



November 9, 2008

**Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center
at the Israel Intelligence Heritage
& Commemoration Center (IICC)**

Initial reactions on the Palestinian scene to Barack Obama's victory in the US presidential elections



The headline of Al-Quds, a Palestinian newspaper: "Obama... the first black president on the doorstep of the White House" (Reuters, November 5, Omar Awad)

Overview

1. The initial reactions of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian public in Judea and Samaria to Barack Obama's victory were characterized by satisfaction, **expectation of change**, and expression of hope that the joint activity for the promotion of the peace process would continue. **Hamas** spokesmen said they were hoping that Obama would change his policy towards Hamas and the Palestinians, noting that they would be willing to have an open mind to the new American administration and judge it by its actions. However, unofficial reactions of web surfers on Hamas's forum showed a deeply-rooted hostility towards the US and its president. The **Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)** website was skeptic about Obama's willingness to embrace a new policy towards the Palestinians since he "appointed a Zionist" (i.e., Rahm Emanuel) to a key position in the White House.

The Palestinian Authority



The expectations from the new President of the United States: Obama depicted as the Statue of Liberty, holding a flower in one hand and a plate with the word "change" (in English and in Arabic) in the other (Al-Ayyam, November 6, 2008)

2. **PA Chairman Abu Mazen** congratulated Obama for his victory in the presidential elections. In a brief announcement, presidential spokesman **Nabil Abu Rodeina** said that Abu Mazen was looking forward to cooperating with the American administration and to promptly promote the peace process in order to bring peace and stability to the Middle East and to the entire world (November 5, 2008).

3. **The Palestinian public in Judea and Samaria** was satisfied with Obama's victory, expressing hope that it would lead to a change in the US foreign policy. The satisfaction is mostly driven by hostility towards the Bush administration (even though it had good relations with Abu Mazen and the Palestinian Authority), and the belief that the Republican candidate John McCain would have followed a similar policy.

4. **Nimr Hamad, Abu Mazen's political advisor**, denied publications according to which Barack Obama promised PA Chairman Abu Mazen that he would support transferring control over East Jerusalem to the Palestinian Authority (Al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, November 5).



President Bush to Obama: "No change is necessary, the interior and foreign policy is OK and [even] great!" Obama replies: "Not OK!" (Al-Quds, November 6, 2008)

The Hamas movement



The US elections: two roosters, one black and the other white, fight for world domination (Felesteen, November 5, 2008)

5. On November 5, the **Hamas movement** made a public statement on its website, saying that it would judge Obama by his views and not by his election platform. However, Hamas's deeply rooted hostility towards the US was reflected in web surfers' comments on the Hamas forum, who called Obama "the black dog" and said they would rather see the Americans cry rather than celebrate.

6. Following are the reactions of several Hamas leaders:

a. **Khaled Mash'al**, the Hamas Political Bureau chief, said that the US needed to change the erroneous policy espoused by President Bush in the past several years. "We, as Palestinians and Arabs, are willing to have an open mind to any American administration that would respect the interests of the Middle East and the choices, principles, and legitimate rights of our people", Mash'al added (SANA, November 5).

b. **Sami Abu Zuhri**, a Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, said that Hamas considered Obama's election platform to be no different than McCain's. He added, however, that Hamas would determine its position towards Obama according to his actions and political views with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Palestine-info, November 5).

c. **Ahmed Youssef**, the Foreign Ministry advisor in Isma'il Haniyah's government, expressed his hope that Obama would address the Palestinian issue in a fair manner and embrace a new policy towards Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran—a policy different than that followed by Bush. He said that Obama attempted to please the Jews in the US in order to get their vote and money but that it may change since his advisors had more in-depth understanding of the Middle East. He expressed his hope that Obama would attempt to initiate some kind of contact with Hamas (Al-Jazeera International, November 5).

The PIJ

7. On the PIJ website, Obama is said to be close to Israel and hostile towards the Palestinians. The Qudsway website says (November 6): "Obama's first order of business [after being elected president]: appointing a Zionist to the number three position in the White House [referring to the appointment of Rahm Emanuel to the White House Chief of Staff]". The article [about Rahm Emanuel] said that he was "born to Zionist parents who emigrated from the occupied territories", and that he was "fluent in Hebrew". The article also notes that "during the Gulf War, Emanuel came to the occupied territories and served in a civilian role in the Israeli army".



Obama at the Western Wall, an image which accompanied the article about him on the PIJ website, suggesting that Obama is on the Israeli side (Qudsway, November 6, 2008)