

Hamas election win, Ariel Sharon's Last Victory

Monday 6 February 2006, by [WARSCHAWSKI Michael](#) (Date first published: 31 January 2006).

Hamas's decisive victory in the unquestionably democratic elections held in the Palestinian occupied territories is the result of many factors. However, above all else, it is a great victory for Ariel Sharon's policy. For decades the destruction of the PLO has been a strategic objective for the former Israeli PM, and this was not his first attempt; Sharon's bloody venture in Lebanon in 1982 represented a major effort to achieve this goal.

However, despite both Israel's military might and ruthless brutality - exemplified by its role in the Sabra and Shatila massacres - the Lebanon invasion failed.

Back in power in 2001, Ariel Sharon was determined to succeed where he failed two decades before. Under the cover of a permanent and preventive war against terrorism, Sharon launched a bloody offensive against the leaders, activists and institutions of the Palestinian National Movement. The goal was the destruction of the movement, knowing full well that, if successful, the strategy would bring about the emergence of an alternative leadership.

"Israel has no Palestinian partner" was not the reason for the broad military offensive and Israel's policy of destruction in the occupied territories - it was the objective: for the former Israeli PM, unilateralism was the only way to achieve the Zionist goals, and negotiations were perceived as an obstacle which could force unacceptable compromises. It was therefore necessary to destroy any potential partner for future negotiations.

After neutralizing Yasser Arafat, the Israeli government destabilized the "moderate" Abu Mazen and continued the ongoing destruction of both Palestinian infrastructure and territorial continuity. Chaos, and on many occasions, terrorist attacks were the expected results of this policy, which only proved that there was still no Palestinian partner.

Israel intentionally prevented the Palestinian leadership from delivering anything to their public on either economic or political levels. This facilitated, as expected and predicted, the collapse of the leadership's popular support and the strengthening of the Islamic opposition. Indeed, Hamas is not only perceived as more capable but also removed from the failures of the Palestinian Authority. The vote for Hamas was more of a protest vote than an ideological one; it was a way to say "you failed, we don't trust you anymore and we want to try something new."

Ariel Sharon wanted a victory for Hamas so that he could even more convincingly claim that "we don't have a partner for peace." The election results will allow Israel to continue its unilateral steps of colonization, including some tactical military redeployments and the dismantling of unmanageable isolated settlements.

For a while this policy may succeed, and the reaction of the international community and media, by threatening to outcast the Palestinians, is definitely going according to the plans of the Israeli leadership. In other words, the Palestinian people will be confronted in the short term with hard times.

But, and every Palestinian knows this, how much harder can thing get? Israel will stop the peace process? There was no peace process. Israel will renew targeted assassinations? They were never halted. Israel will destroy more houses and uproot more trees? It is almost impossible to do more damage than what was done during the last five years. Israel will continue arresting activists? This policy never stopped. The international community will cut economic support? It was already reduced to a minimum.

Israeli success, however, may not last for long. Because it was democratically elected in the presence of hundreds of international observers, the Hamas leadership will have a certain amount of international legitimacy. The fact that it is not responsible for the previous political commitments of the PLO (Oslo process) makes it better positioned to keep low the population's expectations. The possibility of a true national unity government is now very real and will this time be perceived by the international community as a sign of moderation. In the previous period it was considered as a turn of the Palestinian Authority to a more radical line.

Unlike the racist images spread by the local and the international media, Hamas is not an irrational fanatic organization. It has a wise political leadership who will follow the example of the successful Hizbollah party in Lebanon. Moreover, Hamas may well join the PLO and accept its authority. It may not be too optimistic to argue that the Israeli-planned victory of Hamas may bring about what the Israelis have been trying to sabotage: Palestinian national unity to fight the occupation and reconstruct a society that has been systematically dismantled by the Israeli war of pacification. It may provide renewed hope and confidence.

"We will not negotiate with Hamas." "We will meet Hamas only in the battlefield" - we remember such slogans from the eighties, only during those years they were directed towards the PLO. We know that ultimately the Israeli government was forced to radically change its policy, for at least a few years.

There are already signs that the US administration is backing off its policy of total war against Islamic organizations and is even starting to look for new allies among them. Indeed, the US has begun working with such organization in Iraq and conducted semi-public talks with the Muslim Brothers in Egypt. Sooner or later, the international community will force Israel to negotiate with Hamas, as it did fifteen years ago with the PLO.

As for the Palestinian society, the Hamas victory clearly represents a double challenge. First, Palestinians will have to struggle internally in order to maintain and expand upon the social and civic achievements which the Hamas may threaten.

While such attacks on social and democratic rights will certainly not bother the international community they remain a major concern for the Palestinian people. The second challenge is to rebuild the secular national movement, most importantly Fatah, and to give back to the PLO its power and leadership.

If these two challenges are successfully met, the latest achievements of Ariel Sharon may be similar to those in Lebanon: a Pyrrhic victory.

P.S.

* This article first appeared at News from Within, e-journal of the Alternative Information Centre, Jerusalem. Later published by International Viewpoint Online magazine : IVP ° 375 - February 2006.

* Michel Warschawski is a journalist and writer and a founder of the Alternative Information Center (AIC) in Israel. His books include "On the Border" (South End Press) and "Towards an Open Tomb -

the Crisis of Israeli Society” (Monthly Review Press).