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Pray for Peace in the Middle East — Ominous Developments

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The stunning success of the Hamas party in the Palestinian election is sending shock waves through the world — and especially through the Middle East. Hamas demands the destruction of Israel, and sponsors terrorism. Yet, the party won a shocking landslide in the election for a Palestinian parliament, ousting the Fatah party of the late Yasser Arafat.

What does this mean for Hamas? From *The Los Angeles Times*:

In taking the reins of power after participating in its first parliamentary vote, Hamas leaders face a predicament: If they attempt to please their most radical adherents by continuing to call for Israel's destruction, they jeopardize hard-won international support for a Palestinian state. But if they moderate their stance and reject their founding principle, they risk alienating their militant base.

What does this mean for Israel? From *The New York Times*:

The Hamas landslide in Palestinian elections has stunned Israelis, but it may also have brought them a rare moment of clarity: with peace talks off the table, Israel will most likely pursue unilateral actions, drawing its own borders and separating itself from the Palestinians. Ehud Olmert, the acting prime minister, made it clear after an emergency cabinet meeting that talks with Hamas, a Palestinian party sworn to Israel's destruction, were out of the question, while experts said Israel was now freer to establish its future on its own. They said Israel — whose own elections in two months could be heavily influenced by the Palestinian results — was likely to focus on speeding up construction of the separation barrier, which runs along and through parts of the West Bank. After more than three years of building, it remains less than half finished, but Israeli officials say it has contributed enormously to the reduction of suicide bombings and other attacks. Palestinians, on the other hand, say the barrier takes land they want for a future state.

What does this mean for the peace process? From the *Chicago Tribune*:

Israel said Thursday it would not negotiate with a Palestinian government that includes Hamas after the militant Islamic movement won a stunning landslide victory over the ruling Fatah Party in parliamentary elections. . . . Hamas, whose charter calls for the destruction of Israel, rejects peace talks and says it will concentrate on internal reforms to improve the lives of Palestinians. Mushir al-Masri, a Hamas candidate and spokesman, said Thursday that negotiations with Israel are "not on the agenda."

What does this mean for the upcoming Israeli election? From *The Washington Post*:

The Hamas parliamentary election victory became a focal point of Israel's election campaign Thursday as opposition politicians criticized the government for failing to stop the radical Islamic movement from rising to prominence within the Palestinian Authority. . . . [Acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud] Olmert ordered his ministers Thursday not to comment on the Palestinian returns. He told visiting Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D-Del.) Wednesday evening that he would not "negotiate with a government that does not meet its most basic obligations — to fight terrorism.

In November 2004, just after the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, I wrote [this](#):

We must all now hope and pray for a Palestinian leader who will be a true statesman, a leader who will transform

resentment into a determined dream of peace, statehood, and stability. Such a leader must recognize that Israel is not only a permanent political reality, but an example to the Palestinians of what can be done when a determined people take responsibility, give sacrificially, and devote themselves to the building of a nation and the shaping of a future. The Palestinian people do not deserve and cannot afford another Moses in reverse.

These hopes remain unfulfilled. Pray for peace in the Middle East.

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