

FACTSHEET: ISRAELI ELECTION RESULTS AND MIDDLE EAST PEACE



Israeli elections in March, 2006 have created a political landscape which seems destined to drive an era of inexorable Israeli unilateralism with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet while Israeli politicians speak of “right,” “left,” and “center” parties, few in Canada would use such terms to describe Israel’s parties’ positions vis-à-vis the Palestinians. Indeed, there is evidence that Israeli unilateralism is driven in part by ethno-centric demographic concerns. Canadians must understand the implications of a Kadima-led government in Israel, and how this new government’s unilateral policies and practices run counter to Canadian values and policy positions.

How the Election Results will shape the Middle East Peace Process?

Kadima, with 29 seats, will form the government. Kadima seeks to unilaterally fix Israel’s borders along the path defined by Israel’s Wall. It will likely incorporate its colonist population into Israel proper by annexing at least 15 percent of the Palestinian occupied territories. With less than 25 percent of the seats in Israel’s Knesset, Kadima will be forced to form a coalition government likely consisting of Labour, Israel our Home, the Haredi parties, and the Pensioner’s Party. Kadima’s leader, Ehud Olmert, warned that any party opposing his unilateral agenda “cannot be a part of the coalition’s agenda.”

Israel’s “Right” secured a combined 33 seats in the Knesset. The “Right” is made up of Israel our Home (11 seats), Likud (12 seats) and the National Union-National Religious Party (9 seats.) These parties are primarily distinguished by their opposition to any significant concessions of land to the Palestinians. Avigdor Lieberman, leader of Israel our Home, proposes that Israel unilaterally redraw its borders to exclude towns of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, and to include its illegal colonies. Benny Elon, leader of the National Union Party openly endorses “transfer” (i.e. deportation) of Palestinians from Palestine.

Israel’s “Left” won a combined total of 31 seats. The “Left” is made-up of three main Parties: Labor (19 seats) Meimad Meretz (5 seats) and Gil – the Pensioner’s party (7 seats.) Israel’s “left” generally supports a negotiated two-state solution based on land for peace; opposes colony expansion and supported the Gaza withdrawal. However, all of these parties are open to unilateral moves vis-à-vis the Palestinians, which makes a coalition with the leading Kadima Party a foreseeable scenario.

The Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Parties won a total of 18 seats. These parties are ideologically flexible on the peace process but strongly oppose the separation of religion and state.

The Israeli Arab Parties won 9 seats. These parties believe in the removal of all Israeli colonies from the Occupied Territories and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.

Should Canada support Kadima’s unilateral agenda?

No. Kadima’s plan under Olmert runs counter to both international law, and Canada’s stated policy. By calling for the permanent annexation of the largest Jewish colonies, as well as the vast Jordan Valley portion of the West Bank, Israel violates the UN Charter, and UNSC resolutions 242, 252, 446, and 465. It also explicitly violates the Oslo Accords and the Road Map Peace Plan by impacting the “territorial integrity” of the West Bank, and by actively growing its illegal colonies.

Canada’s policy on the Occupied Territories states: “Canada opposes all unilateral actions that might prejudice the outcome of negotiations, including the establishment of settlements in the territories, unilateral moves to annex East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, and construction of the barrier [i.e. the Wall] inside the West Bank and East Jerusalem.”

Kadima’s plan blocks any realistic prospects for a “viable” Palestinian state (Oslo and Roadmap) – let alone a truly sovereign state within “secure and recognized borders”, in accordance with UN resolutions. (e.g. see UNSC 242 (1967), 1379 (2002)) At a minimum, Kadima’s plans will create five different disconnected Palestinian “Bantustans” in the Palestinian territories, leaving Palestinians isolated, unemployed and impoverished. Kadima’s plan also predetermines what the Oslo Accords defined as

“final status” issues, to be decided through negotiations, e.g. the rights of Palestinian refugees; the rights to land and water resources; etc.

Canada’s policy on the conflict opposes unilateralism, and seeks a viable Palestinian state: “The international community has recognized the Palestinian right of self-determination, which should be implemented through negotiations. Canada supports the creation of a sovereign, independent, viable, democratic and territorially contiguous Palestinian state, as part of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace settlement.”

How have Palestinians reacted to Kadima’s unilateral plans?

In a poll conducted on March 26, 2006 by the Palestinian Center For Public Opinion, 71 percent of Palestinians felt that unilateral action on borders and colonies by Israel would lead to either “instability of Israeli security,” or “outbreak of disputes and continuation of wars in the region.” On March 31, in an editorial published in Britain’s *The Guardian*, Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh criticized Kadima’s plan, saying, “Olmert’s unilateralism is a recipe for conflict. It is a plan to impose a permanent situation in which the Palestinians end up with a homeland cut into pieces made inaccessible because of massive Jewish settlements built in contravention of international law on land seized illegally from the Palestinians.”

Interestingly, according to a March 2006 survey, individuals on both sides of the conflict favor a negotiated solution. According to a joint survey by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research and the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem 76% of Israeli respondents – and 73% of Palestinian respondents – believe future disengagements should be negotiated.

What drives Israel’s Unilateral Approach?

In the past 18 months, Israel has contended that it does not have a peace partner with whom to negotiate. Yet Ariel Sharon’s senior advisor Dov Weissglas admitted in October, 2004 to Israeli daily Haaretz that Israel purposely scuttled the Road Map Peace Plan with its unilateral withdrawal from Gaza. Weissglas told Haaretz, “The significance of the ‘[Gaza] disengagement’ plan is the freezing of the peace process.” Weissglas continued, “The peace process is the evacuation of settlements, it’s the return of refugees, it’s the partition of Jerusalem. And all that has now been frozen...” All the while, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas – of Fatah – obtained a “ceasefire” among many Palestinian militant groups, and was anxious to enter into negotiations with the Israelis.

Israeli unilateralism – non-negotiation – has other drivers as well. In response to what some Israeli term the Palestinian “demographic threat,” Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said “It’s only a matter of time before the Palestinians demand ‘one man, one vote’ - and then, what will we do?” Many in Israel argue that it was this fear of the “demographic threat” that has given rise to Kadima’s popularity. Kadima’s election pledge was to deal with this threat by means of controlled separation from the Palestinian occupied territories with as many Palestinians on one side of the wall, and as many Jews on the other. “In the coming period,” Olmert promised Israelis on the eve of elections, “we will move to set the final borders of the state of Israel, a Jewish state with a Jewish majority.”

Key Israeli comments about the Wall also bolster arguments that ethno-centric concerns drive non-negotiation with the Palestinians. Israel’s Wall, which Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni admitted (Ha’aretz, Dec. 1, 2005) is being used to draw Israel’s borders, will make the city “more Jewish” according to former Jerusalem Minister Haim Ramon. He added, “The safer and more Jewish Jerusalem will be, it can serve as a true capital of the state of Israel.” About one third of Jerusalem is Palestinian.

References: “Israelis ponder a land swap,” Ilene Prusher, April 5, 2006, Christian Science Monitor; “Kadima: Labor won’t get Treasury,” Gil Hoffman, March 30, 2006, Jerusalem Post; “An Arab View: Olmert ‘giving up the unilateral solution’”, Abdul Jalil Mustafa, March 29, 2006, Deutsche Presse-Argentinur. “Olmert builds Israeli Coalition”, Adam Entous and Allyn Fisher-Ilan, March 29, 2006, Reuters UK; “Sharon Aid says goal of Gaza plan is Halt Road Map,” John Ward Anderson, October 7, 2004, Washington Post Foreign Service; “Kadima’s big plans for Israel,” Martin Asser, March 29, 2006, BBC News Website; “Justice minister: West Bank fence is Israel’s future border,” Yuval Yoaz, December 1, 2005, Ha’aretz; “Wall makes Jerusalem ‘more Jewish’,” Chris McGreal, July 12, 2005, The Guardian; For polls, see Palestinian Center For Public Opinion, Poll No. 151, 26 March, 2006; and Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research / Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, April 4, 2006. Please refer to appropriate documents for all UN and diplomatic references.