



## Political

**update:** – Israeli elections, Tuesday 10 February: The Key Players and their views on the Middle East Peace Process – 5 February

### Key points:

- The latest poll by the Israeli newspaper, Ma'ariv, (dated 3 February) predicts that the Israeli Knesset will have the following composition after the general election on 10 February:

Likud (Benjamin Netanyahu)	27 seats
Kadima (Tzipi Livni)	23 seats
Labor (Ehud Barak)	17 seats
Yisrael Beiteinu (Avigdor Lieberman)	17 seats

- 61 seats are needed to form a government in the 120 seat Israeli Knesset; the Israeli right-wing bloc has grown to 61 Knesset seats while the Israeli centre-left bloc has dwindled to 54
- At least 20 percent of voters are still undecided – this means a number of Knesset seats are still up for grabs
- Likely outcome is a government of national unity led by either Likud or Kadima
- The current Israeli Government consists of Kadima (29 seats), Labor (19 seats), Shas (12 seats) and the Pensioners Party (6 seats)

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## THE KEY PLAYERS OF THE FOUR MAIN PARTIES

### TZIPI LIVNI – KADIMA CHAIRWOMAN

#### Profile

Tzipi Livni is Israel's Foreign Minister and Chairwoman of the Kadima party (meaning 'Forward' in Hebrew) – the largest party in the Israeli Knesset. She became Chairwoman after winning the Kadima primaries on 19 September 2008, following Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's decision to resign the party Chairmanship in light of corruption allegations against him.

Livni has a strained relationship with Prime Minister Olmert. She was highly critical of his handling of Israel's war with Hezbollah in 2006. In April 2007, she called on Olmert to resign following the publication of the interim Winograd report which investigated the conduct of the Israeli Government during the war. Livni is widely

seen as a clean and honest politician, in contrast to the allegations of corruption that surround Olmert.

### **Palestinian Track**

Livni is a supporter of the two-state solution believing that this is the only way for Israel to remain a Jewish and democratic state. Following the Annapolis Peace Conference of November 2007, Tzipi Livni was appointed head of Israel's negotiating team with the Palestinians. She has held a number of meetings over the past year with her Palestinian counterpart Abu Ala. In her talks with the Palestinians Livni has made clear the need for 'continuous, uninterrupted, direct, bilateral negotiations'. Livni speaking at the 9<sup>th</sup> annual Herzliya Conference in Israel on Monday (2 February) made clear her commitment in pursuing peace with the Palestinians:

"Peace is in our interest... The enforced 'choice' between peace and security is incorrect and anyone forcing the public to choose between the two is deluding himself, the public and does not understand the world we live in." (2/2/09)

On Jerusalem, Livni has made clear that while the issue will be discussed with the Palestinians, Israel will not cede Jerusalem or sovereignty over the holy sites. She has also stated that a future Palestinian state will be the national home of the Palestinian nation, including refugees and has made clear that a government led by her will remove settlement outposts which are illegal under Israeli and international law.

### **Syrian Track**

Livni has put the emphasis on the need for Syria to change its behaviour before Israel can actively pursue peace talks. In an interview with the Israeli Ma'ariv newspaper she said:

"Peace with Syria requires a strategic change in Syria's actions. Syria has to leave the axis of evil, to stop supporting Hamas and Hizballah terror organisations on its soil and to stop the arms smuggling to Lebanon. After that, direct negotiations will be conducted that include the issue of security arrangements, territory, water, normalisation and more." (27/01/09)

### **Iran**

Livni has made clear that all options are on the table regarding the need to stop Iran from enriching uranium. When asked about this issue on 27 January, she said:

"Creating a global coalition against Iran will help guarantee Israel's security, and I have proven that I can build such a coalition. The ability to act with the US also depends on which government there is in Israel, and its ability to promote common matters." (27/01/09)

## **BENJAMIN NETANYAHU – LIKUD CHAIRMAN**

### **Profile**

Benjamin Netanyahu has been the Chairman of the Likud (meaning 'Union' in Hebrew) party since December 2006. He was Prime Minister from 1996-1999 and later served as Foreign Minister and Finance Minister under former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

While Netanyahu has a reputation for adopting a hard-line approach to the Palestinians he has shown some elements of pragmatism. In 1998, Netanyahu signed the Wye River Accords with former Palestinian President Yasir Arafat. This

agreement aimed to implement a number of practical steps over security and economic cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, as well as to transfer land in the West Bank to Palestinian control. Since the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, the Wye River's understandings and goals remain un-implemented.

### **Palestinian Track**

Netanyahu has made clear that if elected Prime Minister he will continue negotiations with the Palestinians but will put more emphasis on strengthening the Palestinian economy than pursuing the political track. This is due to his belief that only Israel can currently deliver security in the West Bank and that it will take time before Palestinian security forces are adequately developed to take full responsibility for this role. Netanyahu told the Israeli Ma'ariv newspaper on 27 January that:

“The goal is to safeguard Israel’s security while conducting a responsible peace process to resolve the dispute with the Palestinians. The way to promote a genuine peace process is to strengthen security, to accelerate economic development among the Palestinians, and to intensify regional cooperation with Jordan and Egypt in parallel with the peace process.” (27/01/09)

Netanyahu takes a tough stance on Jerusalem and told Ma'ariv that:

“if the Palestinians know that we are determined to insist on Jerusalem’s unity, in the end, they will learn to accept this.” (27/1/09)

In the same interview he also suggested that negotiations should not move towards the creation of a Palestinian state, but simply towards the transfer of some authority to existing Palestinian institutions.

On settlements, Netanyahu told Quartet Envoy to the Middle East, Tony Blair:

“I have no intention of building new settlements in the West Bank, but like all the governments there have been until now, I will have to meet the needs of natural growth in the population. I will not be able to choke the settlements.” (25/01/09)

On settlement outposts, he told Ma'ariv that:

“Steps must be taken to exhaust the current steps led by the security establishment to resolve the issue in an agreement with the settlers’ leadership.” (27/1/09)

### **Syria Track**

Netanyahu has been dismissive of the indirect talks which were started by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and the Syrians under Turkish mediation. In an interview with Israel Radio on 19 December 2008 he said:

“The concessions made by the Olmert-Livni government to the Syrians do not and will not obligate a government that I shall head.” (19/12/08)

He has also made clear any future government he heads will oppose Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

## **Iran**

Netanyahu is almost exclusively focused on the Iranian nuclear issue and said in an Israeli TV Channel 2 interview on 1 January 2009 that, if he is elected Prime Minister, his first mission will be to thwart the Iranian nuclear threat. He called Iran the greatest current danger to Israel and to all humanity. When asked if stopping Iran's nuclear ambitions included a military strike, he replied: "it includes everything that is necessary to make this statement come true."

## **EHUD BARAK – LABOR CHAIRMAN**

### **Profile**

Ehud Barak was Israeli Prime Minister from 1999 to 2001. He has been Labor Chairman twice from 1997-2001 and more recently since June 2007. He became Prime Minister when he defeated Netanyahu in 1999 only to lose two years later to his successor Ariel Sharon following the outbreak of the Al Qsa Intifada in 2000.

Ehud Barak's 1999-2001 Government was committed to making peace with the Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians. Under Barak, Israel withdrew from south Lebanon in May 2000. He also led far-reaching efforts to negotiate peace agreements, first with Syria and later with the Palestinian Authority, with the active participation of former US President Bill Clinton. These negotiations, however, did not result in the breakthroughs necessary to conclude final agreements.

### **Palestinian Track**

Ehud Barak has talked about pursuing a 'comprehensive regional peace' with the Arab world. In this context, he has talked positively about the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 - which offers Israel full normalisation of relations with the Arab World in exchange for withdrawal from occupied land to 1967 borders. In an interview with the Israeli Ma'ariv newspaper on 27 January, Barak said:

"The prime minister must strive, without fear, to reach agreements with our neighbours by presenting an Israeli plan for comprehensive regional peace. This plan must be such that it can deal with security-political agreements with a strong economic basis, in combination with negotiations with our neighbours and the entire Arab world." (29/1/09)

Unlike Netanyahu and Livni, Barak accepts that the future of Jerusalem will form part of Israel's negotiations with the Palestinians. He told Al-Jazeera on 3 September 2008 that East Jerusalem could be the capital of a future Palestinian state:

"Our basic position is that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, but that we can find a formula under which certain neighborhoods, heavily populated Arab neighborhoods, could become, in a peace agreement, part of the Palestinian capital and it will of course include all of the neighboring [Arab] villages around Jerusalem," Barak told Al-Jazeera (03/09/08)

Barak has also demonstrated his commitment to making peace with the Palestinians by proposing, on Monday (2 February), the building of a 48-kilometre tunnel connecting the Gaza Strip with the southern West Bank in order to allow for the freedom of movement for Palestinians between the two territories.

### **Syrian Track**

On Syria, Barak told French newspaper Le Monde in June 2008 that despite the great strategic advantages of keeping the Golan Heights, Israel is "ready to examine the

possibility of ending” its occupation of the Golan Heights. On 27 January Barak said that he would be prepared to consider ‘painful concessions’:

“A true peace agreement must provide answers to many subjects relating to security, early warning and demilitarisation, water, normalisation, influence on Lebanon and Hezbollah. In this case, we would consider painful concessions. After the elections it will be possible to promote negotiations and we must do this while security arrangements and the essence of the peace are discussed in parallel with territorial concessions.” (27/01/09)

### **Iran**

Barak told former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in November 2008 that Israel would not rule out any course of action to prevent Iran from attaining nuclear weapons. Israel “is not taking any option off the table, and we don’t recommend that others take any option off the table.”

In an interview with Ma’ariv on 27 January, Barak stressed the need to impose further sanctions on Iran:

“We are now at a juncture in which we must impose general global sanctions on Iran, and not just talk. We have a limited window of time before Iran obtains nuclear weapons. The State of Israel was, is and will be the strongest state in the entire region, even at a range of 1,500 kilometres around Jerusalem, and no options should be dropped from the table.” (27/1/09)

## **AVIGDOR LIEBERMAN – YISRAEL BEITEINU CHAIRMAN**

### **Profile**

Avigdor Lieberman is the leader of the right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu party (meaning ‘Israel Our Home’ in Hebrew), formed in 1999.

In March 2001 Lieberman was appointed National Infrastructure Minister in Ariel Sharon’s government but resigned in 2002 believing a tougher approach by Sharon was needed to deal with the Palestinian uprising. Following the 2003 Israeli general election, he became Transportation Minister serving again under Ariel Sharon’s Government. In July 2004 he was sacked by Sharon for criticising the latter’s disengagement plan from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank. In the March 2006 elections Yisrael Beiteinu won 11 Knesset seats and in October that year Lieberman joined Ehud Olmert’s Government as Minister for Strategic Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister. He withdrew his party from Olmert’s Government in January 2008 in protest at the ongoing talks with the Palestinians over the core issues of Jerusalem, Refugees and Borders.

Lieberman who was born in Moldova is especially popular amongst Israel’s Russian voters. Former Kach secretary general Yossi Dayan has made claims to Israeli Newspaper Haaretz on 3 February that Lieberman was once a member of the Kach movement. The Kach movement is a banned political party in Israel due to its incitement of racism against Israeli Arabs. Lieberman is also under investigation for fraud, embezzlement and money-laundering, although he denies any wrong-doing.

### **Palestinian Track**

Lieberman is against the principle of land for peace believing in exchanges of territory and population. Yisrael Beiteinu’s advocates the policy of transferring predominately Arab areas in Israel to the Palestinian Authority. In return, Jewish

Settlements in the West Bank would become part of Israel. Yisrael Beiteinu's website states that:

“the responsibility for primarily Arab areas such as Umm Al-Fahm [Haifa District] and the “triangle” [concentration of Israeli Arab towns and villages adjacent to the 1967 borders] will be transferred to the Palestinian Authority. In parallel, Israel will officially annex Jewish areas in Judea and Samaria [West Bank]. Israel is our home; Palestine is theirs.”

Lieberman has also adopted a policy of ‘no citizenship without loyalty.’ This promotes the idea that all Israeli citizens, Jews and Arabs, should swear loyalty to the country as a Jewish state. In January 2009, Yisrael Beiteinu and National Union parties requested that Israeli-Arab parties be banned from participating in the forthcoming Israeli elections. The request was accepted by the Central Election Committee but later unanimously overturned by a ruling of the Israeli Supreme Court.

### **Syria Track**

Lieberman is against Israel making any territorial concessions with Syria over the Golan Heights.

### **Iran**

Lieberman cites Iran as the main threat to Israel's existence. In an interview with the Jerusalem Post on 22 January 2009, he stated the following:

“the way I see it, the main existential threat to Israel is Iran - not the Palestinians, the Lebanese or anybody else. Iran created a strategic advantage over Israel by establishing a border with us, even though we don't have a border with them. There are three Irans: Iran via Hizbullah from Lebanon; Iran via Hamas and Islamic Jihad from Gaza; and Iran with unconventional weapons and long-range missiles. Without Iran, there is no Hezbollah, no Hamas and no Islamic Jihad, most of whose budget, weaponry, technology and training comes from Iran. These groups are unable to exist without Iranian backing.” (22/1/09)

## **ISRAELI POLITICAL PARTIES – CURRENT SEATS AND LATEST POLLS**

<b>Party (* = in current governing coalition)</b>	<b>Current number of Knesset seats</b>	<b>Number of Knesset seats predicted to win in election in January polls</b>
Kadima* (centre)	29	23
Labor* (left)	19	17
Likud (right)	12	27
Yisrael Beitenu (religious-right)	11	17
Shas* (religious-right)	12	10
Meretz (left)	5	6
Jewish Home (religious-right)	5	3

United Torah Judaism (religious-right)	6	5
National Union (religious-right)	4	4
Pensioners Party* (single issue)	6	0
United Arab List-Ta'al (Arab)	4	4
Hadash (Arab)	3	4
Balad (Arab)	3	0

\*part of the Government Coalition