

Mahmoud Abbas Prepares His Excuse to Cancel Elections

by Hugh Fitzgerald



When Mahmoud Abbas first came up in mid-January with the idea of holding parliamentary and presidential elections, it all seemed so cloudless a prospect. Eager to win favor with the Biden Administration, he would demonstrate that he was a true democrat, and that only the mean-minded would continue to point out that he was now entering the sixteenth year of his four-year term. He didn't foresee any trouble. His Fatah ticket would handily win a majority in the Parliament. He himself would win the Presidential election: first, he'd buy off Hamas so that it would agree not to field a presidential candidate, and second, he would make sure that neither of his two most popular rivals – Mohammad Dahlan and Marwan Barghouti, each of whom would win 60% of the vote if running

alone against Abbas – would be able to run for President.

His first surprise was discovering defections in the ranks of Fatah; there were those who, fed up with Abbas, chose not to run on his parliamentary list, but on their own, demonstrating their determination to keep their distance from the widely disliked Abbas. One of the defectors was Nasser al-Kidwa, the nephew of Yasser Arafat, who discomfited Abbas when he announced he would be presenting his own list of candidates for Parliament. In a rage, Abbas expelled Al-Kidwa from Fatah and fired him from his sinecure as chairman of the Yasser Arafat Foundation. Al-Kidwa, unfazed, responded by announcing a political alliance with Abbas' rival Marwan Barghouti. Other Fatah members have also expressed their anger with Abbas, some by firing on the homes of his loyalists. There was rage, too, that in Abbas' list of candidates for 132 seats in the Parliament, he had chosen only two from the most populous Palestinian city, East Jerusalem – an incomprehensible slight that Palestinians in East Jerusalem denounced, and warned him to rectify, but so far he's been standing obstinately firm. Fatah is splintering, and what Abbas assumed would be a sure win for his Parliamentary list now looks instead like an embarrassing loss, with opinion polls predicting that Abbas' own list of candidates will win only 30 of the 132 seats.

And then there is the Presidential election, which the President-For-Life assumed he would have little trouble winning. He first extracted a promise from Hamas that, while it would contest parliamentary seats, it would not field a presidential candidate. That left his two chief rivals, both formerly in Fatah, Dahlan and Barghouti. Abbas assumed that Dahlan would not try to run, because several years ago Abbas arranged to try him in absentia, and he was convicted of "embezzlement," in order to make sure that he would be disqualified from running for office because of that criminal conviction. But Dahlan, even in his exile in the U.A.E., where he has become an advisor to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed,

and the “Emirates’ favorite Palestinian,” he remains far more popular among Palestinians than Abbas. And recently his star rose further, when he arranged for the U.A.E. to deliver 50,000 doses of vaccine to the Palestinians. In early March, Mohammed Dahlan announced he was ready to run for President of the PA.

The second major rival to Abbas is Marwan Barghouti, a member of one of the largest and most powerful families in the West Bank. Abbas assumed he would not be running, given that Barghouti is serving five life sentences in an Israeli prison, but Barghouti announced in April that he, too, will be running for President. Should he win, he could probably “work from home” – that “home” being a prison – and hold Zoom meetings with his cabinet, deliver speeches on YouTube, and dispatch orders to underlings via the Internet. There have been politicians who have served from prison, such as James Michael Curley, who served two of his many years as Mayor of Boston from prison. What Abbas assumed was unthinkable, for both Dahlan and Barghouti, has become – he has been horrified to discover – most thinkable.

Faced with likely losses in both the parliamentary and presidential elections, Mahmoud Abbas wants to close down the whole election business right now. The Biden Administration has privately been urging him to do just that; the Bidenites fear a Hamas victory in the parliamentary elections. And while Hamas promised Abbas it wouldn’t run a candidate for president, would anyone in his right mind trust a promise from Hamas? Even the Biden people understand that if Hamas wins a plurality of seats in the Parliament, it may decide to have one of its own to run for president, and were Hamas go win, it would become harder for the Bidenites to take the side of a recognized terror group in putting the squeeze on Israel.

So Abbas will let Israel come to his rescue. The report on this turn of events is here: “Abbas adviser: Palestinian elections ‘very likely’ to be postponed,” [Jihad Watch](#).