

# How to Deal with the Challenge from Hamas

by [David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](/experts/david-makovsky)

May 12, 2006

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](/experts/david-makovsky)

David Makovsky is the Ziegler distinguished fellow at The Washington Institute and director of the Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations.



## In-Depth Reports

On May 12, 2006, Lt. Gen. (ret.) Moshe Yaalon, Amjad Atallah, and David Makovsky addressed the 2006 Soref Symposium. General Yaalon served as chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) from 2002 to 2005 and is currently the distinguished military fellow at The Washington Institute. Mr. Atallah is founder and president of Strategic Assessments Initiative and a former adviser to the Palestinian negotiating team. Mr. Makovsky is the director of the Project on the Middle East Peace Process at The Washington Institute.

## MOSHE YAALON

A viable Palestinian state cannot be established behind fences, nor will a state split between Gaza and the West Bank work. The Oslo process sought to encourage cooperation, facilitate open borders (as in Europe), and produce a common economy with the Palestinians. The vast majority of Israelis were ready for this kind of compromise after a decade of Oslo, but they were confronted with the Palestinian leadership's refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, as well as a rejection of the two-state solution. Israel ultimately was forced to construct the fence to protect its civilians from the Palestinian war of terrorism that ensued.

With Hamas in government, Palestinian moderates have even less power than they did previously. A peaceful solution simply is not currently possible, and it may take at least another generation for the Oslo paradigm to be workable, if at all. For this reason, it might be time to consider other paradigms for solving the conflict and promoting stability in the region. While examining other paradigms, Israel should also work to promote Palestinian moderates, who are, thus far, politically powerless.

Looking regionally, Hamas's victory in Palestinian elections may pose a threat to Jordan and Egypt, given the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in these countries. Jordan in particular sees Hamas's victory as a threat, particularly given Hamas's possible cooperation with Iran and the consolidation of Shiite power in Iraq and elsewhere. Amman has therefore acted recently to undermine Hamas's attempt to operate within the kingdom.

Egypt, on the other hand, has not delivered on Hamas. Israel permitted Egypt to play a very significant role before, during, and after the Gaza disengagement, yet Egypt has failed to act responsibly. As a result, Egypt is now paying a price: Sinai has become a safe haven for terrorists, including al-Qaeda, while weapons smuggling into Gaza has continued. While Egypt views Hamas as a threat because of its potential to encourage the Egyptian Muslim

Brotherhood, Egypt will probably continue along the path of inaction.

For any future negotiations with the Palestinians to be possible, insuring Palestinian accountability is essential. Currently, a lack of accountability transcends the Palestinian arena, whether in preventing terror attacks or managing civilian affairs. Responsibility for Palestinian affairs should no longer be the domain of other players.

So long as the Palestinian narrative emphasizes the destruction of the State of Israel over the construction of a Palestinian state living side by side with it, there is no chance for a political solution to the conflict. The absence of Israel on Palestinian maps and in Palestinian textbooks indicates the denial of linkage between the Jewish people and the land of Israel, as well as the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state. Under these circumstances, there can be no peaceful option. Hostilities will only be perpetuated by a Palestinian education system that sanctifies death and not life, encouraging the next generation to become homicide bombers.

At the present time, any withdrawal will be perceived as a victory for global terror elements, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Iran. In moving ahead, Israel must bear this in mind.

In terms of the security situation, unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank is unlikely to succeed without a future military presence in the areas that will be evacuated. Israel will not experience calm without continued deployment in the West Bank, and it should enjoy freedom of operation throughout.

AMJAD ATALLAH

The United States should distinguish between its own policy vis-à-vis the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the policy the rest of the world adopts towards the PA. While the United States is not obliged to engage with Hamas or to give it money, other states may wish to do so. After all, preventing a humanitarian disaster requires paying Palestinian salaries. Education and healthcare, among other services, cannot be provided otherwise. The U.S. experience regarding Iraq in the 1990s should be instructive. After the Gulf War, the sanctions regime effectively served to destroy the middle class, while strengthening Saddam Hussein. There is the danger that a sanctions regime might have the same effect in the West Bank.

To argue that Palestinians voted for Hamas because they rejected Israel's right to exist is simply to ignore all the empirical evidence on the ground. Postelection polls indicated that the Palestinians accept a two state solution, and Hamas appears to recognize this support for peace among its constituents. In this vein, Hamas is gradually moderating its position; for example, it recognizes that Israel exists, but does not accept its right to exist. Hamas is further trying a variety of formulas, including holding a referendum on any peace deal that Hamas will back; this is a way of justifying future moderations. The question of recognizing Israel as a Jewish state is problematic for many Palestinians, including moderates. The priority for Israel should be that Palestinians accept Israel's right to exist and that Jews have a right to self-determination, as well as the right to decide on the nature of Israel.

If the two state paradigm fails—especially now, when a majority of Israelis and Palestinians openly support it—it will fail because of a lack of political will in Washington. The easiest solution for Hamas is a continuation of U.S. policy, which removes the onus of having to deliver on good governance. So long as it emphasizes that under U.S. leadership the international community has predetermined its failure, Hamas will succeed politically.

The unilateral separation plan currently proposed by the Israeli government is problematic. While it would result in two states, the very fact that the Palestinian side rejects the plan means that there would be no stable, accepted solution.

Empowering PA president Mahmoud Abbas requires either permanent status negotiations or a process leading to permanent status negotiations. Other alternatives, such as strengthening his presidential guard, will not enable him, politically, to make a deal with Israel. If the Palestine Liberation Organization, under Abbas's leadership, is shown to

be the party with which the international community is engaging to end the conflict, Palestinian moderates will be strengthened.

In the short run, democratization in the Middle East may mean the rise to power of moderate Islamist forces. For the last twenty years, the West promoted autocracies in the region; the only opposition that could succeed was religiously based. Progress will take time, and it requires a process through which Islamist movements can be moderated.

DAVID MAKOVSKY

Currently, the United States is considering a proposal for a temporary international mechanism to alleviate humanitarian concerns in the Palestinian Authority in which the duration of funding would be defined. However, the payment of PA salaries does not appear to be part of this consideration. The Bush administration view is that paying PA salaries would enable Hamas to conduct its business unhindered. Nor is there any practical means for an international body to step in; there is no way for outsiders to write individual checks to the 150,000 PA employees. Currently, Hamas has access to \$400 million in the Palestine Investment Fund; Iran might contribute, at most, \$50 million, but Tehran will face difficulties in getting this money to the Palestinians. In the short run, welfare payments may be channeled through Abbas, though we should work to avoid a culture of dependency.

For its part, Israel is looking to disengage from the territories. It withdrew from Gaza in August 2005 and is now looking to at least relocate settlers in the West Bank east of the security barrier. However, Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert will find it difficult to implement this policy if Israel faces renewed violence, particularly because his coalition is not very strong. Moreover, both Olmert and his defense minister, Amir Peretz, lack the security gravitas of their predecessors. If there is a spate of terrorism, it will be very damaging, though it is not clear that it will derail the process.

Israel has gained little from removing its army from Gaza. It has not gained much on the security front; with Hamas in power, it is even more concerned about rocket attacks aimed at Israeli cities. The international community fumbled on Israel's pullout from Gaza in failing to give Israel appropriate credit for the disengagement plan. Both because of its security needs and because of a lack of incentives from the international community to act, Israel is unlikely to withdraw the IDF from the West Bank. In all likelihood, Olmert will focus on withdrawing the settlers rather than the IDF. Violence would reinforce that trend away from a military withdrawal, even if settlers are removed.

In the Middle East, it takes more than one to be unilateral. Israeli unilateralism still requires multiple consultations with various players, especially the United States. Israel will not enter into open-ended negotiation with Abbas; he will not necessarily be able to implement anything agreed to in negotiations. However, Olmert should attempt to coordinate his West Bank withdrawal with Abbas. The lack of coordination in the runup to the Gaza disengagement was a major shortcoming.

This rapporteur's summary was prepared by Eric Trager. ❖

---

**RECOMMENDED**

---



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

### How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria

Feb 15, 2022

◆  
Anna Borshchevskaya  
(/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy

Feb 14, 2022

◆  
Simon Henderson  
(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### Libya's Renewed Legitimacy Crisis

Feb 14, 2022

◆  
Ben Fishman  
(/policy-analysis/libyas-renewed-legitimacy-crisis)

### TOPICS

Peace Process (/policy-analysis/peace-process)

Terrorism (/policy-analysis/terrorism)

U.S. Policy (/policy-analysis/us-policy)

### REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Israel (/policy-  
analysis/israel)

Palestinians (/policy-  
analysis/palestinians)