

Hamas' Impossible Mission

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It should be established by now that most Western governments are the least interested in honoring the decided democratic choice of the Palestinian people, which elevated to power a movement that is branded 'terrorist' by Israel, thus by much of the Western hemisphere.

Since facts and common sense are of little concern to those who hastily decided to withhold badly needed funds to support the battered economy of the Occupied Territories, there would be no need to once again marvel at the rhetorical inconsistencies of the Bush Administration and of the European Union.

So what if Hamas has adhered to a virtually unilateral ceasefire for over a year, while Israel did not? So what if the newly formed government has given ample evidence that it is keenly interested in dialogue, not violence? So what if the majority of the Palestinian people have adamantly and repeatedly — according to recent public opinion polls — expressed their interest in a negotiated settlement with Israel? Indeed, so many "so whats" that hardly matter now, since it is quite clear that the US and the EU's real intentions are to topple the Palestinian government, along with the sham of a doctrine which claims that democratizing the Arabs is the ultimate policy objective of Bush and Blair.

Seeing ample empirical evidence that supports such a claim, one has to wonder what the remaining options are for the Palestinian government. Unfortunately, there are not many, and none of them are trouble-free.

The coordinated financial and diplomatic boycott, led by the US, which was demanded by Israel, makes it impossible for the Palestinian government to pay the salaries of some 150,000 government employees. Even Arab banks could be punished if they agreed to transfer funds to the Palestinians, according to US terror laws. The Palestinian government is, naturally, desperate to secure whatever meager funds from alternative sources.

Concurrently, the word is out that disgruntled Fatah members — whose party has dominated the political scene for many years until they were cast aside last January by Palestinian voters, fed up with corruption and nepotism — are planning to stage wide protests demanding salaries and government services. Early signs of such disorder have been plentiful in recent weeks. Moreover, former PA government advisors — now posing as independent 'experts' with newly forged think-tanks — sound as eager to maintain a financial stranglehold on the new government as any pro-Israeli analyst in a Washington-based neoconservative think-tank.

It's now politics at work; forget about a "just solution" to the conflict, "peace" and "democracy" and all other ornamental phrases. What's at play here is politics, and dirty politics at that: any Palestinian government or leader, democratically elected or not, that

fails to perform according to a specified role and insists on addressing the central elements of the conflict, must be fought, branded and discarded, no matter how pragmatic his argument may be.

Former Palestinian Authority President Yassir Arafat was caged in the basement of his battered offices in the West Bank town of Ramallah for years, for simply failing to read his assigned lines. The lapel of his jacket was decorated not only with the flag of Palestine, but that of Israel as well. He condemned terrorism, shut down Palestinian charities, imprisoned militant and political leaders, but was still deemed “irrelevant” and was literally imprisoned until a mysterious illness and death set him free. He would call Israeli leaders “my brothers”, “my partners”, he would condemn attacks on Israeli civilians and often neglected to even address attacks on Palestinian civilians, yet he was told that all was not enough. “Arafat must condemn Palestinian terrorism in Arabic,” US officials and pundits parroted. He did. That too did not suffice. “He must follow his words with deeds,” they further instructed, but without calling on Israel to free him to achieve such a mission.

He was humiliated, physically confined and completely stripped of any tangible powers, and yet he was expected to ensure Israel’s security while in his shackles. He was expected to do the impossible, and naturally he failed.

History has an odd and often ironic way of repeating itself. The same conditions are now being imposed on Hamas, who would, predictably have to do more to prove to be seen as a legitimate partner in a peace process that doesn’t exist and was not meant to exist. The US is now backing Fatah, which was much more “flexible” and ready to sign and initial with the slightest wink, yet, it was too “no peace partner”, according to Israel, and of course the US.

Undoubtedly, Washington has no constructive foreign policy of its own regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and is itself following an Israeli script, one that will deem any Palestinian leadership “terrorist”, “irrelevant” and “no peace partner”, even if the entire Palestinian leadership was made of vegetarian, pacifist, Mother Teresa incarnates. That’s all beside the point. All Israel is striving for is time: to consolidate its strong hold over occupied Jerusalem, to conclude the construction of its illegal Apartheid Wall built mostly on Palestinian land and to demarcate its own borders, which also happen to fall in Palestinian areas. Meanwhile, let Palestinians starve, wrangle over pathetic powers of the government and the president, and resort to Iran for financial aid. None of this is of any concern to Israel, but it provides the further proof needed to brand Palestinians incapable of governing themselves, and to make obvious the “evil” alliance between Hamas and Iran – which in turn places the Palestinian government in the anti-American camp.

It’s unfortunate indeed that the EU has agreed to participate in this charade, betraying the trust of most Palestinians who have always seen Europe as different from the US, believing that their foreign policies have not yet been fully hijacked by pro-Israeli lobbies, and so forth. All of this is faltering will likely push the Palestinian government, willingly or not, toward a more detrimental and extremist political line, because mere survival – neither pragmatism nor a shadowy peace — is now its ultimate objective.

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