

Point of View

COPYRIGHT © 2005 The Re'ut Institute

Hamas – Facilitating Convergence?

Prime Minister Olmert will soon visit the US in order to coordinate the Convergence Plan. The US has said it would support a unilateral withdrawal but that international recognition of the border would come only with an Israeli-Palestinian agreement (**Ha'aretz**, 4/26).

The Re'ut Institute contends that the Hamas regime may increase the probability of obtaining the required international support for Convergence.

What is the Issue?

- According to press reports, the Convergence Plan will include a withdrawal from the West Bank, evacuation of settlements, and the continuation of Israeli control over settlement blocks and the Jordan Valley.
- The Convergence Plan is a unilateral act. As such, it seemingly does not require Palestinian consent, but rather coordination with and support by the international community.
- International support for the Convergence Plan in the West Bank is likely to be harder to obtain than it was in Gaza, since Israel will maintain control over the settlement blocks, Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley and for various other reasons.
- A key component in gaining international legitimacy for the Convergence is the nature of the PA government and its ability to control its territory.

Why is this Important? Why Now?

- It may be easier to coordinate the Convergence Plan with the international community while Hamas is in power, due to the following attributes of the Hamas regime:
 - **Hamas is “not a partner”** – The Convergence Plan is based on the assumption that there is no partner for political moves. In contrast to Fatah, Hamas negates the right of the state of Israel to exist, and refuses to negotiate with it.
 - **Hamas is an “address”** – Following the elections, Hamas continues to enjoy popular Palestinian support and appears to have the legitimacy and the ability to govern the territories of the PA.

Policy Options

- At present Israel and the international community are demanding that Hamas recognize Israel, reaffirm existing agreements and cease violence. Until Hamas agrees to these conditions, Israel is cutting off its ties with the PA and maintaining an international coalition against Hamas.
- These policies undermine the Hamas regime and may affect the prospects for implementing the Convergence Plan. The current policy may bring about:
 - A new PA government – On the one hand, Fatah wishes to continue the political process; on the other hand, it is doubtful if it is able to be a partner for such a process. In any event, if Fatah is in power it will be harder to obtain international approval for any unilateral steps.
 - Collapse of the PA government – the failure of Hamas government, an institutional anarchy in the PA or the dismantling of the PA altogether means an

Brought to you by:



Point of View

COPYRIGHT © 2005 The Re'ut Institute

absence of a Palestinian political address able to "absorb" the areas vacated by Israel. Without such an address it will be impossible to carry-out the Convergence Plan.

- An implicit recognition by Hamas places Israel before a dilemma: On one hand, Israel does not want to grant legitimacy to a Palestinian regime that does not explicitly recognize it; on the other hand, if the international community accepts Hamas' tacit recognition, Israel might prefer to align with the international community in exchange for its recognition of 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/>.

End.

Brought to you by:

