**Ruling Palestinian Fatah Party Splits**

By**Robert Berger  
VOICE OF AMERICA**

*The ruling Palestinian Fatah party has split ahead of elections next month.  A jailed militant is heading the new list.*

Young Palestinian activists have split from the old guard in the ruling Fatah movement, symbolized by the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and led today by President Mahmoud Abbas.  The young guard has been winning in Fatah primaries in the West Bank and Gaza, before landmark parliamentary elections on January 25.

The younger generation rebelled when Mr. Abbas appointed traditional candidates to the top of the Fatah list.  In several instances, gunmen loyal to the young leadership stormed into election offices and closed them down.

Palestinian analyst Mahdi Abdul Hadi says the old guard has fallen from grace, because it is widely seen as corrupt.

"Corruption can be political corruption, can be financial corruption, can be social corruption.  It is exactly another Arab regime," he said.

The old guard returned to the Palestinian territories from exile with Yasser Arafat in 1994.  But with the death of Mr. Arafat a year ago, times have changed.

"He was the one to protect, to preserve and to deliver," he noted.  "Now, nobody is there to do that.  That is why the young generation are moving very fast and very quickly and visibly to tell the old guard, 'It is time for us.'"

The breakaway faction, called "The Future," is led by Palestinian uprising leader Marwan Barghouti, 46, who is serving a life term in an Israeli prison on terrorism charges.

Mr. Abdul Hadi says the young guard leaders have won popularity by serving on the front lines of the conflict with Israel, and spending time in Israeli jails.

"We are witnessing the election of the prison, the culture of the prison," he added.  "It is people that have been serving and resisting Israeli occupation."

But Mr. Barghouti will have a hard time ascending to power.  Israel says he is a terrorist who will remain in jail.

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