

Abbas, Hamas, The Elections: When What's to Come Is Still Unsure

by Hugh Fitzgerald



When **President-for-Life Mahmoud Abbas**, now entering the 16th year of his four-year term, first had the bright idea, this past February, to call for Palestinian elections, both parliamentary and presidential, it seemed like a good idea. Abbas thought it would burnish his image with the new Biden Administration, showing that he was, after all, a believer in democracy. He assumed he'd be able to prevail in both elections. It doesn't seem to be working out quite as he anticipated.

First, the parliamentary elections in late May will not be a sure Fatah victory. In fact, the big story about those elections is that Fatah itself is now coming apart. One leading figure in Fatah has been Nasser al-Kidwa, Yasser

Arafat's nephew. When he announced that he would be fielding his own list of candidates, separate from those of Fatah, Mahmoud Abbas flew into a rage. He declared that the PA would no longer support the Yasser Arafat Foundation, where Nasser al-Kidwa has long enjoyed a sinecure, thereby cutting off his means of support. That has not brought Al-Kidwa back into the Fatah fold, but made him more determined than ever to oppose Abbas and the Fatah loyalists he has chosen to run for Parliament.

Hamas intends to take part in the parliamentary elections, though it will not field a candidate for President. In recent public opinion polls, neither Hamas nor Fatah had a majority. The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research found that if elections were held today, a single Fatah list would win 43% of the vote and Hamas would win 30%, with 18% of voters undecided.

A faction led by Mohammed Dahlan, a former senior Fatah leader now based in the United Arab Emirates, would win 10%. Nasser al-Kidwa would win 7%. These two candidates would draw votes mainly from Fatah, dropping its share to around 30%, the pollsters said. That would put Hamas and Fatah neck and neck. Hamas soundly defeated Fatah (74 to 45 seats) in the only previous elections – held in 2006 – where they faced each other. And Hamas keeps rising in the polls for Palestinian president, while Abbas' popularity continues to steadily go down. He is being blamed for mishandling the coronavirus pandemic, having failed to buy a single dose of the vaccine for his people. He is geriatric (85 and in poor health), authoritarian (he does not brook the slightest sign of independence from his subordinates), corrupt (he has amassed a fortune of \$400 million) and ineffectual: he was unable to prevent five Muslim states – the U.A.E., Bahrain, Sudan, Morocco, and Kosovo – from one after the other normalizing relations with the Jewish state (Kosovo even put its embassy in Jerusalem), or to weaken the Jewish state in any way. Israel

goes from strength to strength: first, economically, as the Start-Up Nation with IPOs and unicorns galore; second, militarily, with startling advances in its weaponry; politically, with the Abraham Accords that have transformed Israel, for so many Muslims, from pariah to partner. Abbas' star is waning; that of Hamas is on the rise. Another two months of Abbas' rule may be enough to put Hamas in position, if it manages to strike a deal either with Mohamad Dahlan or with Nasser al-Kidwa, to win a majority of seats in the Palestinian parliament.

And it is that possibility – turning into a likelihood – of Hamas' success which alarms the Arab countries that have asked Mahmoud Abbas to cancel the upcoming elections. The story is here: "Hamas: Arab countries asked Abbas to scrap elections," by Khaled Abu Tomah, [*Jihad Watch*](#).