

Honest, Fair, Safe And Without Violence

by Dean Andromidas

"The elections were completely honest, completely fair, completely safe, and without violence," declared former U.S. President Jimmy Carter about the Palestinian elections. Carter led a team of international observers at the elections on Jan. 26, where Hamas won 76 of the 135 seats in the Palestinian Parliament. "My hope is that [when] Hamas assumes a major role in the next government, whatever it might be, it will take a position on international standards of responsibility," said Carter, who has long supported Hamas participation in the Palestinian government. Carter also called on international donors to continue to support the Palestinian National Authority.

By contrast, Israel's Likud Party Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu declared that "Hamastan" had just been created in the occupied territories, the "stepchild of Iran and the Taliban." Israel's Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert issued a statement that his government would not negotiate with Hamas, although this means little, because since neither his government, nor Ariel Sharon's, ever negotiated with Palestinian President Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) and the formerly ruling Fatah.

But Israeli President Moshe Katsav, who is a Likud member, stated that negotiations with the Palestinian Authority on a peace settlement can materialize if Hamas renounces terror, and recognizes Israel.

Although the election result was by no means welcomed internationally, it did not lead to denunciations by any foreign governments. The general formula was that if Hamas recognizes the right of Israel to exist, as is stipulated in the Oslo Accords, then the international community should deal with a Hamas government.

Why Hamas Won

If a democratically elected government that expresses the will of the people can be considered a "disaster," then blame lies with Washington and Israel, which, for the last five years, have done nothing to support the government led by the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Fatah movement, headed first by Yasser Arafat and then his successor, Abu Mazen. As one Israeli commentator noted, "anyone with eyes in his head" should not have been surprised by a

Hamas victory. After all, as *EIR* has documented, Ariel Sharon had built up Hamas for decades as a means of undermining the PLO, so Sharon's support work has been very successful.

A senior British intelligence source also told *EIR* that Hamas's victory should have surprised no one. Hamas ran a well-organized campaign and had predicted months ago that they were aiming for between 70 and 80 parliamentary seats. The source pointed to an article in this month's *Prospect* magazine by Alastair Crooke, the former British MI-6 agent with many years of experience with the Palestinians. Crooke pointed out that a Hamas victory would, in fact, represent a victory not only of Hamas, but of the militant wing and younger generation of Fatah, led by imprisoned Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti.

Hamas has a great deal of respect for Barghouti, who is considered the "engineer" of the *intifada*, and was instrumental in organizing a ceasefire among all the militant groups. Crooke pointed out that this young Fatah faction exerted its power last year during the Fatah primaries, where Barghouti formed his own election list. It was believed, Crooke said, that this alarmed the old guard who then tried to suspend the elections.

Crooke stated his view of what Hamas could be expected to do once in power: "Hamas will aim to rally as many of the factions as possible to agree on Palestinian national objectives. They will lay out the means to achieve those objectives and designate a popular leadership able to bring them about." Hamas will most likely call for a ceasefire, he said, "to be agreed and reciprocated by Israel, that would last a full generation and that, unlike past truces, would deal with all the outstanding issues that might be resolved in a long term period of calm."

Hamas, Crooke said, would call for Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines, and a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. Hamas would not disarm at the outset of the process; but, he said, demilitarization in step with political progress, as seen in Northern Ireland, "is a real possibility."

An Israeli peace activist voiced similar views, telling *EIR*: "My personal opinion is that in the short term, the Hamas election victory will hurt the Labor Party and drive voters towards Kadima [Sharon's new party] and the Likud. But in the long term, it is a good development. Anyone who knows the situation in the territories should not be surprised by the Hamas success. This was the grass roots voting and reflects the reality."

The activist went on to say: "I'm not impressed with the Hamas being called terrorists. Yitzhak Shamir and Menachem Begin were terrorists, and once we achieved independence they became Prime Ministers. The Hamas will do the same. They will fight for independence by every means they have until they get their independence, and will later become politicians."

What Hamas Is Saying

Since their victory, the leaders of Hamas have been calling for national unity among all Palestinian factions, and would like to have a national unity government with the Fatah. They have also announced their support of Palestinian President Abu Mazen, and said they would not interfere in his efforts to hold negotiations with the Israelis.

The labelling of Hamas as a “terrorist” organization fails to understand that Hamas not only is a mass organization, but is very much part of the overall Palestinian political establishment where many Hamas and Fatah leaders show mutual respect and cooperation. Far from a threat of “civil war,” conflict has not gone beyond a few heated clashes. All Palestinian factions have one goal above all others: ending the Israeli occupation and forming a Palestinian State.

Deputy head of the Hamas, Moussa Abu Marzouk, told the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* on Jan. 30, “Being that the Palestinian System of government is a Presidential regime, Abu Mazen has supreme responsibility for the process of forming the cabinet based on his position, while Hamas will be responsible for minister appointments and the functioning of the cabinet.”

The Hamas has recognized that under the Palestinian charter, it is the PLO which has the responsibility to negotiate with Israel, and that as head of the PLO, Abu Mazen is the one ultimately responsible.

Ismail Haniyeh, who led the Hamas election list, gave an interview to the *Jerusalem Post* Feb.1, stating: “We believe in political partnership. We want to establish a new political system based on political pluralism and ending the monopoly of one faction in power.” Haniyeh, who has been the target of an assassination attempt by Israel, is considered one of the key moderates he has served as a liaison with international organizations, and was key in bringing Hamas into the electoral process.

Abu Mazen has yet to meet with the Hamas leadership for discussion of forming a new government. While Hamas wants to form a national unity government, Fatah is split. One faction, believed to be led by Marwan Barghouti, is willing to cooperate, while another refuses and wants to stay in the opposition. Negotiations, also with the help of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, are ongoing in an effort to find a formula where all sides, including the United States, Israel, and Hamas, can agree.

More War, or a Peace Initiative

Behind the rhetoric, Hamas’s official position on the peace process is to negotiate a long-term truce, within which negotiations can be held for the withdrawal of Israel to the 1967 borders. This was announced by Abu Marzouk, who is based in Damascus. Marzouk told the press: “Truce is one of the projects through which we could deal. I believe that this would placate everybody if they understand Hamas’s stand



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Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter monitors the polls in East Jerusalem during the Palestinian elections. Carter, who led a team of international observers, hopes that Hamas will move toward recognition of Israel, now that it has won the parliamentary elections.

and talk to Hamas on these grounds. I believe that this [a renewed truce] is one of the options which we could propose in the future to cooperate with the international community to bring about peace and tranquility to this region.”

Israeli commentator Gideon Samet, writing in *Ha'aretz* on Feb. 1, laid out the problematic Israeli approach: “In the foggy Israeli thought process, there were, it will be recalled, times when the good fellows at the political-military assessment winked at Hamas, in the idiotic belief that it would weaken the PLO. Even when it was clear to the most junior officer in research at the Intelligence Branch that Hamas was taking control of the Palestinian street, we killed their leaders as if each of them were ticking like a bomb. The American ally helped deepen the conception. A simplistic White House adopted us in a bear hug, the more Israel contributed to the demonizing of Hamas. . . .”

Samet then called for Israel to initiate talks: “It will not be long before we will have to talk to it. Why not initiate the talks and hold them to their word when it turns out they are no more monstrous than the PLO and Fatah seemed at the

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time? There can be only one reason: Israel has forgotten nothing and learned nothing after dozens of years of accursed policy blunders.”

A similar view was expressed by Matti Steinberg, an expert on Palestinian affairs who has advised various directors of the Israel Shin Bet security services. Steinberg told *Ha'aretz* that no one should have been surprised at the Hamas victory; he had been warning the government for years that its refusal to negotiate with the Palestinian National Authority would leave the Fatah with only its corruption to offer the Palestinian people.

If I were in power, Steinberg said, “I would stop declaring and hinting at unilateral measures” and present the “Clinton blueprint,” which is the peace plan announced by President Bill Clinton at the close of his Administration, which called for the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with an exchange of territories. It called for the division of Jerusalem along Israeli and Palestinian lines, and a negotiated settlement over the holy places.

There is a definite consensus over such a solution among both Palestinians and Israelis. A recent poll showed that a majority of Israelis would support holding negotiations with Hamas over a permanent peace agreement based on a two-state solution.

There are two dangers ahead. One is that neither Israel nor the United States would make such an initiative. The current policy of no all-out peace and no all-out war has led to the collapse of the moderate Fatah and ushered in Hamas. Another round of this policy will lead to chaos and the death of many thousands of Palestinians and Israelis, if not a regional war. “Threats from Washington that they would cut off all funds to a Hamas government, would only hasten chaos and more terrorism,” warned one Egyptian analyst, with close ties to the Palestinian negotiations.

The second danger would be another “political” peace process that will not deal with the fundamental economic crisis. This will lead not only to a catastrophic economic collapse in any new Palestinian State, but would continue to weaken the Israeli economy in which a socio-economic crisis is raging.

Even without Ariel Sharon, if a Kadima-led government were to come to power after the March 28 Israeli elections, it would at best attempt to implement the first option and then fail, because its neo-liberal economic policies would continue the process of collapse.

A Labor-Party-led government might have a chance. Labor Chairman Amir Peretz has called for a negotiated settlement and has committed his party to a socio-economic alternative to the neo-liberal economic policies now dominating Israel. Nonetheless, success would only be assured if the United States, in concert with Europe, Russia, and the United Nations offered a true peace through an economic development program for the entire region, from the Mediterranean to West Asia.