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**CONTINUITY AND CHANGE:
ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY AFTER THE VICTORY OF HAMAS****Anat Kurz
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On February 17, the newly-elected Palestinian parliament was sworn in. Of its 132 members, 74 belong to Hamas, and their installation marks the end of Fatah's longstanding domination of Palestinian politics.

The Hamas leadership has stressed three points that will guide the policy of the government it will now lead:

1. a categorical refusal to recognize Israel;
2. upholding of agreements already contracted with Israel (to the extent that they serve Palestinian national interests); and
3. willingness to enter into a long-term ceasefire (*hudna*) if Israel withdraws to the line of 4 June 1967.

The last of these points has been described in Israel as a "honey trap," intended to lull the Israeli leadership and public into complacency. But the Government of Israel apparently has no intention of countering with a "honey trap" of its own that would allow – indeed, force – Hamas to confront problems of governance without the excuse of foreign pressure to rationalize any shortcomings. Israel has posed three preconditions for any dialogue with Hamas: dismantling the terrorist infrastructure, accepting all previously contracted agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, and repudiating those parts of the Hamas covenant denying Israel's right to exist. Until these conditions are met,

Israel is prepared to boycott the Palestinian Authority and create economic problems that could undermine the consolidation of a Hamas government. In addition to suspending transfer of taxes and customs collected on behalf of the PA, Israel might bar entry of Palestinian workers into Israel and try to prevent construction of a seaport and airport in Gaza. In effect, the Gaza Strip would be placed under siege. Furthermore, Israel is acting to promote a broad international coalition that would cut contacts with a Hamas-led PA in order to bring about its collapse and facilitate the return to power of Fatah.

There is little doubt that Hamas' first priority now is to institutionalize its rule without assuming long-term obligations. That, and not a desire to implement the first stage of the Roadmap in order to lay the groundwork for talks with Israel, is what explains its continued commitment to the terms of the *tahdi'a* (relaxation of tensions) it agreed with Fatah in March 2005. Part of that challenge involves a struggle with PA President Mahmoud Abbas over control of political and especially security affairs. To establish principles of law and order in the territories, it will need to constrain various armed factions, including both Islamic Jihad and Fatah-affiliated elements of the Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades. Inter-organizational rivalries will in any case make it difficult for Hamas to deliver



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on its promises of reform and change; more terrorist attacks – along with the inevitable Israeli counter-measures – would only further complicate the problem. Above all, ongoing terrorism would surely strengthen the demands for an economic embargo of the PA by both Israel and those donors who already label Hamas a terrorist organization.

But if Israel's purpose is to complicate Hamas' efforts to consolidate its control, the freeze on political contacts may not really constitute effective pressure. Indeed, Israel's refusal to open channels of communication actually frees the movement from any need to show the sort of flexibility on basic ideological and strategic principles that would blur the distinction between itself and other factors in Palestinian politics, especially Fatah. Moreover, any deviation from the principles that have guided the movement since its founding might undermine its internal cohesiveness; Hamas could hardly undertake such a shift without inviting internal schisms and fragmentation. In other words, non-recognition of Israel is still an organizational imperative no less than an ideological commitment, and in that sense, Israeli policy makes it easier for Hamas to maintain its political "virginity."

Nor does an economic boycott promise to produce the desired results. It might well exacerbate poverty and anarchy in the territories and further reduce the chances of reviving any political process, but it would not reverse the political upheaval that has taken place. After all, Hamas' victory in parliamentary elections did not result from some sudden shift in Palestinian political opinion but was, instead, the culmination of a decade-long process of alienation from both Israel and a Fatah leadership that failed to deliver results in every sphere. Besides, humanitarian distress resulting from Israeli pressure would produce an international outcry that might well prompt others to take up the slack while handing Hamas a diplomatic-propaganda windfall. And even if

Hamas fails to solidify its rule, the result would not necessarily be a formal change of regime. Given the results of the last election, regional and international actors would be loath to press for new elections unless they were confident of a Fatah victory.

Since its establishment, Hamas has been determined to sabotage any progress toward Israeli-Palestinian agreement and conciliation, and its assumption of power over the Palestinian Authority has unnerved many Israelis. Indeed, the outcome of the election was so unexpected that it prevented any public acknowledgement of the reality that Hamas' rise of power changes little in the substance of Israel's relations with the PA as they have evolved over the past few years. For example, the idea of an economic embargo is not new; various sorts of pressure, including delays in transfers of tax revenues, were applied periodically in response to terrorist attacks even when Fatah was in power. Nor will a diplomatic freeze put a stop to some putative political process; although the Roadmap has not been officially buried, it has for years lacked any operational significance, and Israel's recent unilateral actions – construction of the security barrier and the disengagement from Gaza and the northern West Bank – are powerful testimony to its abandonment of any demands for reciprocity or the cessation of terror as conditions for any change in the political-territorial status quo. Indeed, they reflect Israel's conclusion, reached long before Hamas came to power, that there was no viable Palestinian partner, and it is therefore highly doubtful whether a Fatah victory in the elections would have resulted in a reality different enough to justify the revival of substantive negotiations.

In other words, non-negotiation with a Fatah-led PA will now be succeeded by non-negotiation with a Hamas-led PA, and the most visible effect of Hamas' victory is simply to provide further legitimacy for Israel's policy of unilateralism.

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