

Point of View

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Haniyeh's Compromise – a Political Trap?

Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said: "If Israel withdraws to the 1967 borders, peace will prevail and we will implement a cease-fire [hudna] for many years". Haniyeh emphasized that he is speaking as the leader of the Palestinian government, and not as the leader of the Hamas movement. (Interview with Haniyeh, **Ha'aretz**, 5/23/06).

The Re'ut Institute contends that the compromise Haniyeh offers may enable Hamas to undermine the international coalition and lead Israel into a political deadlock, lacking both the ability to reach a negotiated agreement and the ability to implement the Convergence Plan.

What is the Issue?

- At present, both the US and the EU pressuring Israel to enter negotiations with the Palestinians based on the Roadmap, and to suspend the Convergence Plan.
- Israel contends that Hamas' adherence to the three demands, primarily to recognize Israel, should serve as precondition for entering negotiations.
- Additionally, Hamas is currently under heavy pressure to adjust its policy towards Israel:
 - External pressure – Although the Quartet is designing an economic mechanism to assist the PA, the Hamas-led government is still politically isolated and economically weak;
 - Internal pressure – Power struggles between Hamas and Fatah over the security apparatus and the institutional crisis between the PA government and the president's office are undermining the effective control of the Hamas regime.

Why is this Important? Why Now?

- Hamas objects to the Convergence Plan (Regular, **Ha'aretz**, 4/6/06) and understands that Israel will not be able to gain the international support needed for Convergence unless it exhausts the option of negotiations.
- Distinguishing between a "moderate" PA government and a "radical" Hamas movement will enable the movement to maintain its radical ideological principles and to:
 - Cope with the external pressure placed on the movement and even to dismantle the international coalition against the PA government;
 - Undermine Israel's insistence that Hamas complies with the demands as a condition for negotiations. In other words, **Haniyeh's declaration was aimed to legitimize the PA government and for the time being, to forestall the Convergence Plan.**
- Moreover, Hamas will be able to stay loyal to its ideological principles by obstructing the negotiations between Israel and Abu-Mazen, since:
 - Hamas' control over the government and parliament can render the negotiations pointless;
 - Israel and the Palestinians disagree on the essence and objectives of the negotiations;
 - The international community will find it difficult to support the Convergence Plan, and admit the failure of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians (See: ["Difficult Transition from Negotiations to Convergence"](#)).

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- Therefore, Israel may find itself "stuck" in a political deadlock – with neither a negotiated nor a unilateral option.

Policy Options

Israel has several political alternatives:

- It could insist that the Hamas **movement**, and not the PA government, adhere to the three demands. This policy may either exacerbate the economical crisis in the PA and even lead to its collapse, or become irrelevant due to the stance of the international coalition.
- **Israel can declare that its partner for negotiations is the Hamas government** – This alternative will negate Hamas the ability to obstruct the negotiations "from outside", will make Hamas the object for international pressures and will expose its political intentions.
- Israel should form an "exit strategy" from negotiations in case the negotiations fail. To this purpose it should reach an understanding with the international community on the conditions for moving from the Roadmap to the Convergence Plan.

For additional sources see the Re'ut Institute website www.reut-institute.org and the Re'ut Institute website on the Challenge of Dealing with Hamas: <http://www.reut2006.info/hamas/eng/>.

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