Policy Focus 53

Hamas Triumphant: Implications for Security, Politics, Economy, and Strategy

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The victory of the Islamic Resistance Movement -- Hamas -- in Palestinian legislative elections on January 25 unleashed a political tsunami throughout the Middle East and beyond. After forty years of undisputed dominance in Palestinian politics, the secular, nationalist Fatah -- the party of Yasser Arafat and the Oslo Accords -- was displaced by a violent Islamist upstart that, despite its deep roots, was founded less than two decades ago. Hamas's success has compelled all regional and international actors to undertake a wholesale review of the assumptions that have long guided their policies in the Arab-Israeli and even wider Muslim arenas.

At this moment of transition, there are more questions than answers about such issues as the resilience of Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, the adroitness of the emerging Hamas, the fortunes of the deflated Fatah, the vigilance of the Quartet, the clarity of Israel's approach, and the opportunism of regional spoilers such as Iran. As U.S. policymakers consider their own strategic response to these questions, The Washington Institute presents a special Policy Focus to shed light on this murky situation. The purpose of this compilation -- whose contributors hail from the United States, Britain, Turkey, Israel, and the West Bank and include experts in diplomacy, security, economics, counterterrorism, as well as Arab and Israeli politics -- is to inform policy in the very near term. In the months to come, ample time will be available to assess longer-term implications. For now, it is essential to understand who Hamas is, what its victory means, and what the United States should do to preserve its interests in the security and peace of the Middle East.

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