

MEMO

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Palestinian Unity Deal Undermines Peace Prospects

Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas' decision to formally ink a reconciliation agreement with the U.S.-designated terrorist group Hamas is likely to severely undermine U.S. peace efforts. The unity deal does not require Hamas to change its positions, which include openly seeking Israel's destruction and carrying out attacks on innocent Israeli civilians. As leading members of Congress have urged, the United States should suspend aid to the PA unless it becomes clear that a new government will meet international expectations that it renounce violence, recognize Israel's right to exist and accept the commitments made by prior PA governments.

The Hamas-Fatah unity government does not require Hamas to recognize Israel and end violence.

- Under the agreement, formally adopted on May 4, Hamas is not required to accept the Quartet (the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia) conditions of recognizing Israel's right to exist, rejecting violence and endorsing previous Israeli-Palestinian peace agreements in order to participate in the transitional government and elections.
- Abbas made clear that he will not press Hamas to recognize Israel. "We will form a government of technocrats and we will not ask Hamas to recognize Israel," he told *Al-Ahram* newspaper.
- Hamas vowed during the May 4 signing ceremony that it will continue to use violence. "The only campaign we have is against Israel," Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal said, adding, "Our common enemy is Israel. Israel must be fought through force and diplomacy."
- By reconciling with Hamas, the PA has chosen to break from its peace commitments with Israel, under which it is required to fight terror and dismantle the terrorist infrastructure represented by Hamas, among other groups. Incorporating an unreformed Hamas that has not foresworn terror would make it impossible for the PA to meet these commitments.
- Indeed, the unity agreement may represent part of a broader Palestinian strategy to abandon talks with Israel and seek U.N. recognition of a Palestinian state outside the context of negotiations.
- Abbas said during the signing ceremony that world leaders have "come together to indicate the Palestinian people's right to an independent state. ... The Palestinian state needs to be born this year."



Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh (left) and PA President Mahmoud Abbas have agreed to form a unity government.

Hamas refuses to recognize Israel and is increasing its attacks against Israeli civilians.

- The Hamas charter, published in 1988, details the guiding principles of the group. The charter is laced with anti-Semitism and racism, rejects peaceful efforts to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and calls for the destruction of the State of Israel through *jihad*, or holy war. Hamas considers all of Israel to be occupied territory.
- Hamas' past involvement in political activity has not moderated or otherwise altered its stated goal of destroying Israel and building a radical Islamist society. Since seizing Gaza from Abbas in a bloody coup in 2007, Hamas has imposed harsh Islamic law throughout the coastal strip.
- Hamas and other Iranian-backed terrorist groups in Gaza have stepped up their smuggling of Iranian arms and increased their mortar and rocket attacks against Israeli civilians, firing nearly 300 this year. A deliberate attack on a school bus recently killed a 16 year-old boy.

Israel's leadership sees no path to peace with a PA that includes an unreformed Hamas.

- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on May 4 that the reconciliation agreement is “a tremendous blow to peace and a great victory for terrorism. ... The only way we can make peace is with our neighbors who want peace. Those who want to eliminate us, those who practice terror against us, are not partners for peace.”
- Israeli President Shimon Peres also denounced the agreement. “The agreement between Fatah and the terrorist organization of Hamas is a fatal mistake which will prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, and destroy the chances of achieving peace and stability in the region,” he said.
- Israel's opposition leader Tzipi Livni said the new Palestinian government “will have to accept the Quartet's conditions if it intends to keep peace with Israel.”

The United States must refuse to recognize or provide aid to any government that includes Hamas until Hamas renounces violence, recognizes Israel and agrees to previous PA obligations.

- Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said May 5 that the United States has “made it very clear that we cannot support any government that consists of Hamas unless and until Hamas adopts the Quartet principles.” In April 2009, Clinton told members of Congress that that the United States would “not deal with, nor in any way fund, a Palestinian government that includes” an unreformed Hamas.
- U.S. law prohibits the provision of aid to a PA government that includes Hamas unless the government and all its members have publically committed to the Quartet principles.
- Members of Congress are urging the administration to review the situation and to suspend U.S. aid if Hamas does not meet the Quartet requirements.
- The Obama administration should also make clear that the PA—regardless of who is in control of the governing body— is bound by its commitment to end violence, dismantle the terrorist infrastructure and adhere to all agreements with Israel and understandings with the United States.
- The United States should also tell the international community that supporting any Palestinian government that rejects the Quartet principles will undermine the prospects for peace with Israel.