

32. Israeli–Palestinian Issues

THE Palestinians tragically have squandered their best opportunity in history to gain a state through peace negotiations. Under the terms of the 1993 Oslo Accord, they pledged to disavow and crack down on terrorism. They have failed to comply with this obligation. Instead, they launched a bloody revolt against Israel in September 2000 after negotiations broke down at the Camp David summit. There is little that the U.S. can do to jump-start the peace negotiations until the Palestinian Authority abides by its commitments to halt terrorism. This is unlikely to happen under a Hamas government.

by *James Phillips*

Notes

Recommendations

1. Do not recognize, support, or aid a Hamas-led Palestinian government. The electoral victory of Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, is likely to further destabilize the already anarchic Palestinian territories, heighten tensions between Israelis and Palestinians, and kill the comatose peace process. Hamas's ideology of hatred, extensive use of terrorism, and commitment to destroy Israel make it unfit to qualify as a genuine democratic party, let alone a government. Now that Hamas has been elected to power, the Bush Administration should insist that it dissolve its militia, disavow terrorism, accept previous Israeli–Palestinian agreements, and amend its charter to drop its goal of destroying Israel if it expects to be treated as a responsible government. If Hamas fails to do so before it forms a government, Washington should refuse to recognize the new government, halt all aid to the Palestinians, and press its allies to follow suit. The United States should not legitimize and empower a terrorist government that is committed to the destruction of a democratic U.S. ally.

2. Encourage the growth of genuine democracies in the Palestinian territories and broader Middle East. Hamas's election triumph was a major setback for U.S. Middle East policy, which sought to encourage the evolution of a peaceful and stable Middle East by promoting democracy as an antidote to terrorism and unending war. Washington should make it clear that democracy requires much more than

elections. It requires (among other things) adherence to the rule of law, a supportive civil society, a culture of political compromise, and respect for the rights of minorities. To be considered a genuine democratic entity, a political party must reject violence, intimidation, and terrorism not only against its own people, but also against other nations—even if they are historic enemies. There should be no tolerance for the fiction of distinguishing between a “political wing” and a “military wing.” Militias and terrorist organizations must be dismantled before a party is accepted as a suitable participant in elections. Opening the door to political movements such as Hamas to compete in elections without first dropping their reliance on political violence will only allow them to subvert democracy and establish a stranglehold on political power. Political parties should also be judged by a values test: They must not advocate racial or religious discrimination. Many European states ban neo-Nazi or other racist political parties. Radical Islamic parties such as Hamas that demonize other religions should also be prohibited from participating in elections and ostracized if they manage to win an election. The Bush Administration should stake out this position long before future elections to avoid the charge that it supports democracy only if the elections produce a pro-American government.

3. Recognize that there can be no progress in the Israeli–Palestinian peace negotiations until the Palestinians renounce and crack down on terrorism. The U.S.-backed “Roadmap” peace plan requires the Palestinians to take comprehensive action against terrorism. Its first phase calls for the Palestinian Authority to “arrest, disrupt, and restrain individuals and groups conducting and planning violent attacks on Israelis anywhere” and to confiscate weapons from terrorist groups. The Roadmap also calls for the Palestinian Authority to end the official incitement of violence against Israelis, purge terrorists from government positions, and reform its security services. Hamas has made it clear that it will not disarm, renounce terrorism, or accept Israel’s legitimacy. While Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has called for “one authority, one law and one gun,” he has not moved to disarm Hamas or other terrorist groups. As long as Palestinians continue terrorist attacks against Israelis, no Israeli government will make the painful concessions necessary for a final peace agreement.

4. Rule out committing any U.S. troops to any international peace-keeping presence designed to facilitate peace negotiations. Such troops would not be capable of halting terrorism and could become a lightning rod for terrorist attacks by Islamic extremists. American troops are stretched thin in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other theaters in the war against terrorism and should not be diverted to an open-ended peacekeeping commitment.

Notes

Facts and Figures

- The U.S.-brokered Israeli–Palestinian peace negotiations broke down in 2000 after the Palestinians rejected an Israeli proposal at the Camp David summit that would have given them a state and control over Gaza, more than 90 percent of the West Bank, and parts of Jerusalem, including the Muslim holy sites. Instead of making a counteroffer, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat dropped negotiations and encouraged political violence that has blocked any progress toward peace.
- Hamas not only rejects peace with Israel, but also rejects Israel’s continued existence. It is dedicated to destroying the Jewish state and creating a radical Islamic state in its place.
- Hamas has been designated a terrorist group by both the United States and the European Union.
- Israel withdrew from Gaza in August 2005 but retains control over disputed territory in the West Bank.
- Israel is building a 480-mile fence to prevent terrorists from crossing from the West Bank into Israel. This barrier has helped to reduce the death toll from Palestinian terrorist attacks from 117 in 2004 to 45 in 2005.
- However, the number of homemade Qassam rockets fired into Israel increased from 309 in 2004 to 377 in 2005.
- The U.S. is the largest bilateral donor in the West Bank and Gaza, providing an average of about \$85 million per year from 1993 to 2004 and about \$400 million in 2005.

This chapter can be read online at issues2006.org/israel.

Notes

Additional Reading

Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., and James Phillips, "Congress Should Withhold Funds from the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA)," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 987, February 6, 2006, at www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/wm987.cfm.

James Phillips, " Hamas's Victory: The United States Should Not Recognize or Aid a Terrorist Regime," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* 971, January 27, 2006, at www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/wm971.cfm.

James Phillips, "Detoxifying Yasser Arafat's Disastrous Legacy," Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 950, November 19, 2004, at www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/em950.cfm.

James Phillips, "Three Middle East Summits," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 473, April 12, 2004, at www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/wm473.cfm.

James Phillips, "A Middle East Roadmap to Gridlock?" Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 287, June 5, 2003, at www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/wm287.cfm.