

Abbas' Choice

While hailed by some as a move toward Israeli-Palestinian peace, the unity government agreement between Hamas and Fatah raises serious questions about Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' sincerity and his credibility as a partner for peace with Israel.

After signing the agreement in Mecca, Hamas leaders unambiguously declared that the deal does not include renunciation of violence or recognition of Israel, as the international community has demanded.

"We devote ourselves to the battle for Jerusalem and the Aqsa Mosque... in order to recover our rights and enable the refugees to return to their homes," said Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal. "What happened in Mecca does not include recognition of Israel," gloated Ahmad Yusuf, advisor to Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh.

Nor does the Mecca deal include acceptance of past agreements, the international community's third demand. Abbas' letter to Haniyeh merely called on Hamas to "respect" previous agreements, which Hamas spokesman Ismail Radwan said "does not mean recognizing the legitimacy of the Zionist entity."

Given these statements, Abbas must ensure that any new Palestinian unity government meets the international requirements. If that government does not unequivocally renounce terror, recognize Israel and accept prior agreements, there should be serious implications for U.S. relations with Abbas. While the United States must continue to promote Israeli-Palestinian peace, its efforts must be guided by the fundamental principles underlying President Bush's vision of a two-state solution.

Until the direction of this new Palestinian government is clarified, members of Congress should continue to raise concerns about U.S. funds intended to help Abbas.

Fortunately, members of Congress such as Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY), chairwoman of the House Appropriations Committee's Foreign Operations subcommittee, have demanded more answers from the State Department on the matter.

"It is imperative that we have a fuller understanding of exactly what the funding is for and what the situation is on the ground," Lowey said, adding that the "Mecca agreement raised additional questions."

Indeed. Since the funds are allocated for training Abbas' security forces to confront Hamas terrorists and provide security, as long as Abbas is cooperating with the terrorist group, why should we provide aid to his forces?