

The Hamas government should be recognized

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The Hamas government must be recognized, not only because recognition of Hamas would be good for Israel, as the former Mossad head Ephraim Halevy recently argued,(1) but because this is the right move by any criterion of justice and international law.

The U.S. and Europe decided, despite Israel's opposition, to permit the Palestinian people to hold democratic elections. According to Jimmy Carter's report in the "Herald Tribune", the elections were "honest, fair, strongly contested, without violence and with the results accepted by winners and losers. Among the 62 elections that have been monitored by... the Carter Center, these are among the best in portraying the will of the people."(2)

In a just and well-ordered world, it would be unthinkable for a government that was elected in this way to be disqualified because Israel does not like the choice of the electorate in question. But in a world in which the U.S. rules, might is right, and might can define democracy as it chooses. Thus it was announced that the outcome of the Palestinian elections would not be recognized until the three "mantras" were fulfilled: Hamas must renounce terror, honour previous accords, and recognize the State of Israel. Meanwhile the Palestinian people would be punished and starved through an economic boycott, in the hope that this will lead to the collapse of the elected government.

In January 2005, Hamas announced its resolution to replace armed struggle with political struggle and agreed to a unilateral ceasefire ("calm"). In the 17 months since then, Hamas has not perpetrated a single terrorist attack. According to security sources, since the election, Hamas has not even participated in the launching of Qassam rockets from Gaza, most of which are carried out by Fatah.(3) What exactly is the substance of the demand that Hamas renounce terror?

Regarding previous accords, Hamas PM Haniyeh explained that according to the Oslo Accords of 1993, after an interim period of five years, a Palestinian state was to have come into existence. But Israel violated every clause of the Accords and continued to colonize and to dispossess Palestinians of their lands. From now on, he says, his government will only honour accords that are good for the Palestinian people.

Since the Oslo Accords, we Israelis have become accustomed to the idea that negotiations with the Palestinian Authority always revolve around the sole question of what is good for Israel – the extent to which the Palestinians are prepared to recognize its existence as a Jewish state and to take care of its security. Suddenly Israel is confronted with an elected Palestinian government which is not willing to play that game any more. Haniyeh is telling the government of Israel: From now on, you will represent the position of Israel in the negotiations, and we will represent the position of the Palestinians. At the Algiers meeting of

the Palestine National Council in 1988, the Palestinian people undertook to recognize the partition of the country and to be satisfied with a state within the 1967 borders. Israel has not done a thing since then to prove that it is prepared to accept such a compromise. The Palestinians will recognize the right of Israel to exist only when Israel proves that it is prepared to recognize the right of the Palestinian people to exist.

But that is precisely what the governments of Israel and the army have never accepted. No Palestinian leadership has yet been found to be a suitable partner for peace, but a leadership that announces that it represents only the Palestinian people is in their eyes a real enemy that must be destroyed.

Olmert may have succeeded in garnering a majority in the U.S. Congress for a boycott of the Hamas government, but in Israeli society itself he does not have a majority. According to a poll by the Truman Institute in March of this year, 62% of Israelis are in favour of negotiations with Hamas.⁽⁴⁾ But for quite some time now, the majority in Israel has had no say. At the moment, what remains to be hoped for is that Europe will come to its senses and also influence the U.S. to accept the democratic choice of the Palestinian people.

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Notes

(1) Interview in Yediot Aharonot Saturday Supplement, May 26, 2006. See also Associated Press, 'Former Mossad chief calls for long-term deal with Hamas' May 27, 2006.

(2) Jimmy Carter, 'Punishing the innocent is a crime', International Herald Tribune

May 7, 2006

(3) Amos Harel, 'IDF and Qassams / Zero tolerance', Ha'aretz, April 7, 2006; Amos Harel and Arnon Regular, 'IDF: Hamas about to rein in Qassams', Ha'aretz April 10, 2006.

(4) Poll conducted March 16-21, 2006, jointly by the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah, <http://truman.huji.ac.il/upload/PressRelease-15-240306English.doc>

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