

Palestine on the brink of Civil War?

By [Nigel Parry](#)

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December 15th: Following an assassination attempt, a heavily-guarded Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh attends a Hamas rally in Gaza. (Photo: [MaanImages](#)/Hatem Omar)

Since the [Palestinian elections on 25 January 2006](#) brought a resounding Hamas victory, Fatah and its US and Israeli allies have been working to destabilize the democratically-elected government.

Hamas truly did deserve a chance at power after a year of unilateral ceasefire in the face of Israeli assassinations of its leaders, massive Israeli confiscation of Palestinian land, and the ongoing daily brutality of Israel's military occupation. And it certainly deserved the opportunity after seven years of Fatah's abject failure during the "peace process", leaving nothing but a legacy of continuously-colonized land while Fatah officials blatantly embraced self-serving corruption and overt pandering to US and Israeli interests.



December 15th: Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas attends Friday prayers in the *Muqata'a* headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah. (Photo: [MaanImages](#)/Fadi Arouri)

Following the elections, in the spring, Israel began a process of starving Gaza starving via blockade to communicate to its one million residents that their vote didn't count. Just so the West Bank was not left out — and Gaza *really* got the message — Israel encouraged the international community to cease aid to the Palestinian Authority. In the summer and autumn, Israel launched two massive military campaigns in Gaza, resurrecting its mid-Intifada policy of overtly destroying official Palestinian Authority infrastructure — now under the control of Hamas — targeting ministry building after ministry building and plunging the wider population into chaos with massive demolitions of civilian infrastructure including bridges, roads, and power plants.

The obvious and ultimate *end* to this brutish and fundamentally anti-human *means* is civil war. You can only squeeze an entire population for so long, and employ the combined political might of the United States with Israel's military might — to attempt to shore up a failed, corrupt party against a democratically-elected government — before the fault lines you encouraged start rumbling and the ground starts shaking. And civil war is the obvious direction things are heading towards.

Today in Ramallah...



Above: Palestinian security forces clash with Hamas demonstrators after the Friday prayers in the West Bank city of Ramallah, 15 December 2006. At least thirty Palestinians were injured as supporters from Fatah and Hamas clashed following an attempted assassination of Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh as he returned to Gaza yesterday. (Photo: [MaanImages](#)/Fadi Arouri)

Rattling the cage

With the help of one faction of Palestinian prisoners, the US prison administrators and Israeli prison guards are rattling the cage and encouraging the brawl. Today, as if to demonstrate how the conflict between the US-Israel-Fatah alliance and Hamas has spiraled to new lows, news reports quote Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declaring that she intends to ask Congress for tens of millions of dollars to “strengthen the security forces” of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Thus, putting more guns in the hands of the people that were not elected. And of course, this was not the first US payoff to Abbas for this very same purpose.



December 14th: Palestinian security officers attend a Fatah demonstration in the West Bank city of Ramallah following the killing of three sons of a Palestinian intelligence chief loyal to Abbas in Gaza City on Monday. (Photo: [MaanImages](#)/Fadi Arouri)

The current strife was preceded by several events whose exact details are murky. In Palestine, it is often hard to discern whether violence sparked from a tribal or political motive because the overall pressure cooker effect of the ongoing Israeli occupation’s violence, on every Palestinian soul, has the effect of blurring the precise line where rage reaches for the gun. Yet the obvious and desperate impetus to act swiftly to intervene and address the primary concern of reducing violence on the ground goes unheeded.

Palestinians are reeling from a century of systematic destruction of their way of life at every possible level. Instead of pouring gasoline on the fire, as the US-Israel-Fatah coalition has been doing, and instead of debating the price of petrol, as the international community has busied itself with throughout the entire history of this conflict, we need to recognize that events are fast reaching the straw breaking the camel’s back moment.



December 15th: Palestinian Prime Minister Adviser Ahmad Yousef gets treatment at the hospital in Rafah after being injured when unknown masked men shot at Prime Minister

Ismail Haniyeh's motorcade while he was entering Rafah from Egypt. Prime Minister Haniyeh has been on a fundraising tour of the Middle East, and was believed to be carrying large sums of cash on his return to Gaza. Abd Elsalam Haniyeh, Ismail's son was injured, along with four bodyguards, one of whom was killed. (Photo: [MaanImages](#)/Hatem Omar)

"Interesting times"

It is odd, in this world of space flight, laser vision correction, and million dollar marketing campaigns that precisely target frighteningly exact demographics, that few seem to grasp that 'business as usual' in the Middle East can only be destined to lead to more suffering, death, and loss of hope, and that the time to act was yesterday.

The oft-quoted Chinese curse condemns us to "live in interesting times". The universal blessing that all people of conscience should hope for, while watching current events unfold in Palestine, is that our world's future is one that is characterized by peace and creativity rather than by the war and destruction that seems to be the prevailing diplomatic tool of choice. Whether that sea change can come or not is patently not a matter to leave up to the diplomats.



Palestinian children protest against the killing of three boys in Gaza City on Monday, December 13th, in the West Bank city of Ramallah. (Photo: [MaanImages](#)/Fadi Arouri)
Nigel Parry is a cofounder of the Electronic Intifada.

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