

Roadblock to Peace

Facing international demands to recognize Israel's right to exist, renounce terrorism and accept previous Israeli-Palestinian peace agreements, the Palestinian unity government responded with a platform that does none of the above.

The document, a list of governing principles, deflates hopes that the terrorist group Hamas—in control of the Palestinian government since last March—would moderate its radical positions in order to form a political coalition with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah faction.

But its implications are even graver, representing a full-scale retreat from the most important gains achieved during the peace process of the 1990s.

The document doesn't simply ignore calls for the Palestinians to give up violence. It "affirms that resistance in all its forms...is a legitimate right of the Palestinian people." Thus, a conditional pledge in the platform to expand the false, rocket-riddled "calm" in Gaza is susceptible to termination whenever the Palestinian government decides to exercise its "legitimate right" to return to full-blown terrorism.

Recognition of Israel is nowhere to be found in the platform. The document's authors couldn't even bring themselves to mention the word "Israel," apart from mentions of "Israeli occupation" and distorted portrayals of "Israeli policies" in Jerusalem.

Regarding acceptance of previous agreements concluded between Israel and the PLO, the platform states that the government merely "respects the... agreements signed by the PLO." In addition, the agreement only discusses "respect" of previous internal Palestinian agreements and resolutions adopted by the Arab League, not agreements reached between the PLO and Israel, such as the Oslo accords.

The U.S.-backed Roadmap peace plan, moreover, is singled out for scornful rejection. The platform states that "the government reiterates its rejection of the so-called state within temporary borders, stipulated in the U.S.-Israeli plan."

These statements fall well short of meeting the international requirement to accept and fulfill those accords.

The platform also allows Hamas to solidify its hold on the Palestinian government. The terrorist group will continue to hold a dominant majority in the Palestinian legislature and a plurality of cabinet seats. Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas continues to hold office, as well, and there are no signs he's rethinking his December statement that "resistance is the only solution, and the Palestinian government will never recognize Israel."

Clearly, the Palestinians have yet to meet the minimal standards laid out for restoring the international aid that was cut off last year when Hamas came to power and promptly refused to give up its fundamental commitment to Israel's extermination.

Fortunately, the Middle East Quartet—the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia—responded to the formation of the unity government with a statement reaffirming the boycott.

Additionally, more than three-quarters of the Senate and half of the House of Representatives signed letters to the European Union and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, respectively, urging no retreat on demands for the Palestinian government to recognize Israel, reject terrorism and accept fulfill past peace accords.

Under U.S. leadership, the Quartet must continue to firmly insist on full Palestinian compliance with these three conditions before resuming assistance and engagement.