



# Middle East Spotlight

## Committed to Peace

Following the violent Hamas overthrow of the Palestinian Authority (PA) government in Gaza, President Mahmoud Abbas fired the Hamas ministers and created a new PA government in the West Bank. This seismic shift presented Israel with a potential partner for peace in Abbas and his new government.

After Hamas' coup, Israel took bold steps to bolster Abbas and his new prime minister, Salam Fayyad. These measures included releasing Palestinian tax monies, freeing 250 Palestinian prisoners, offering amnesty to wanted Fatah militiamen and sending over 50,000 tons of humanitarian aid to Gaza's civilians.

In early August, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert met with Abbas in Jericho, becoming the first Israeli prime minister to visit a Palestinian town since fighting broke out seven years ago. The meeting was intended "to show good will and foster good relations," said Olmert, adding that the two discussed "fundamental issues which are the basis for the establishment of a Palestinian state."

Israel's conciliatory gestures were intended to strengthen Abbas. Free from the constraints imposed by Hamas' extremists, Abbas made progress in implementing financial transparency while consolidating PA control over the West Bank. Israel's interest in preventing chaos there is clear.

The U.S.-backed Israeli government's policy of seeking a two-state solution—i.e., the establishment of a Palestinian state that will live in peace with Israel—is strongly supported by Israelis. A recent poll indicates that 70 percent of Israelis support a peace agreement with Palestinians based on the "two states for two peoples" formula.

Continued progress toward discussing Palestinian statehood will require ongoing reciprocity. For Israel to be able to continue to move forward, the Palestinians will have to respond in kind.

Most important, Abbas must continue to reject pressures to include Hamas in any PA government—unless Hamas meets the international community's conditions: recognizing Israel, renouncing violence and accepting all previous agreements with Israel. The PA, furthermore, must continue its current security cooperation with Israel and prevent terrorist attacks.

The removal of Hamas from the PA has created a unique opportunity for moving toward Israeli-Palestinian peace. It is now up to Abbas and Fayyad to disprove Abba Eban's famous quip that the Palestinians "never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity."