

Hamas's Electoral Victory Serves the Israeli Government

By [Shraga Elam](#)

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The sweeping electoral victory of Hamas is primarily a triumph for the Israeli government and a big defeat for Palestinian interests. The international pressure on the Palestinians is growing. If Hamas will not make substantial and painful concessions it risks a massive cut in the financial international support and further escalation in the Israeli anti-Palestinian measures.

If Hamas commits to such concessions, it will not only betray its voters, but the Israeli government will demand more. Now, for example, Israel demands that Hamas recognize Israel and declare an end to armed struggle before substantial economic aid will be rendered. If Hamas fulfills these conditions, it will be confronted with others like the impossible demand to renounce the Right of Return for the Palestinian refugees.

Even if Hamas does comply, the Israeli government will claim that Hamas is not to be trusted as it is a terror organization swallowing chalk but still remaining a wolf. Besides, Hamas will then have problems controlling Palestinian militants and chaos will break out.

The Palestinian political leverage against the Israeli government is now even smaller than what the Fatah-led PA had, and this leverage was for sure not very extensive.

This is a direct result of the fact that the Israeli government holds the Palestinians as hostages and can use the latter's economical and military vulnerability as a deadly means of pressure.

This is a result of the cruel Israeli economical warfare combined with the wrong economical politics pursued by the PA, which brought the Palestinian economy to the verge of a collapse. The economy survives only through foreign aid. Besides, the Palestinians have been unable until now to build an existential military threat against Israel and accordingly have hardly any deterring effect. The military and political situation is such that every successful military Palestinian action delivers Israel a pretext to hit much much harder back.

Collective punishments have been imposed under the declared goal that the Palestinians will put pressure on militants to stop their activities; an alleged aim that the Israeli generals know perfectly well cannot be achieved, as the Palestinian civilians can hardly impose such a line on the militants.

Accordingly, the Palestinian suicide bombing strategy turned into a collective suicide that culminates now in Hamas's electoral victory. The suicide bombings have been a military, economic and political disaster for the Palestinians. Some cynical Palestinian commanders threw away the life of light to manipulate people for no real achievement. The suicide

bombers did not succeed in hitting any so-called Israeli strategic targets, and their real threat for the Israelis as individuals has been much smaller than car accidents (in one year there are more Israeli civilians dying through road accidents than the sum of the civilians who were killed inside the “green line” by Palestinians in the last five years, i.e. since the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000). The suicide bombings elicited international explicit and implicit support for Israel’s anti-Palestinian measures.

While the Palestinians did not succeed in creating an existential threat to Israel, Israel tendered very severe damages to Palestinian society. Even the alleged victory of evacuation of the Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip was no real improvement, but can be rather defined as a temporary enlargement of the Gaza Ghetto with a high potential for further deterioration.

Hamas’s electoral victory poses a threat to Palestinian women, as well as secular and Christian Palestinians, but not much of one to Israel. There is also a stronger threat for internal Palestinian instability, which was already high before. There are plausible rumors that a large sum of money has been transferred abroad by rich Palestinians since the elections, which means further deterioration of the economical situation.

The Israeli website DEBKAFfile (which specializes in conspiracy theories) wrote on January 15 — ten days before the election — that “Bush and Sharon Agreed to Let Hamas Win.” DEBKAFfile predicted the Hamas electoral victory and argued that the US and Israel could have prevented it if they would have agreed “to Abu Mazen’s fervent wish to postpone the ballot as demanded by his own Fatah.” “Because they decided against this, the Palestinian Authority stands to become the first national entity in the Middle East to be dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas is the Palestinian branch.”

DEBKAFfile believes that before his second stroke, Ariel Sharon looked for further justification for his unilateral policy by proving that there is no Palestinian partner.

But what can this unilateral policy be?

It is hard to assume that an Israeli government under present conditions would really voluntarily evacuate a substantial number of Jewish settlements from the West Bank. The present evacuation plan is obviously a hoax, as Israeli right wing activists persistently claim there is an agreement with the government that will allow them to return soon to the “evacuated” settlements. It seems, by the way, possible that a similar agreement was made as well with the settlers from Gaza, although no exact timetable was laid.

One scenario, attributed to Sharon, for a unilateral Israeli policy was proffered by the Israeli daily Ma’ariv before his stroke. This plan talks about eliminating the Palestinian Authority and the stationing of US troops in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It also talks about a massive evacuation of Jewish settlements.

It is rather unlikely that the Bush administration will approve such a move. US soldiers have enough problems in Iraq and the US would hardly seek to be drawn into another quagmire. A US rejection of this “Sharon plan” will add additional justification for the more likely scenario of a further escalation in Israeli measures against the Palestinians, which will go through bloody reoccupation, eliminating the PA and up to mass expulsion, if the political conditions are “favorable”.

From the perspective of the Israeli elite the Hamas electoral victory is a win-win-situation.

Either it will give the pretext for the further escalation or it will work along the “peaceful” scenario depicted by Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd. Chairman Eli Hurvitz.

“Hurvitz believes that an improvement is even possible [following Hamas’s electoral victory], because of Hamas’s ability to control terrorism in the Palestinian territories, in contrast to the ineffectiveness of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu-Mazen),” wrote the Israeli financial daily Globes. (Jan 30) Hurvitz was quoted as saying, “I think the negative effect attributed to Hamas’s rise is greatly exaggerated. It will have no effect whatsoever on foreign investment [in Israel]. The sale of \$2 billion worth of Teva bonds in the US was not affected, and no buyer even raised the subject.”

Hurvitz is convinced, however, that “Hamas does not threaten Israel’s existence. It is more likely that they will control terrorism than during the period of Abu-Mazen, who could not do it.” If terrorism wreaks havoc, adds Hurvitz, “Will terrorism break us? Bombs don’t explode elsewhere in the world?”

Hurvitz seems to be correct in the assumption that the possibility for Hamas to escalate further the armed struggle against Israel is rather limited. If, for example, an El-Al jet was shot down from the West Bank the Israeli retaliation will be very bloody.

Facing an impossible situation, Hamas can still correct its mistake of participating in the election by dissolving the Palestinian Authority (PA) and ending the farce introduced by the Oslo Accord. Israel was to a large extent freed from its responsibilities as an occupying power and given a free hand to destroy the Palestinian infrastructures instead of constructing and maintaining them. Actually, today a large part of the foreign aid to the Palestinians takes the form of indirect aid to Israel, which otherwise had to take care of the occupied Palestinian population (see e.g., Ghada Karmi, “With no Palestinian state in sight, aid becomes an adjunct to occupation,” The Guardian, December 31, 2005).

Dissolving the PA must be accompanied by a serious search for new methods of effective non-violent struggle against the occupation, and deepening cooperation with the Israeli peace movements. This is the time to create ANC-like common movements that will address issues like racism or oppression. Like the people of South Africa, it has to be realized that a separatist nationalism means catastrophe and therefore has to be abandoned. The vision of one secular and democratic state from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea is the only viable and desirable alternative to the existing state of apartheid and to further terrible escalation.

It is very difficult for colonized people to look for a peaceful and just mode of co-existence with their oppressors, and vice versa it is difficult for the colonialists to give up their privileges and arrogant attitudes. There are many fears and hateful feelings to be overcome before trust can be established. Along the Hegelian Master-Slave dialectic, the master is afraid of the slave because he oppresses him. Of course the slave is also afraid of the master and the only way out of it is in the abolition of oppression. Is there another rational choice?

Shraga Elam is an Israeli journalist based in Zurich/Switzerland. He can be reached at: elams@dplanet.ch

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