

This Week in Palestine

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From [the Jerusalem Times](#) Behind the News with Hanna Siniora

The damage that many Palestinians feared - took place, no excuses; we all share in the blame. Hamas heavily tarnished its image, as a democratically elected movement, by resorting to brute force to resolve the power struggle resulting from its sweeping electoral victory in January 2006. Up to the military putsch that led Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, the movement had the democratic and moral high ground. The impatience of its radical elements and its alliance with extremist regional partners might bring about the possible demise of the first Arab Islamic party that came to power through the ballot box. Hamas now, although it has military supremacy in Gaza, has lost the support of civil society in Palestine. The public was horrified at the barbaric atrocities committed by the military militias. Hamas has undermined the democratic process and allowed a combination of forces, internally and externally, to seek its elimination. President Mahmoud Abbas was constantly blamed for indecisiveness, but Abbas knew that whoever resorted to force will lose legitimacy and the backing of his people, as well as the Arab world and international community. Hamas radicals have committed political suicide by allowing civil war and usurping power by force. President Abbas with the backing of the majority of his people was finally forced into action. Abbas dismissed PM Ismail Haniyeh and appointed a new cabinet headed by Dr. Salam Fayyad to repair the damage that divided the future Palestine into two entities, Gaza under the military domination of Hamas, and the West Bank under the legitimacy of the presidency and the PLO. PM Salam Fayyad emergency government, according to the basic laws of the PLC, have a mandate of 30 days that can be renewed up to 90 days by avoiding a constitutional showdown with Hamas majority in parliament. Ninety days are not enough for the emergency government to repair the damage of the past fifteen months. President Abbas and legal experts have to look for legal means to extend the mandate of the emergency government, at least, up to the end of the presidential term in 20 months. This the period necessary for Fayyad to deal with the political and economic damaged, also in order to repair and stabilize the internal collapse. PM Fayyad immediate concern

and full attention should be focused on preventing the collapse of the security in the West Bank, institutionalizing the security force to serve the nation and not individuals and parties, provide the basic needs and services to the Palestinian people in Gaza, irrespective of the illegitimate Hamas control, to work on preserving relations with Gaza despite the political nuances. The Palestinian economy should receive the primary attention, plans prepared while Fayyad was Finance minister should be implemented, as international sanctions are being lifted. Hamas as emotions simmers down has to revert to rational behavior, should remove weapons and masked militias from the streets of Gaza and observe and implement the rule of law. Assassinations of political and security rivals should cease immediately. As soon as possible Hamas should accept the dismissal of Ismail Haniyeh and his cabinet to begin to seek reconciliation. Hamas has two alternatives. to preserve its place as a political movement. In the first place Hamas future is not as a military force, its strength is political, it has to renounce violence to prevent Gaza from sinking deeper into violence, otherwise it will give the hard line military in Israel the perfect excuse to try to eliminate the Hamas movement by force, already such plans are being discussed by the new Minister of Defense Ehud Barak. Secondly if sane forces in Hamas prevail, it should avoid further radicalization and military confrontation, to prevent being snuffed out by force. The Algerian experience should be fully understood by Hamas and Fateh, everybody loses in a civil war situation The Palestinian supporters of Hamas as well as the Palestinian people at large will become the victims, if the present rift is allowed to deepen. The national aspirations of the Palestinian people for self determination and independence will receive a major setback and the suffering will escalate.

Now, Hamas has to work in earnest with the special Arab League committee that was set-up recently to repair relations and heal wounds. Hamas have to consider seriously early elections to avoid a constitutional impasse, in order to regain public confidence. If Hamas is so sure of public support, it should support the process of early elections. In addition, seek the release of the BBC journalist from captivity should be one of its first acts of restoring law and order in Gaza. Hamas, if it is serious to show that it supports the recent statement of Ismail Haniyeh that Hamas accepts a Palestinian state in the borders of June 4, 1967, should release the captive soldier Gilad Shalit, via the good offices of President Abbas, it will help it

to reverse negative public opinion worldwide and internally. The President, should be firm and resolute, he was forced to act, but should keep in mind that he was elected to look after the welfare of his people, all his people. Abbas has to work toward reestablishing internal dialogue, economic reconstruction, massive reforms and an end of occupation. This is a tremendous agenda, no one except the President has this mandate, let us all support him and pray that he may succeed.

Mr. Hanna Siniora is the Palestinian Co-CEO of IPCRI - the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information www.ipcri.org