

The Security Implications of a Hamas-Led Palestinian Authority

by [Moshe Yaalon \(/experts/moshe-yaalon\)](/experts/moshe-yaalon)

Feb 16, 2006

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Moshe Yaalon \(/experts/moshe-yaalon\)](/experts/moshe-yaalon)

Moshe "Bogie" Yaalon, Israel's former defense minister and military chief of staff, was the Rosenblatt Distinguished Visiting Fellow at The Washington Institute in 2016.



Brief Analysis

On February 8, 2006, Lt. Gen. (ret.) Moshe Yaalon addressed The Washington Institute's Special Policy Forum. General Yaalon served until June 2005 as chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces. The following is a transcript of his remarks.

"Hamas's recent victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections challenges all those actors currently invested in promoting change in the Middle East. These include Israel, Western nations, Arab democrats, and Palestinian moderates. Adding to this challenge is the perception of radical Islamists -- Sunni and Shiite alike -- that Hamas's victory is a defeat for U.S. policy in the region, a blow to democratization, and a victory for Islamist fundamentalism.

"Addressing the implications of Hamas's victory demands a clear understanding of these challenges. Regarding Israel and the United States's approach toward the Palestinian Authority (PA), Hamas leader Khalid Mishal's recent speech at a Damascus mosque should be clarifying. Mishal said: 'The nation of Islam will sit at the throne of the world, and the West will be full of remorse.' This language -- and particularly Mishal's references to 'the nation of Islam' and 'the West' -- mirrors that of Osama bin Laden and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad. It is therefore not sufficient to say that Hamas's victory is simply a Palestinian popular response to Fatah corruption; it must be viewed, more accurately, as a victory for radical Islamism, as perceived by radical Islamists globally.

"There are three primary security implications of Hamas's electoral victory. First and foremost is the morale encouragement it provides to terrorists and rogue regimes - including al-Qaeda, global Jihad organizations, Syria, and Iran. The election will, quite dangerously, inspire Muslim Brotherhood affiliates in pro-Western regimes, including Egypt and Jordan. It will further energize the imaginations of Muslims everywhere, unifying Muslims under the banner of radical Islam, rather than drawing them to the flag of democratization being waved by the United States and the West.

"Second, Hamas's victory will improve cooperation among the a Hamas-led PA, Hamas terror apparatuses, Palestinian terrorist organizations, Iran, and al-Qaeda. Recent meetings between Mishal and Ahmadinezhad in Damascus should be viewed as early warnings of this dangerous alliance, which will grow with or without Western financial backing of the Hamas-led government. This partnership will overlook differences between Sunni Hamas

and Shiite Iran, reflecting the common interests of anti-Western radicalism, and Palestinian terrorist organizations will benefit from newfound Iranian funding, terrorist mentorship, weapons systems, and ammunition. This situation has already begun to unfold: Hizballah has moved operational headquarters from Beirut to Gaza, while operating terror cells in the West Bank and Gaza; its ability to operate will only increase once Hamas officially takes power.

"Third, al-Qaeda elements, which Hamas will permit to operate as proxies, will increasingly penetrate the PA. Currently, al-Qaeda elements are exploiting an unstable situation by recruiting frustrated Fatah activists and former Hamas terrorists opposing the tahdiya (period of calm).

"In the West Bank, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) will address this threat so long as it continues to enjoy freedom of operation. In the Gaza Strip, however, security will be dependent on Egypt's determination, as well as its intelligence and military capabilities. After all, Egypt will be responsible for foiling the transfer of Iranian weapons coming through the Sinai Peninsula, though the Israeli navy will continue to patrol the Gaza coastline.

"Given the strategic situation resulting from Hamas's victory, Israel should enjoy defensible borders, whether by agreement or unilaterally. It must therefore protect its interests in the Jordan Valley, as well as the areas surrounding Jerusalem and Ben Gurion Airport. It must also defend its strategic infrastructure lying between Netanya and Tel Aviv.

"Hamas's immediate interest is to preserve the tahdiya, which will buy it time to improve its terror capabilities for future deployment. As a consequence, Hamas will pursue -- by production or imports -- longer-range, more lethal, and more accurate rockets, capable of hitting Ashkelon and more northern coastal cities. Hamas will further attempt to import handheld air defense (AD) missiles and antitank missiles. These more effective 'low profile' weapons systems will create a serious military challenge for Israel if Hamas remains in power."

The Palestinian Internal Security Situation

"Without external intervention, Hamas and PA president Mahmoud Abbas will likely achieve a modus vivendi, which will ultimately benefit Hamas. Abbas will likely back down in response to any escalation of this conflict.

"The main security issue to be settled between Hamas and Abbas is responsibility for the PA's various security apparatuses. This conflict arose immediately following the elections, when Abbas ordered commanders of the security organizations to report to him exclusively as their supreme commander. Hamas's leadership reacted by announcing its refusal to relinquish control of PA security services once it forms a government. Already, it appears as though Abbas is surrendering to Hamas, indicating his readiness to hand over control of internal security organizations, national security apparatus, and civil defense. Although Abbas appears less ready to relinquish control of the Preventative Security Service, the powerful intelligence service, he is certainly not the horse to bet on in this dispute.

"On the Hamas-Fatah axis, the outcome of a brewing power struggle is less predictable. While both sides prefer to avoid fitnah (dissension leading to internal bloodshed), Fatah security servicemen and al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades members will likely develop as a militant opposition to Hamas. This opposition will be fueled by frustration from the election results, the resulting loss of power, and a desire for revenge. Moreover, this Fatah-led militant opposition will act on the fear of becoming subordinate to Hamas, losing their jobs, and being subjected to Hamas's personal settling of old accounts.

"As a result, Hamas will aim to consolidate its control over the security services as soon as possible, though its success in doing so is hard to predict. The likely consequence will be internal instability in the short run. During this period -- which will range from a couple of weeks to a few months -- Hamas will rely on the murabitoun (approximately 3,000 armed militiamen) and Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades (its terror apparatus) to deal with Fatah. Whether or not Hamas succeeds in controlling the PA's security services, it will likely maintain the murabitoun and

the Qassam Brigades as loyal armed forces -- much like the Revolutionary Guard in Iran -- which it will deploy at its discretion.

"On a final note, Hamas will likely allow other proxies, such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Fatah terror activists, to operate under its directives."

The Security Implications for Arab States and Iran

Egypt. "As a consequence of Hamas's victory, Egypt must worry about a potential boost for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Egypt will further face increased Iranian and al-Qaeda involvement and influence in the PA, particularly in Gaza. This may force the Egyptian regime to demonstrate more determination in thwarting weapons smugglers and terrorists in Sinai. However, it will not be surprising if Egypt reaches an understanding with Hamas to the benefit of both parties; this will undermine Israeli security objectives."

Jordan. "Although less threatened than Egypt, Jordan will likewise face the danger of increased Iranian involvement in the PA, and the West Bank may become a platform for undermining the Hashemite regime."

Syria. "Syrian president Bashar al-Asad is satisfied by Hamas's victory, viewing it as a defeat both for Israel and U.S. policy. Asad believes that Hamas's victory will provide him leverage for advancing Syrian interests and reducing international pressure. Encouraged by Hamas's success, Syria will continue supporting Hizballah and Palestinian terrorist organizations to serve Syrian interests with fewer restraints."

Iran. "Clearly, Hamas's victory is a boost for the Iranian regime. Iran will likely exploit Hamas's victory by penetrating the PA; its increased influence will give it more options against Israel. The Palestinian arena might be a more convenient Iranian platform than Lebanon, and Iran will use it to encourage terror activities against moderate regimes in Egypt, Jordan, and the PA. This new option might be used as leverage against the West in pursuing its nuclear ambitions."

Conclusion

"Hamas's victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections will likely spawn a counter 'earthquake' to the U.S.-led push for democratization, which will not be confined to the Palestinian internal arena or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It must be dealt with as such. In this vein, the United States and the international community should realize that the Israeli-Palestinian track has completely lost its way; they should return to the sentiments expressed by President George W. Bush in his June 24, 2002, address to guide them toward a policy of isolating the PA so long as it is compromised by terror. The Roadmap was a detour from this policy.

"The only way to address the problems created by a Hamas-led PA is to undermine its authority as soon as possible. Indeed, time is running out: Iran, al-Qaeda, and other Islamist elements will quickly exploit the situation, and they will have greater opportunity to do so given Israel's withdrawal from Gaza. A clear Israeli strategy, supported by the international community, is necessary in order to compel a positive change in the PA, either toward moderation (if that is possible) or collapse (if moderation does not occur). We should not fear collapse; the experience of Israel's security operations in recent years shows that Palestinian society will not collapse -- as the word is commonly interpreted -- even under extreme conditions. Municipalities, for example, continued to operate and provide services even at the height of Israel military actions against the PA.

"The preconditions for legitimating Hamas have been established. Until these conditions are met, the international community must unite behind a diplomatic siege and an active boycott of the PA. Israel should freeze its economic agreements with the PA on border procedures and further intensify its military counterterrorism activities, especially in Gaza. The only restraint should be avoiding a humanitarian crisis, which can be done through working with municipalities and nongovernmental institutions. The mistake that allowed Hamas to participate in the

elections without preconditions has brought us to this point. Without working to correct it, the situation will not improve.

"It must be remembered that the Palestinian people elected Hamas with full awareness of its terrorist nature. It is therefore highly important that the international community send a clear message that terrorism does not pay. Such a statement will serve to undermine terrorists and their supporters worldwide. At the same time, it will provide a much-needed boost to those prodemocracy moderates who reject terrorism."

This transcript was compiled by Eric Trager. ❖

Policy #1080

RECOMMENDED

BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆
Grant Rumley

[\(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations\)](#)



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

[\(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy\)](#)

TOPICS

[Military & Security \(/policy-analysis/military-security\)](/policy-analysis/military-security)

[Peace Process \(/policy-analysis/peace-process\)](/policy-analysis/peace-process)

[Terrorism \(/policy-analysis/terrorism\)](/policy-analysis/terrorism)

[U.S. Policy \(/policy-analysis/us-policy\)](/policy-analysis/us-policy)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Israel \(/policy-analysis/israel\)](/policy-analysis/israel)

[Palestinians \(/policy-analysis/palestinians\)](/policy-analysis/palestinians)