

Point of View No. 59

National Unity Government: an Opportunity to "Expose" Hamas

02.12.2007

The agreement signed in Mecca between Hamas and Fatah regarding the establishment of a National Unity Government does not adhere to the three demands of the international community, including the demand to recognize Israel (**Ha'aretz**, 2/11/07).

The Reut Institute contends that the establishment of a Palestinian National Unity government may be an opportunity for Israel to update its policy vis-à-vis the PA, such that it sharpens the tension between Hamas' ideology and its responsibility for the population.

What is the Issue?

- Israel's policy vis-à-vis Hamas, which was formulated between Hamas' electoral victory and the establishment of its government (1-3/06) was aimed at either bringing about an ideological change in Hamas or causing its government to fall. This, without causing the collapse of the Palestinian Authority or a humanitarian crisis.
- To this end, Israel and the International Community placed political, economic and military pressure on Hamas to explicitly recognize Israel, ratify existing agreements and cease violence (hereinafter, "three demands").
- The agreement that was signed in Mecca does not include the recognition of Israel or any reference to the cessation of violence, and only includes an ambiguous declaration that Hamas will "respect the agreements that were signed by the PLO".

Why is this Important? Why Now?

- **Israel's current policy is failing** – A year after its electoral victory, Hamas is showing no signs of fulfilling the 'three demands', the PA is in danger of collapse; and Israel is unable to create a political breakthrough in order to promote its goal of ending its control over the Palestinians.
- **A unity government is likely to dismantle the international coalition** – Despite a statement issued by the foreign ministers of the Quartet in which they reiterate the "three demands", the US has announced that it may cooperate with certain ministers of the new Palestinian government; several of the European countries have responded positively to the Mecca agreement and Russia is calling for the end of the embargo on the PA.
- In light of the failure of the current policy and the threat that the international coalition may be dismantled, Israel should evaluate other alternatives for dealing with the PA government.

Policy Options

- **Considering moving to a policy of "Exposure"** – Israel is not obligated to "recognize" the new PA government, although it should consider allowing it to govern. In this manner, Israel could promote the creation of a Palestinian political "address" that can guarantee its population's basic needs, fight terror and deepen the separation between Israel and the Palestinians.
- This strategy will "expose" Hamas politically in the government and the parliament by 'accompanying it' through a 'corridor of difficult decisions' that will play the needs of the Palestinian population against Hamas' ideology.

Israel can allow the transfer of money to the PA, free the imprisoned ministers and members of the parliament, open the Rafah border crossing, and ease the restrictions on the Palestinian population as was promised to Abu Mazen.

Moreover, Israel can try to force Hamas to accept de-facto recognition of Israel through an assortment of existing interfaces between Israel and the PA such as the mechanism for removing tariffs and barriers, the postal service and the supply of electricity.

- Hamas' recognition of the clauses of the agreements will lead to a gradual change in its position towards Israel. If it refuses, it will be unable to blame Israel for its failure to govern and will be exposed to public pressure. Ultimately, if Hamas builds alternative government mechanisms, it will turn the PA into an address and deepen its separation from Israel.

End.