



Dangerous and False Palestinian “Unity”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: As long as the military branch of Hamas remains independent, there is no Palestinian unity. Under the current accord, instead of the PA regaining lost Gaza, Hamas is gaining better access to the West Bank. The current Western stance, which supports the continuation of a fragmented Palestinian polity, makes the establishment of a stable Palestinian state more unlikely than ever. Moreover, acceptance of a growing role for Hamas is inimical to Israeli-Palestinian peaceful co-existence.

The new Palestinian “unity” government is not about the reestablishment of one Palestinian political entity that could develop into a functioning Palestinian state. Already in the early 2000s, the Palestinian Authority (PA) degenerated into a failed state as it lost monopoly over the use of power in the territory under its jurisdiction with the advent of several competing militias. Indeed, in June 2007 Hamas orchestrated a military coup that put the Gaza Strip under the control of this terrorist organization.

Despite the current “unity” discourse, the Palestinians remain as divided as before. The only true test for “unity” of a political entity is monopoly over the use of force. As long as the military branch of Hamas remains independent, there is no unity; just evidence of the “Somalization” of Palestinian politics. Islamic Jihad also remains fiercely independent in Gaza, as well as other Jihadist organizations. In fact, under the current accord, instead of the PA regaining lost Gaza, Hamas is gaining better access to the West Bank.

Unfortunately, what is happening in the Palestinian territories is part of a larger phenomenon characteristic of much of the Arab world before and after the so-called “Arab Spring.” Lebanon, Somalia Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and

even Egypt are plagued by a plethora of militias eroding the exclusive control of the central authorities. It is not clear to what extent are Palestinians able to move beyond this general Arab political malaise.

In fact, it is hard to believe that Hamas will give up control over the Gaza Strip. The de facto statehood which Hamas enjoys is good business, as it allows for the extraction of taxes and fees. In addition, it serves the extremist Hamas ideology that demands building Islamist political structures and keeping alive the military and theological struggle against the unacceptable Jewish state. Hamas has made it clear that it has not mellowed one bit on this issue. It also hopes to get a better foothold in the West Bank to fortify its role in Palestinian society. Hamas seeks to emulate the road taken by Hizballah in gaining political hegemony in Lebanon while maintaining a military force independent of the central government.

The reaction of the US and the EU to the new government –business as usual – is counterproductive and morally wrong. This approach helps the Palestinians evade facing their fundamental dilemma in state building: that there is no chance to attain statehood without achieving a monopoly over use of force. Thus the current Western stance, which allows for the continuation of a fragmented Palestinian polity, makes the establishment of a real, stable Palestinian state more unlikely than ever. Continuous economic support for a failing Palestinian order preserves its dysfunctional characteristics and does not encourage the Palestinians to make the needed difficult choices.

Moreover, recent Western reactions to Palestinian “unity” are destructive for peace-making. Acceptance of a growing role for Hamas is inimical to Israeli-Palestinian peaceful co-existence. Radical Hamas is totally opposed to such a scenario and is unlikely to give up violence against Israel. After all, the Islamists are encouraged by the trends in the Arab world – whereby political Islam seems to be gaining greater power than ever before, and where the US seems to be in constant retreat.

It is not the first time the Europeans and the Americans adopt misguided policies towards the Middle East, displaying naiveté, misunderstanding of Middle East realities, and moral failure. If the West is serious about the two-state paradigm and opposing Islamist terrorism, it must insist that Mahmoud Abbas reject cooperation with terrorist entities such as Hamas.

Such cooperation can bring only additional disasters on Palestinian society. Hamas is hardly a democratic or a modernizing force as we have seen from its short rule over Gaza. A growing Hamas input in Palestinian society means growing deficits in human rights, and in economic and educational

performance. It will also increase the hatred to Jews and will fuel additional violence that is likely to trigger a tough Israeli response. This is not what the Palestinians need if they are interested in liberty, prosperity and peace.

From an Israeli point of view, the mass demonstrations in favor of “unity” and the very few Palestinian voices opposing the deal with Hamas are depressing. The Palestinian “unity” deal reinforces the negative image Israelis have of their close neighbors: that Palestinian society is addicted to violence, where the shaheed (martyr) who attempts to kill as many Jews as possible – is the role model.

Palestinian society, under the spell of a nationalist and Islamic ethos, is simply unable to bring itself to a historic compromise with the Zionist movement that would end the conflict. Unfortunately, Palestinian rejectionism has won the day whenever a concrete partition plan was on the agenda. The ascendance of Hamas in Palestinian politics through this false “unity” government, further undermines the search for peace.

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