

ELECTION SHOCK: THE HAMAS VICTORY


Introduction

Focus

This *CBC News in Review* story focuses on the surprise election victory of the militant Islamic group Hamas in the January 2006 elections for the Palestinian parliament, and what this will mean for the prospects of achieving peace in the Middle East.

Further Research

To learn more about Palestinian politics, consider a visit to the official Palestinian Authority Web site at www.pma.gov.ps.

 Sections marked with this symbol indicate content suitable for younger viewers.

On February 18, 2006, the newly elected members of the Palestinian parliament met for their inaugural session, held jointly in the West Bank town of Ramallah and in Gaza City. Palestinian voters in Gaza and the West Bank had cast their ballots on January 25 in a widely anticipated demonstration of democracy in a region where such exercises are rare. The election was also regarded as a referendum on the leadership of Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, who had succeeded Yasser Arafat in 2004 and was pursuing a policy of negotiations with Israel. To the surprise of almost everyone inside and outside the Palestinian territories, the clear winner of the election was not Abbas's governing Fatah party, but Hamas, a militant Islamic group pledged to the destruction of Israel. In the eyes of Israel, the United States, Canada, and most Western countries, it is viewed as a terrorist organization. Hamas has claimed responsibility for a number of suicide bombings and other attacks on Israel that have claimed hundreds of lives, many of them innocent civilians. But alongside its violent military wing, Hamas presents another face inside the West Bank and Gaza. In recent years, it has emerged as a clear rival to the corrupt and ineffective Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority in these areas. Hamas has won the admiration and support of thousands of ordinary Palestinians because of its record of clean government in the municipalities it runs, and for the wide network of schools, hospitals, and other social services it provides to impoverished West Bank and Gaza residents. Many Palestinians who cast their ballots for

Hamas did so not primarily for its militant anti-Israel stance, but because of its record as an honest, competent alternative to the discredited Fatah regime. The Hamas win was decisive, netting it 74 of the 132 members of the Palestinian parliament, and shocked even the leaders of the organization itself, who had not anticipated such a sweeping victory. On hearing the news of the election result, thousands of pro-Hamas supporters took to the streets in Gaza and the West Bank, chanting slogans, waving the movement's green banners and posters of assassinated Hamas leaders like Sheik Ahmed Yassin, and shooting rifles into the air. But the victory celebrations soon turned violent. Disgruntled supporters of Abbas's Fatah party, who could not believe they had been defeated, also turned out to express their anger and frustration at the result. Many of them were members of the police and other government bodies, who feared that they would no longer be able to hold their jobs or expect regular paycheques now that Hamas had formed the government.

The international reaction to the Hamas victory was one of shock, dismay, and great concern. Israel's acting prime minister, Ehud Olmert, who had only recently replaced former leader Ariel Sharon, who had been incapacitated by a stroke, firmly stated that his government would have no dealings with Hamas. Olmert made it clear that the only way negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians could resume would be if Hamas renounced violence and officially recognized Israel's right to exist as a nation. Western governments were cautious in their initial responses, anxious to keep

Did you know . . .

Of the 74 elected Hamas members, 12 are in Israeli jails and one is in a Palestinian prison.

channels of communication open with the new Palestinian rulers. But the “quartet” of the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations cautioned that financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority might be in jeopardy if Hamas did not moderate its policies. Israel announced that it would withhold the taxes collected from Palestinians living inside its territory, money that had previously been transferred to the Palestinian Authority to conduct its day-to-day government operations.

Such financial pressures were intended to convince Hamas that it was expected to act responsibly and adopt a more conciliatory position regarding Israel if it wanted to continue to receive outside assistance. But to many Palestinians these signals smacked of blackmail. There was widespread anger throughout the Arab world at the hostile Western reaction to the Hamas democratic victory in a free election. U.S. President George W. Bush strongly

promotes democracy in Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries as a first step toward peace, prosperity, and security for the people of the region. But when Palestinians peacefully elected Hamas, their choice met with widespread condemnation. The Hamas leaders defiantly responded that no amount of financial pressure would compel them to abandon their basic principles. Yet at the same time, the movement did try to reassure outsiders that it would govern responsibly and not seek further violent confrontations with Israel. Specifically, it committed itself to observing the year-long ceasefire with Israel, and held out the possibility that it might be prepared to extend this truce indefinitely into the future. But any expectations for substantial progress toward a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians were now clearly on hold for the moment, as Palestinians, Israelis, and interested outsiders and observers contemplated the magnitude of the political change that had occurred.

To Consider

1. Why was the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections such a surprise, to both Palestinians and outsiders alike?

2. Why is Hamas viewed as a terrorist organization? What is the opinion of many Palestinians about the movement?

3. What were the reactions to the Hamas victory inside the Palestinian territories, in Israel, and among Western governments?

4. How are Israel and the “quartet” of international governments pressuring Hamas to moderate its policies? How is Hamas reacting to this pressure?

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Viewing Activity

Watch the video and respond carefully to the questions.

1. How many suicide bombing missions has Hamas's military wing carried out against Israel since 2000? _____
2. What three countries and organizations view Hamas as a terrorist organization? Why?

3. a) Who is the president of the Palestinian Authority? _____
b) What is the name of the political party he leads? _____
4. What was the main reason why Palestinians elected Hamas as their new government?

5. What two world leaders made it clear that they will have no dealings with Hamas until it changes its policies?
_____ and _____
6. What two Middle Eastern countries expressed delight at the Hamas victory?

7. How are Western leaders and organizations attempting to pressure Hamas to change its position on Israel?

8. What countries and organizations constitute the "quartet" responsible for promoting the Israel-Palestine peace process?

9. a) What aid projects does Canada sponsor in the Palestinian territories?
b) How much money does Canada contribute in foreign aid to the Palestinian Authority?

10. a) Why does Maryam Farahat, a newly elected Hamas MP and mother of three suicide bombers, want Canada to continue providing aid to Palestine?
b) Why does Yakov Krugliak want Canada to stop?

Discussion

As a class, discuss the issue of whether Western countries and organizations, including Canada, should continue providing foreign aid to the Palestinian Authority now that Hamas has been elected. Evaluate the arguments on both sides of this issue, and state your opinions based on the information and viewpoints the video presents. Based on this information, what would you advise the new federal government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper to do, and why?

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The History of Hamas

Further Research

To review the Hamas Charter, which is a statement of the basic principles of Hamas, go to www.thejerusalemfund.org/index.php and click on the Palestine Center button.

The emergence of Hamas as the dominant force in Middle East politics has a long history that is linked to developments in the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. To most in the West, Hamas is viewed as a terrorist organization because of its involvement in armed attacks on Israel, including many suicide bombings that have led to the deaths of hundreds of innocent civilians. But Hamas also has another face that has been prominently displayed inside the West Bank and Gaza since the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation—known as the *intifada*—of the late 1980s. Hamas was founded in 1988, just at the beginning of the *intifada*, as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization founded in Egypt in 1928 to promote Arab unity and social and economic development, and especially the liberation of the Palestinians from foreign rule.

Hamas is the short form for *harakat-al-muqawima Al-islamiyya*, which means “Islamic Resistance Movement.” Its political philosophy is strongly based on Islamic teachings, and it shares much in common with Hezbollah, a Lebanon-based group that fought against Israeli occupation of that country during the 1980s and 90s. Hamas strongly opposed the 1993 Oslo Accords negotiated between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), then under the leadership of Yasser Arafat. U.S. President Bill Clinton brokered this deal, which Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed on the White House lawn, in the presence of many world dignitaries. It called for Israel’s military withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, two Palestinian areas it had occupied following its victory over Egypt and Jordan during the June 1967

Six Day War. Palestinians would achieve limited self-government in these areas, leading to the eventual establishment of a fully independent state. The new Palestinian government would in turn recognize Israel, and final borders between the two countries would be determined. Then it would be up to Israel and Palestine to resolve major outstanding differences between them. These include the status of Jerusalem, the right of Palestinians expelled from Israel in 1948 to return to their homes, the future of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories, and control over the region’s precious water supplies.

Hamas rejected the Oslo Accords as a total capitulation to Israel. Its long-term goal, which it has never officially renounced, is the creation of an Islamic state on the entire area that once formed the British mandate of Palestine, prior to the establishment of Israel in 1948. Although the Hamas charter does not specifically state it, this would mean that the Jewish population of Israel would be compelled to abandon their state. Abdel Aziz Rantisi, a former Hamas leader assassinated in 2004, once boasted that his group would not be content until it had “wiped Israel off the face of the map.”

With growing Palestinian resentment at the continuing Israeli military occupation and the inability of the leadership of the Palestinian Authority to achieve real change, Hamas’s base of support in the West Bank and especially Gaza has risen dramatically in recent years. It is really two organizations in one—a military wing known as the Izzidin al-Qassam brigades, named after a hero of the anti-British struggle during the 1930s, and a political faction that plays a prominent part in administering local government. Since the

Quote

"Now we see a major shift, an unprecedented shift in Palestinian life." — Hannan Ashrawi, Palestinian lawmaker (*Toronto Star*, February 19, 2006)

"second *intifada*" began following former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, Hamas's military wing has carried out at least 60 attacks against targets in Israel, many of them involving suicide bombers. These young "martyrs" have been recruited from desperate and disaffected young people who have grown up without hope in Gaza and the West Bank.

Hamas ensures that their families are generously compensated for the sacrifice of their young people to the cause. Many of these attacks have taken the lives of innocent Israeli civilians, something for which Hamas has been condemned in the West. But the organization justifies such acts as a legitimate response to the ongoing military occupation of Palestine, which has caused untold suffering and death to many Palestinian civilians as well.

In 2005, Hamas declared a truce with Israel, and to date has shown great care in observing it to the letter. It did this in order to assist the Palestinian Authority, led by Mahmoud Abbas, in its efforts to pursue negotiations with Israel. Before this, many of Hamas's senior leaders were struck down in targeted assassinations launched by Israel. Among them was Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the movement's founder, who spent eight years in an Israeli jail before being released in 1997. On March 27, 2004, he was killed while leaving prayers at his mosque in Gaza City when a missile struck his car. Less than a month later, Abdel Aziz Rattansi, who succeeded Yassin, was also killed, along with his

son and bodyguard. And that September, another senior Hamas military leader was killed in a car bomb in Syria. While much of the international community has condemned Israel for its practice of targeting Hamas leaders for selective assassination, Israeli officials have justified their actions as a necessary part of their "war on terrorism."

Before its stunning victory in the January 2006 Palestinian elections, Hamas had already established itself as a major force in the region's political life. It had been elected to govern a number of municipalities in Gaza and the West Bank, where it won credit for its honest, competent administration. Many Palestinians could not help but compare Hamas's record in government favourably with that of the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority, which was widely accused of corruption, heavy-handedness, and inefficiency. In addition, many of Hamas's leaders had risked their lives in pursuit of the Palestinian national struggle against the Israeli occupation of their land, serving lengthy prison terms and defying attempts to assassinate them. But despite its growing support within Palestinian communities, Hamas's leaders were as astounded as everyone else by their smashing victory at the ballot box. For a movement that has championed violence and militant resistance to the ongoing Israeli occupation, the change Hamas will now have to make to present a new face to the world as a duly elected government may be a major challenge.

Analysis

1. Why did Hamas oppose the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinians?
2. What is its declared objective in the Middle East?
3. Why do many ordinary Palestinians support Hamas?
4. How does Hamas justify its policy of violent actions against Israel, including the use of suicide bombers?
5. What do you think Canada's reaction should be to the election of Hamas? Be specific.

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The Hamas Leadership and its Policies

Here are some profiles of the senior leaders of Hamas, including the person who has been named to the position of prime minister in the new government in the Palestinian territories. The views of each of these leaders on the movement's position on Israel are also stated.

1. Khaled Mashal is Hamas's senior leader in exile in Syria. He was appointed to that position after the assassination of two previous Hamas leaders in 2004. To avoid the same fate, he now lives outside the Palestinian territories. In 1997, he narrowly escaped death when two Israeli agents, disguised as Canadian tourists, attempted to kill him with a poisonous injection. In return, he called for the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Mashal is viewed as a "hardliner," strongly opposed to any accommodation with Israel.

2. Mahmoud al-Zahar was the personal physician to Hamas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin, and is also strongly opposed to negotiations with Israel. He has served jail terms in both Israeli and Palestinian prisons, and survived an assassination attempt in 2005 that killed his son. He defends suicide bombings of Israeli civilian targets as a legitimate response to the suffering of Palestinians under the military occupation.

3. Hasson Youssef is a senior Hamas leader in the West Bank who campaigned for election from inside an Israeli jail. But he is considered one of the movement's more moderate leaders, and does not rule out negotiations with Israel under certain conditions in the future.

4. Mohammad Deif is the commander of Hamas's dreaded military wing, the al-Qassam brigades. Israel holds him responsible for the suicide bombings that have taken hundreds of lives in recent years. Deif was himself seriously wounded in an Israeli missile attack on his car in 2002, which killed two of his bodyguards and injured 40 bystanders. This attack drew harsh international criticism and was denounced by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. Since then, Deif has lived in hiding, and his military group is widely credited with forcing Israel to withdraw from Gaza in 2005.

5. Mohammed Abu Teir is a former member of Fatah and the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Palestine. Based in East Jerusalem, he spent 25 years in Israeli jails and was detained for campaigning for Hamas in the Arab part of the city. He is a prominent advocate of a strict Islamic approach to social policy and has stated that Hamas will institute separate classes for boys and girls in Palestinian schools once it takes power.

6. Jamila Shanti is one of the few women to hold a senior position in the Hamas leadership. She is a professor of English literature at the Islamic University in Gaza and won election as Hamas candidate to the Palestinian parliament. A founder of the movement's women's organization, she is considered to be an example of a more progressive faction of Hamas that does not seek to restrict women's rights in society.

Further Research

To study Palestinian politics from Arab sources consider a visit to the site of *Al-Jazeera*, the Arab news network at www.aljazeera.com. To view the Israeli viewpoint, consider a visit to the *The Jerusalem Post* site at www.jpost.com.

7. Ismail Haniyeh is the leader of the “Change and Reform” list inside Gaza, and has been chosen to be the prime minister in the new Hamas-led Palestinian government. He is well spoken and lives in a modest home in Gaza City. He has promised to cut the salary of the prime minister from \$4 000 to \$1 500 per month. Viewed as a moderate voice within the organization, he is committed to continuing the ceasefire with Israel, and is prepared to consider a long-term peace if Israel agrees to withdraw to the 1967 borders it held before the Six-Day War. He is barred from travelling to the West Bank and can only leave Gaza via Egypt, one of the few countries that permits Hamas

leaders to enter its territory. Haniyeh can expect strong international pressure to moderate Hamas’s position regarding the use of violence and its refusal to recognize Israel officially. But his reply is firm. He says, “when [the Israelis] say that they recognize the Palestinian state and the rights of the Palestinian people and the release of political prisoners and confirm the right of return for refugees, then Hamas will have a position on recognizing Israel. We are not a violent people. We are not interested in bloodshed. We are an oppressed people. All we want is to enjoy independence, and then there will not be any justification for resistance” (*The Globe and Mail*, February 27, 2006, p. A12).

Activities

1. What experiences do many of the leaders of Hamas share in common?

2. How do you think these experiences have shaped their attitude toward Israel?

3. What is the position of the new Hamas Prime Minister on whether his movement would ever be prepared to recognize Israel?

4. Which of the above leaders do you think would be the best to lead Hamas? Why?

5. Which of the above leaders do you think would be the worst to lead Hamas? Why?

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Responses to Hamas's Victory

Here is a selection of reactions from world leaders, ordinary citizens, and media commentators to the victory of Hamas in the elections for the Palestinian parliament, and what the result could mean for peace in the region and for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

1. "For a nation to be truly democratic it must renounce any use of terrorism. On a fundamental level, the advocacy of terrorism and the establishment of stable democratic institutions are incompatible." — Prime Minister Stephen Harper (*The Globe and Mail*, January 27, 2006)

2. "People will probably start watching their lifestyle, socially. Parties, weddings, restaurants, people will watch their attire. Even without Hamas, Palestinian society is conservative. If a lady wears a short-sleeved shirt on the street, she might hear negative comments. That was without Hamas. Imagine how it will be with Hamas." — Dianna Mohawi, a salesperson in a Christian area of Ramallah, West Bank (*The Globe and Mail*, January 27, 2006)

3. "What is the alternative? The alternative is Hamas. The majority of people can't explain why they voted for Hamas. But when you sit with them they will say: 'We hate Fatah. They did nothing for us. A few poor people suddenly became rich people. Hamas worked in another way. They worked with society. They worked with the poor.'" — Khaled Abu Khatah Barghouti, director of social services for the Palestinian Authority in Deir Ghassana, West Bank (*The New York Times*, January 28, 2006)

4. "I would hope the world community can collectively tide the Palestinians

over. It may well be that Hamas will change. It's a mistake to abandon optimism completely. Don't drive the Palestinians away from rationality. Don't force them into assuming arms as the only way to achieve their legitimate goals. Give them some encouragement and the benefit of the doubt." — former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, part of an international team observing the Palestinian elections (*The New York Times*, January 28, 2006)

5. "We will not recognize Israeli occupation, but we are realistic and we know things are done gradually. We believe it is in the interest of everybody to ride the train of Hamas. We are extending our hands to everybody and saying we need each other. The world raised the slogan of democracy and now it should respect the results of democracy. If you want to punish the Palestinian people for practising democracy, then the American administration should punish Americans for choosing President Bush." — Khaled Mashal, exiled leader of Hamas (*Toronto Star*, January 29, 2006]

6. "The rise to power of Hamas should give Israel and the entire civilized world an opportunity to open their eyes. However, it is doubtful whether Israel, or the West, will take this opportunity to abandon the erroneous conception. Israelis, in particular, love deluding themselves into thinking, again and again, that if they continue to give up parts of their historic homeland, the terror will cease and they will be accepted as a legitimate entity in the Middle East. What a delusion." — Israel Harel, former chairman of the council of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, and head of the

Institute for Zionist Strategy, Jerusalem
(*The Globe and Mail*, January 30, 2006)

7. “No matter how deeply one differs from Hamas and its politics, the fact is it now has the mandate to represent the people of the occupied Palestinian territories. To reject this mandate will send a disturbing message, not just to the people of Palestine, but to the rest of the Muslim world as well, where ordinary citizens have been struggling for the introduction of democracy long before George W. Bush saw its merits, and where the U.S. has propped up dictatorships and monarchies for decades.” — Tarek Fatah and Jihad Aliweiwi, Toronto broadcasters and members of the board of the Muslim Canadian Congress (*Toronto Star*, January 30, 2006)

8. “Our views on Hamas are very clear. We do not deal with Hamas. Hamas is a terrorist organization. Under current circumstances, I don’t see any change in that.” — White House spokesperson Scott McClellan (*The Globe and Mail*, January 26, 2006)

9. “We are centrists, and are against any kind of extremism. The motto that we operate on is that in religion, you cannot force people. We will not force a woman to wear the *hijab*; we hope that decision will come from inside her. I don’t care to have women put on the *hijab* and then take it off when no one is looking.” — Abu Teir, member of the Hamas government (*The Globe and Mail*, January 28, 2006)

Activity

Complete this organizer on the quotes above. Be prepared to share your views.

Quote #	Agree/Disagree	My Reasoning
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		

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Profile of Israel's New Leader

Further Research

To stay informed about politics in Israel, you can visit the Web site of the Government of Israel at www.israel.org/mfa.

In January 2005, Israeli deputy prime minister Ehud Olmert assumed the position of acting prime minister. His predecessor, Ariel Sharon, had suffered a massive stroke and was in a coma, with many fearing for his life. Even if Sharon survived, it was highly doubtful that he would ever recover sufficiently to resume office. Shortly before his stroke, Sharon had stunned Israel by announcing that he was withdrawing as head of the governing Likud Party and forming his own new political force called Kadima (www.kadima.org/), which means “forward” in Hebrew. Sharon’s party had voiced its opposition to his decision to withdraw Israeli military forces and Jewish settlements unilaterally from Gaza, one of the occupied Palestinian territories. To many on the right wing of Israeli politics, Sharon’s move was viewed as a blatant capitulation to the Palestinians and a reward for terrorism. It was also denounced as a betrayal of Jewish settlers who had established their homes there. But for most Israelis, anxious for a peaceful resolution of their long-running conflict with the Palestinians, Sharon’s bold decision met with great support. All opinion polls taken before he collapsed indicated that his new Kadima Party would coast to victory in the next Israeli elections, due to be held on March 28, 2006. Sharon had been given an even greater boost when his old political foe and personal friend Shimon Peres, a former prime minister and head of the Labour Party, announced that he was joining Kadima.

But Sharon’s stroke changed the Israeli political scene dramatically as Olmert assumed control. He quickly

stated that he would continue Sharon’s policy of pursuing peace unilaterally until Israel felt comfortable that it had a willing partner for negotiations on the Palestinian side. He also showed great flexibility in permitting Palestinian residents of Jerusalem to vote in the January 25, 2006, elections, something he would have been unlikely to approve of in his more hardline political past. Like his mentor Sharon, Olmert’s career was shaped by the views of Israeli “Revisionists,” a right-wing political group that was very influential among Jewish independence fighters before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. This group had always championed the goal of “Greater Israel,” a state that would encompass all of the Biblical kingdoms of Judah and Israel, including the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinian residents of these areas were to be encouraged, if not forced, to leave.

As mayor of Jerusalem, a post he held before becoming a member of Sharon’s cabinet, Olmert was a strong advocate for right-wing Jewish settlers who had established themselves in Arab parts of the city, causing serious confrontations with local residents. But with the rise of the “second *intifada*,” a massive Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, Olmert began to revise his previously uncompromising positions. This change was largely the result of his wife’s influence. Aliza Olmert is a strong supporter of Peace Now (www.peacenow.org.il/Site/en/homepage.asp), a left-of-centre Israeli group that calls for a negotiated settlement with the Palestinians, involving the total withdrawal of Israeli

settlements from the West Bank. The couple's five children are also active in the peace movement. As a member of the Sharon government, Olmert frequently joked that whatever cabinet post he held, when he came home the other members of his family always outvoted him.

With his new, more moderate image firmly in place, Olmert has enjoyed a continuing surge of support for Kadima, largely fuelled by massive popular sympathy for Sharon following his stroke. Olmert also is expected to benefit from the weakness of his two main political rivals in the upcoming election campaign: former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, the new Likud leader, and Amir Peretz, a former trade union leader who now heads the Labour Party. To most Israelis, Netanyahu is viewed as too uncompromising and

right-wing, while Peretz is suspected of not having sufficient background in security issues to lead the country.

The victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections of January 25, 2006, has cast a dark shadow on the upcoming Israeli vote. To some, it symbolizes their worst fears that a lasting peace may never be attained, and that the region must face the dire possibility of renewed violence and confrontation. But others believe that the chance for some progress toward a more permanent truce, if not a permanent resolution of the major differences between Israel and the Palestinians, may still be possible despite Hamas's win. Whomever Israeli voters choose to lead them into this uncertain future after March 28 will have to confront new realities and very difficult challenges in the months ahead.

To Consider

1. Why was the incapacitation of former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon such a political bombshell for the region?

2. In what ways has new Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert changed his views regarding peace with the Palestinians over the years?

3. Why has he changed them?

4. In your view will the Israeli government be able to work successfully with Hamas? Explain fully.

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Activity

Group Analysis and Discussion: Consequences of the Hamas Victory

Form small groups and select one of the following topics for analysis and discussion. All of them deal with the implications and consequences of the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections, for the Palestinians, Israel, the Middle East region, and the international community as a whole. Research the issue you have selected, using some of the Web sites listed below. As a group, prepare a detailed analysis of the issue to be presented to the rest of the class in the form of a group discussion. Following your discussion, present some conclusions that you have arrived at as a group.

The Issues

1. The question of continuing international financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority
2. Israel's options for dealing with the reality of a Hamas-led government
3. Canada's position on the Hamas government
4. What a Hamas government will mean for ordinary Palestinians
5. The impact of Hamas's victory on other political Islamist groups in the Middle East and elsewhere
6. The differing views of Hamas leaders on dealing with Israel, and which group may emerge as the most influential
7. The impact of the Hamas victory on the Israeli elections

Web Sites

www.bitterlemons.org — A joint Israeli-Palestinian online journal that explores issues dealing with the Middle East peace process

www.cbc.ca — An in-depth look at the Middle East, including an examination of the implications of Hamas's election victory

www.news.bbc.uk — An extensive review of recent developments in the Middle East, including a profile of Hamas and its leaders

www1.idf.il — The official Web site of the Israeli Defence Forces, with a summary of Hamas's military actions and Israeli responses to them. Click on the English language button for information.

www.hamasonline.org — The official Hamas Web site, not always easily downloaded