



## HAMAS VICTORY IN PALESTINIAN ELECTION SURPRISES WORLD

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*Hamas' surprising victory in last week's Palestinian elections has regional and world leaders scrambling to determine how the militant Muslim party's win will impact the Middle East peace process.*

Hamas, which had refused to participate in the democratic process before, won 76 out of 132 seats in the Palestinian parliament.

The Fatah Party, which had dominated Palestinian politics for decades, won only 43 seats. Many are calling this an unexpected political earthquake.

"I don't know anyone who wasn't caught off guard by Hamas' strong showing," U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said. "Some say that Hamas itself was caught off guard by its strong showing."

### **Who is Hamas?**

Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, is the largest Islamist movement in the Palestinian territories. It formed in 1987 after the beginning of the first Palestinian uprising against Israel. The organization has two branches: a militant and a political wing.

The militant wing, known as the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades, has advocated for the destruction of the state of Israel and has taken responsibility for many terrorist attacks and suicide bombings.

The political wing, the Dawah, runs social welfare programs, such as building hospitals and schools, which aid the impoverished Palestinian people.

Although Hamas has made no move to disarm or end its formal pledge to destroy Israel, the group unofficially continues a year-long cease-fire.

The tension between the militant wing and the political wing will define the new Palestinian government, according to regional experts.

"Hamas will have to decide how it's going to deal with the issue of the desire of the Palestinian people, the needs that they have for calm and order and economic reconstruction. At the same time, as it's going to want to continue with its policy of militant resistance, what we call terrorism, towards Israel and with the objective of destroying the neighboring state," Martin Indyk, former U.S. ambassador to Israel, told the NewsHour.

### **Israel reaction**

Israel has said that it will not deal with a Palestinian government that includes Hamas.

"Under no circumstances can we either accept nor countenance a [Palestinian government] which is composed of an armed organization that calls for the destruction of the state of Israel,"

Acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told world leaders over the weekend, the Guardian reported.

The Israeli government has threatened to stop reimbursing the Palestinian government the roughly \$50 million a month it collects in taxes and customs fees on the Palestinians' behalf.

Israel also has urged foreign governments to stop aiding the Palestinian government unless Hamas disarms, stops calling for the destruction of Israel and renounces violence.

### **World reaction and financial aid**

Because of its terrorist activities the United States put Hamas on its list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations. This designation means that the United States cannot provide funds or material support to the organization. The European Union and Israel have similar designations.

Rice is in London Monday to meet with a group known as "the quartet" -- the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia -- to determine whether to continue to fund the Palestinian government.

Currently the Palestinian government receives about \$1 billion per year in foreign aid, mostly from the United States and Europe.

Rice has said the United States will not support a Hamas government and is working to convince others to cut off aid.

"There has got to be a peaceful road ahead. ... You cannot be on one hand dedicated to peace and on the other dedicated to violence. Those two things are irreconcilable," Rice said.

### **Hamas reaction to threat of aid reduction**

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas have called on the international community not to cut aid to the Palestinians.

Ismail Hanieh, a Hamas leader in Gaza, said the money would go to schools, roads and health care, and that the international community can monitor its budget.

"We in Hamas are ready to meet and have an open dialogue with the Quartet," Hanieh told a news conference in Gaza City.

Other Hamas leaders say that the international community has no choice but to support a democratically elected government.

"The Americans and the Europeans have an interest in this also. They will be embarrassed in this part of the world if they punish a people simply for expressing their democratic wishes," Saed Siyam, a Hamas candidate elected to parliament last week, told the Washington Post.

*--Compiled by Annie Schleicher for NewsHour Extra*

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