



For Hamas, Nothing Has Changed

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: It is difficult for Westerners to understand how intertwined religious and political imperatives are for people who subscribe to the Islamic faith. They feel compelled to fulfill their religious duties within the political arena and believe their experience in the political world teaches them how to practically implement their religion. Westerners should resist the temptation to infer too much into recent moves by Hamas, including a revised charter and a change of leadership. The tune might be changing slightly, but the song remains the same.

Under Western logic, the moment a pragmatic decision is made, the religious-ideological aspiration is necessarily relinquished. Take, for example, Diaspora Jews who conclude every Passover Seder with the pledge to celebrate "next year in Jerusalem" but never take any action to implement that pledge.

On the other hand, under Islamic logic, religious reasoning involves pragmatic flexibility. In Islam, any concessions made out of circumstantial necessity are always merely temporary, with energies patiently gathered for the next stage. Conceding also has a religious justification: Deferral of a goal is seen as an expression of the will of God, who commands the believer to wait patiently for his salvation.

The test of a leader operating on the basis of faith is his attentiveness to the tension between aspiration and reality, and the balance he strikes between them. Hamas's Islamic aspirations have not changed, as highlighted by its reiterated declaration that "Palestine is continual resistance until liberty and return are attained."

Regarding the reality, which is dependent on political circumstances, and especially in light of Hamas's tense relations with the PA, the group decided to issue a message of conciliation and adaptation to the demands of the times.

This is simply another example of faith-based conduct by a leader. When outgoing Hamas political chief Khaled Mashaal adopted the Palestine Liberation Organization's 10-Point Plan after Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012, ostensibly accepting the principle of a two-state solution, it was only a temporary compliance – a stage on the way to completely achieving the aspiration of one state with no concessions.

As he is the heir to Mashaal, Ismail Haniyeh's new appointment will change nothing in light of these considerations.

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