

Election Results: Towards Fascist Rule in Israel

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In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Global Research, February 21, 2009

21 February 2009

On February 10, Israel held parliamentary elections for 120 seats in its 18th Knesset. The process repeats every four years unless the body calls an earlier election by majority vote. The prime minister may also ask the president to request one early that will proceed unless the Knesset blocks it. Parliamentary terms may be extended beyond four years by special majority vote. Israel has no constitution. Under Article 4 of its Basic Law: The Knesset:

“The Knesset shall be elected by general, national, direct, equal, secret and proportional elections, in accordance with the Knesset Elections Law.” Every Israeli citizen 18 or older may vote, including Arabs who are nominally enfranchised, may serve in the parliament, but can’t govern or in any way influence policy.

Knesset seats are assigned proportionally to each party’s percentage of the total vote. A minimum total is required to win any seats. Jewish parties alone are empowered. Arab parliamentarians have no decision-making authority. They’re also constrained by the 1992 Law of Political Parties and section 7A(1) of the Basic Law that prohibits candidates from denying “the existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people.”

Under the law for Arabs and Jews, no candidate may challenge Israel’s fundamental Jewish character or demand equal rights, privileges, and justice. The essential Zionist identity is inviolable. The law works only for Jews. Israeli Arabs have no rights. They’re denied equal treatment and justice, even those elected to public office. Israel calls this democracy. South Africa called it apartheid. Nazi Germany called it fascism.

On January 12, the Central Elections Committee (CEC) banned two Arab parties from participating in the February elections on grounds of incitement, racism, supporting terrorist groups, and refusing to recognize Israel’s right to exist. Two extremist right wing parties requested it – Yisrael Beiteinu and National Union. Named were United Arab List-Ta’al and Balad. All charges were bogus and hateful.

On January 21, Israel’s High Court unanimously reversed the ban after Arab politicians appealed, but this behavior shows what Arab citizens face in a country affording rights only to Jews. Nonetheless, election law states that all votes are of equal weight, without saying only Jewish ones matter, not those of Arabs or members of other faiths. Israel is a Jewish state. Others are outsiders, unwelcome, unwanted, disadvantaged, without rights, and criminally abused at the whim of the government.

Israeli Election Results

Given the number of Israeli parties, coalitions are needed to govern as no single party ever won enough Knesset seats to do it on its own.

Below are the results of the February 10 elections:

Kadima:

— 28 seats, one less than previously. Founded by Ariel Sharon and 13 other Likud members in November 2005, Kadima (meaning “forward” or “in-front”), calls itself “a broad popular movement which works to ensure the future of Israel as a Jewish democratic state.” It’s now Israel’s largest political party. Its ideology is center-right and very militant.

Likud:

— 27 seats compared to 12 in the previous Knesset. It was founded in 1973 as a right wing union of the revisionist Herut party with the Gahal and center Zionist parties. Its former prime ministers include Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Ariel Sharon. Netanyahu again leads it. Its ideology is hard right and like Kadima is very militant.

Yisrael Beiteinu (or Israel is Our Home):

— 15 seats, four more than the previous Knesset. It was founded in 1999 by Avigdor Lieberman, an ultranationalist and revisionist Zionist. In its January/February 2007 issue, the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs said his rise “makes (the) US - Israel alliance more dangerous,” given his extremist views.

On Israeli Radio in November 2006, he called for the assassination of “militant” Palestinian leaders (meaning from Hamas and other resistance groups) and added: “They have to disappear, to go to Paradise, all of them and there can’t be any compromise.” He also wants all peace agreements (like Camp David and Oslo) abandoned, Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas ignored, and earlier urged that Israeli Arabs be deported and Arab Knesset members who met with Hezbollah or Hamas executed.

Haaretz called him an “unrestrained and irresponsible man....a threat (to Israel for) his lack of restraint and his unbridled tongue (that may) bring disaster (to) the whole region.” Confrontation with Iran is one of his top priorities as well as continued illegal settlement expansions. Lieberman is hard-line and uncompromising. His party surpassed Labor to rank third in popularity.

Labor:

-13 seats compared to 19 in the previous Knesset. Founded in 1968 by the union of the Mapai, Ahdut HaAvoda, and Rafi parties. Its ideology is Zionist, neoliberal, and militant like the above three parties. Former prime ministers include David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin, and Ehud Barak. Barak is its current leader.

Shas :

— 11 seats, one less than the previous Knesset. Founded in 1984 by rabbis Ovadia Yosef and Elazar Shach, it’s an extremist right wing religious party led by Eli Yishai, Israel’s deputy prime minister in its 17th Knesset.

The National Union Party:

— 4 seats. Founded in 1999 by Rehavam Ze’evi and Avigdor Lieberman. Now led by Ya’akov

Katz, it's extremely militant, supports settlements in all the Land of Israel (as biblically defined), and advocates expulsion of Palestinians from the West Bank, preferably on a voluntary basis.

Jewish Home Party:

— 3 seats. It was founded in 2008 by a merger of the National Religious Party, Moledet, and Tkuma. Modelet then broke away, and half of Tkuma rejoined National Union. Now led by Daniel Hershkovitz, it's a moderate right wing, pro-settler, religious Zionist party.

Hadash-Democratic Front for Peace and Equality:

— 4 seats, a gain of one. Founded in 1977, it's a Jewish-Arab party led by Mohammad Barakeh. Its ideology counters the above right wing bloc with little public support. It's anti-Zionist, favors dismantling Israeli settlements, ending the occupation, and backs the right of return, full equality for Israeli Arabs, and a comprehensive stable peace.

New Movement Meretz:

— 3 seats compared to 5 in the previous Knesset. Founded in 1992, it's a labor Zionist, social democratic party led by Haim Oron.

United Torah Judaism:

— 5 seats, one less than previously. Founded in 1992, its ideology is strict adherence to the laws of the Torah. Its current leader is Yaakov Litzman.

Balad:

— 3 seats compared to none in the previous Knesset. Founded in 1995, its ideology is Arab nationalism and democratic socialism. Its current leader is Jamal Zahalka.

United Arab List-Ta'al:

— 4 seats, up from none in the previous Knesset. Founded in 1996, it represents Israeli Arabs under its current leader Ibrahim Sarsur.

Israel has about 20 other minor parties. None got enough votes to win seats. The big loser was Gil. It had seven previously. Now it has none. Led by Rafi Eitan, it's ideology is social welfare and pro-elder care.

Israel Shifts to the Right

On January 15, a Haaretz-Dialog poll showed widespread support for the Gaza war with less than 10% of Israelis calling it a "failure." Despite mass slaughter, destruction, and human suffering, 82% of respondents believed the IDF hadn't "gone too far."

It played out strongly in the February elections with center to far right parties winning decisively - 104 of the 120 seats or 86.6% of the Knesset. In spite of mass global condemnation, Israelis stood firm on hard-line militarism, candidates favoring conflict over conciliation, and continued occupation of Palestine in lieu of peace.

Negotiations continue for a new government, but policy is clear whoever becomes prime minister. Under Tzipi Livni or Benjamin Netanyahu, Gaza's siege will continue. So will West Bank oppression, conflict over peace, leaders affirming it in rhetoric and policy, and international community support will back them. Grim times persist for Palestinians, isolated and on their own after decades of occupation and abuse.

On February 11, Juan Cole's web site headlined: "Right Wing Sweeps Israel" in an election that "sounded the death knell for the two-state solution." One never existed, of course, because separation accelerates land annexation, and equity demands one democratic state for members of all faiths equally.

After the February 10 elections, that possibility is more remote than ever with figures like Avigdor Lieberman emerging as "kingmaker." He rose in prominence on a racist platform against 20% of the population and now wants them "executed," expelled, or at least forced to sign loyalty oaths.

Under a hard-line Netanyahu or Livni government, Cole sees one of three possibilities:

— a hardened apartheid giving Palestinians fewer rights than ever and no control over their land, borders, water and air; Palestinians won't accept it, so conflict ahead is assured;

— a violent expulsion policy affecting all Palestinians, including Israeli Arabs to purify Greater Israel for Jews; Cole believes that "This option would almost certainly end the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan" because a population outflow this great would create tensions in both countries and they'd react; they and other Arab states might also ally with Iran and create a new problem for America and Israel.

— a single-state solution; impossible now but over time economic, technological, and political boycotts may force one.

As for Obama reviving the peace process and a viable two-state solution, both prospects aren't possible given Israel's shift to the right and the Israeli Lobby's influence against it.

In a February 10 Nation magazine article, Neve Gordon disagrees. Headlined: "Few Peacemakers in Israel's Knesset," he believes it's for "the world, and particularly the Obama administration, to respond," unmindful of his one-sided Israeli support and reluctance to counter its policy.

Nonetheless, Gordon hopes that Obama "will make good on his promise for change and introduce a courageous initiative that will finally bring peace to Israelis and Palestinians" under a two-state solution "to resolve this bloody conflict once and for all."

"With determination and political boldness he can do just that." Perhaps so but he won't. Obama is timid, not bold. He "crossed the River Jordan," according to James Petras. His administration is filled with Zionist zealots professing unconditional support for Israel. With that team in place, Israeli interests matter. Palestinian ones don't. Change awaits a new day in Israel and Washington, and given Tel Aviv's likely government, it's more in the future than ever.

Prospects are grim with Israeli Arab Knesset member (MK) Ahmed Tibi calling Livni "90% Lieberman and 10% Netanyahu." For his part, Netanyahu is 100% hard-line, and won't give an inch on compromise. As head of state, he promises to destroy Hamas. As 1996 - 1999

prime minister, his agenda was three “nos:”

- no Golan Heights withdrawal;
- no discussion, division, or relinquishing of Jerusalem, and
- no precondition negotiations with Arafat, meaning Palestinian relations depend on full compliance with Israel demands.

Today he’s more hard-line than ever, vows as prime minister to “thwart the Iranian threat,” and sabotage Tehran’s nuclear program once and for all by any means necessary. He also opposes the peace process, wants expanded illegal West Bank settlements, and, like Lieberman, called for “mass deportations of Arabs from the Territories.”

For her part, Livni is no less hard-line in vowing to overthrow Hamas if elected and finish subduing Gaza. As kingmaker, Lieberman won’t join any government that will “agree directly or indirectly to Hamas staying in power.” He opposed last month’s ceasefire that “prevented the IDF from finishing the job” and stops just short of demanding renewal.

As a result, AP reported on February 11 that Arabs see little chance for peace under any new government and fear the emergence of Israel’s far right. It cited Middle East newspapers decrying Lieberman’s rise, denouncing him as racist with Syria’s Al-Thawra saying: “The Israelis are electing war and extremism....so long as the Israel street is extremist and racist, the government would be like it.”

In Iran, Foreign Ministry spokesman Hassan Qashqavi called it “regretful” that all sides were hard-line in their campaigns. “Each party tried to show a more brutal, aggressive and pro-occupation face....” He added that Iran has no official position on the election as it doesn’t recognize any Israeli government.

Oraib al-Rentawi, head of the Al Quds Center for Political Studies, said a Livni government may market an illusory peace process, but under Netanyahu, “the mission will be far more difficult.” Others think it impossible no matter who’s prime minister given that 61 years of oppression prevented any from emerging thus far. With Israel’s far right shift, it’s less likely now than ever.

Forming A New Government

Under Israel’s Basic Law, the president (a symbolic, ceremonial post), lets one Knesset member form a new government and head it as prime minister.

The law reads as follows:

“When a new government has to be constituted, the President of the State shall, after consultation with representatives of party groups in the Knesset, assign the task of forming a Government to a Knesset Member (MK) who notified him that he is prepared to accept the task.”

Time constraints are imposed – a maximum 28 days but the President may extend it for an additional 14. If a government can’t be formed or if the Knesset rejects the one proposed, “the President may assign the task....to another Knesset Member who has notified him that he is prepared to accept the task....” No mention of a “she.”

“When the Knesset Member has formed a Government, he shall notify the President of the State and Speaker of the Knesset” within a designated period. The MK who “formed a Government shall head it.”

On February 16, Haaretz reported that Netanyahu “said earlier that he would begin forging a coalition with his party’s ‘natural partners’ as soon as possible” even though Kadima bettered Likud by one seat.

Livni said she’d only join a Netanyahu coalition on a rotating prime ministerial basis. Jockeying for position continues amid conciliatory and hostile rhetoric with one Likud MK (Silvan Shalom) accusing Livni of “shtick, tricks, (and) scheming (that could) sabotage the standard political process.” He added that election results affirmed Netanyahu as the rightful prime minister so allow him to “form a government as soon as possible.”

Prime minister Olmert mentioned post-election uncertainty and suggested that Livni join a Likud coalition “with Kadima as a central factor.” At the same time, Olmert advised Livni to head the opposition to ensure a clear victory next time.

On February 17, Labor’s Housing and Construction Minister, Isaac Herzog, told Haaretz that neither Livni or Netanyahu can form a new government that will hold. “At this rate, (he suggested) we will find ourselves in the midst of new elections within a few months” because Livni agreed to ally with Yisrael Beitenu.

Labor whip, Eitan Cabel was even more strident saying: “The scam that is Kadima has now been exposed before all. If the leftist voters who gave their ballot to Livni would have known (they’d be) in bed with Lieberman, they would have demanded their votes back.”

President Peres spoke about the complicated task he faces:

“On Wednesday (February 11) at 6PM, I will get the official results,” and will then try to form a unity government. “The nation told me to consider the election results honestly and as the law prescribes, so I will make my decision after I hear out all the parties.”

On February 15, the Jerusalem Post reported new developments in a story headlined: “Police have evidence of money laundering against Lieberman.” Quoting former National Fraud Unit’s Boaz Guttman, writer Yaakov Lappin said “Police amassed sufficient evidence to link....Lieberman” with these charges. It’s believed that he used Cypriot bank accounts under his daughter’s name - for money laundering and possible fraud and bribes. “The police source said there was no doubt about money laundering,” but that prosecution could be a long way off given complex hurdles to be overcome before charges lead to a trial.

Guttman added that fallout affecting Lieberman could be considerable since he’s now damaged goods. Forming a new government is more complicated and important positions for Lieberman are off-limits - including finance and public security.

On the same day, Tehran’s Press TV reported that “An Israeli defense strategy report for 2009 has tasked the military with making preliminary preparations for launching a war against Iran.” It calls the country “the No. 1 threat the IDF is now preparing for,” and cites Tehran as “a threat to Israel’s existence” without any evidence to prove it. There is none because Iran threatens no other country but is prepared to defend itself if targeted.

Nonetheless, “Israeli officials argue that a military attack is a legitimate option for taking out

Iran's nuclear infrastructure" even though the IAEA says it complies with NPT provisions. Israel is a nuclear outlaw non-signatory.

Earlier, Tel Aviv asked the Bush administration for bunker-buster bombs, green light permission to attack, and overflight and refueling rights over Iraq. It was rebuffed in favor of covert sabotage efforts.

For its part, Iran is seeking sophisticated Russian S-300 long-range surface-to-air missiles. They can intercept aircraft, cruise and ballistic missiles so pose a formidable defense against attack. Lexington Institute vice-president and Pentagon advisor Dan Goure said "If Tehran obtained the S-300, it would be a game-changer in military thinking for (targeting) Iran." It might also prevent a Middle East holocaust if Washington and/or Israel seriously consider one, something even the Bush administration didn't pursue.

On February 16, the UK Telegraph headlined: "Israel launches covert war against Iran" with writer Philip Sherwell calling it "an alternative to direct military strikes against Tehran's nuclear programme, US intelligence sources have revealed."

It includes planned assassinations of "top figures involved in Iran's atomic operations" as well as "sabotage, front companies and double agents to disrupt the regime's 'illicit' weapons project, the experts say."

According to a former (unnamed) CIA officer, the idea is to slow progress without Iran knowing what's happening. "The goal is delay, delay, delay until you can come up with some other solution" because the Obama administration may prefer non-military efforts for now.

Rumors are that Mossad was behind the mysterious 2007 "gas poisoning" death of Ardeshire Hassanpour, Iran's top nuclear scientist at its Isfahan uranium plant. Other suspicious deaths were also reported, and according to an unnamed European intelligence official, "Israel (doesn't hesitate) assassinating weapons scientists" or anyone else for that matter.

Israeli security and intelligence journalist, Yossi Melman, said that "Without military strikes, there is still considerable scope for disrupting and damaging the Iranian program, and this has been done with some success." Tehran is alerted to the threat and has measures in place to counteract it.

Observers are following the rhetoric and watching as events unfold. In the meantime, jockeying and deal-making continue as Netanyahu and Livni try outmaneuvering each other to form a new government. Whoever wins, Palestinians, Israelis, and most others will be losers.

On February 19, AP reported that Lieberman endorsed Netanyahu, "all but guaranteeing that (he'll) be the country's next leader." Haaretz went further saying that "65 MKs announced (for) Netanyahu (so) it appears that his path to the premiership is (now) paved." Livni called it "the foundation....for an extreme right-wing government." Lieberman wants Kadima in it. Likud said it would try to forge a broad coalition, and Peres may shortly announce Netanyahu will lead it.

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