

ISRAEL
ON THE EVE OF AN ELECTION YEAR
SOME PERLIMINARY REFLECTIONS

Naomi Chazan



PASSIA

Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs

ISRAEL
ON THE EVE OF AN ELECTION YEAR
SOME PERLIMINARY REFLECTIONS

Naomi Chazan



PASSIA
Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs

PASSIA is an independent, non-profit Palestinian institution, unaffiliated with any government, political party, or organization, which undertakes studies and research on the Question of Palestine and its relationship to international affairs. PASSIA encourages the publication of various research studies reflecting plurality of perspectives and methodology within a context of academic freedom.

This paper represents the views of its author and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of PASSIA. Professor Naomi Chazan, Chairperson of the Truman Research Institute, Hebrew University in Jerusalem, presented this paper in a workshop under the title 'Israel on the Eve of an Election Year', on August 25, 1991.

PASSIA c Copyright
First Edition - November 1991

PASSIA Publication
Tel: (02)894426 Fax: (02)282819
P.O.Box 19545
East Jerusalem

Preface

As part of its programme of lectures and workshops, PASSIA has, for some time, been inviting visiting academics from Europe and the US to make presentations at PASSIA to be followed by roundtable debate with Palestinian academics, professionals and activists. The aims of this element of the PASSIA programme are: firstly, to exchange views and ideas; secondly, to provide an opportunity for Palestinians to learn about others' concerns, problems and future policy as it affects Palestinians, and thirdly, to provide material for Palestinian homework.

Consistent with this policy was PASSIA's decision to invite Professor Naomi Chazan, Chairperson of the Truman Research Institute at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem to give a talk on the next Israeli elections. Arrangements were made with New Outlook magazine to the effect that they would invite Israelis to join Palestinian participants in debate on points raised by Professor Chazan.

We are here offering the text of Professor Chazan's presentation with minutes of the following Palestinian-Israeli discussion as a booklet for the use of interested readers in both camps.

We hope this publication will prove a valuable addition to Palestinian academic resources in general and to the library of Palestinian-Israeli dialogue in particular.

Israel on the Eve of an Election Year: The Issues

The overriding preoccupation in recent months with preliminary negotiations over the terms for convening a regional peace conference has diverted attention away from the preparations for the upcoming elections scheduled to take place in Israel within the next year. The connection between the peace process and the forthcoming polls is, however, by no means coincidental. The timing of the elections may affect current peace efforts, dictating both the climate and the pace of the anticipated negotiations. Their substance cannot but influence Israeli positions in the future. These elections promise to be critical elections in several senses: they will furnish a barometer of the impact of recent global and regional changes on domestic politics; they offer a testing ground of the electoral ramifications of the recent mass immigration (primarily from the Soviet Union) on Israeli political dynamics; they are the first real opportunity to measure the effects of the Palestinian uprising at the ballot box (the bearing of the intifada on the November 1988 elections was marginal); and, significantly, there are all the indications that these elections--whether explicitly or not--will take the form of a referendum on the peace process and the future of the occupied territories. Above all, however, because the stakes in these elections are so high, their outcome will probably mold the nature and direction of the Israeli polity for years to come and hence have a direct impact on the prospects for a viable peace settlement.

It is consequently not too early to begin, even if only on a most tentative basis, to examine some of the outstanding features of present configurations, to pinpoint critical variables, and to explore some of the possible dynamics of the electoral process. This presentation will focus specifically on four key elements of current preparations for the impending elections: the structure of the party scene, the candidates and personalities involved, the main issues and the manner of their presentation, and the foreseeable atmosphere and rhythm of the election campaign.

Present projections in public opinion polls and the press, while highlighting the extent of polarization in the Israeli body politic, emphasize the strong propensity of Israeli voters to cast their ballots for

the same parties they supported in the past. Shifts in these patterns will depend, in all likelihood, on at least three critical factors within the control of local actors: the capacity to offer the electorate new options (either in terms of parties, candidates, or substantive priorities), the ability to attract first-time voters (especially new immigrants and youth), and the aptitude to plan and conduct an effective campaign (taking into account the circumstances, the timing, and the political mood of the country).

Without belittling the formidable challenge posed by the Likud and its allies, it is nevertheless the contention of this analysis that certain areas of flexibility do exist in the domestic political arena, and that these can be capitalized upon through the careful design and implementation of appropriate strategies. This task assumes particular importance in light of the urgency of the situation and the severe consequences of the continuation of the domestic status quo in Israel for peace prospects in the region.

Preparations for Elections: The Parties

The party scene in Israel has, especially in the past decade, mirrored the essential political fragmentation that exists in the country. The results of the 1988 elections underlined several salient patterns. First, the two main parties--Likud and Labour--command roughly the same electoral strength among Israel's voting population. Second, the appeal of both of these alignments has diminished in recent elections, with a greater number of votes moving either to parties right of Likud or left of Labour. Third, the ultra-orthodox parties (whose electoral strength grew during this period) emerged as the critical variable in the process of coalition construction. Fourth, in this situation, as the events of the 1980s so amply demonstrate, either the two major parties could come together in a national unity government, or a narrow coalition (inevitably dominated by Likud) could be created in conjunction with the religious factions. In both cases, the influence of moderate and progressive parties has been effectively muted.

The strategy of the various parties in anticipation of the forthcoming elections is dictated by the degree to which they benefit from the present

structural constellation. Clearly the ruling coalition has a vested interest in maintaining prevailing arrangements, since these have consistently worked to its advantage in recent years. In contrast, because it has been so systematically immobilized, the opposition (particularly on the progressive part of the spectrum) stands to gain from structural changes on the party scene. And, to a large extent, the Labour party is still torn between a strategy based on winning over wavering voters to its camp and thereby shifting the political center of gravity (but also reinforcing the present institutional configuration) and one which advocates a party realignment, which, while in all probability carried out at its expense, may possibly at the same time increase its centrality.

It is possible, at this point, to discern two directions of movement on the institutional party front. The first, and in all likelihood the most realistic, involves the creation of electoral blocs by existing parties. Such an initiative is most advanced among the progressive parties--Ratz (The Citizen's Rights and Peace Movement), Mapam and Shinui. In recent months, serious discussions have been held among their leaders with a view to joining forces in a unified Peace Bloc for the 1992 elections. The rationale behind such a move rests, first, on the felt need to present a clear and unequivocal position on peace negotiations which would provide a real alternative to what is widely perceived as an ambiguous Labour stance on these matters. Second, given the meeting of the minds on preferred solutions (including recognition of the Palestinian right to self-determination, the right of Palestinians to select their own representatives, and support for Palestinian participation in a regional peace conference), and the successful coordination among the ten members of Knesset (MKs) on these matters in the present parliament, there is significant trepidation that competition between these parties during the elections might enfeeble the voice of progressive forces. Third, there is a strong sense in these circles that many Labour voters are disenchanted, and that the time has come to begin to consolidate a real alternative to Likud domination. Fourth, a bloc of this sort also stands a chance of attracting wavering Likud supporters who for historical reasons cannot bring themselves to cast their ballots for a Labour list. Fifth, and not insignificantly, such a step would substantially change the party map, by placing Labour squarely in the political center and moving the Likud further to the right.

Progress towards the proposed alliance is fraught with difficulties. Substantively, there is a gap between the parties on social and economic issues, with Mapam adhering to socialist precepts and Shinui advocating free market policies. Strategically, there is disagreement about the electoral advisability of forming a common bloc, given the poor showing of left mergers in previous elections. Personally, there are indications that such an electoral front will exacerbate competition between potential candidates, arousing reservations among individuals who see their own positions threatened by such a move. This would be particularly true if some Labour doves (the key victims of the proposed peace bloc) decide to join in the alliance (for example, Yossi Beilin, Haim Ramon, Yael Dayan or Avraham Burg). And practically, the commitment of the potential partners is uneven: while Ratz is strongly supportive (its party council unanimously approved the idea), both the leadership and rank and file of Mapam are split on the issue (with many preferring a revival of the historical alliance with Labour) and Shinui is still hesitant about identifying itself as part of what is widely viewed as a coalition of the left.

In view of these problems, it will probably be extremely difficult to effect a party merger in the next few months. On the other hand, there are all the indications that an electoral bloc will be established. Present projections, depending greatly on the platform and standing of other parties, indicate that such a peace alliance could garner between 15 to 20 seats in the next elections (as opposed to the 10 they command at this time), thus significantly changing the calculus of coalition-building.

The second party coalition initiative currently being explored involves the Palestinian citizens of Israel. The Communist Party (Rakah), until recently the most organized actor in this sector, has been seriously enfeebled as a result not only of events in Eastern Europe, but also of defections in its ranks and changes within the Arab community in Israel. The Progressive List for Peace (PLFP) has also run into difficulties, and it is estimated that it may not be able to pass the threshold needed to gain entry into the Knesset. And the Islamic party, which had a very strong showing in the 1989 municipal elections, might decide not to run in the national polls for both substantive and legal reasons (there are signs that an Islamic list would be challenged in the courts on the grounds that it is

opposed to the existence of the state of Israel).

In these circumstances, there is a logic to forging a combined Arab list which would attempt to improve representation in the next Knesset (the Arab vote could account for 14 to 15 seats, although to date it has amounted to only about one third of this number as a result of low participation rates and the siphoning of some support to Jewish parties). Preliminary talks have been held to explore this possibility, based on the lessons gleaned from the failures of a not dissimilar experiment in the Histadrut (Trade Union) elections a couple of years ago. At this point, it appears that the Arab Democratic Party headed by Abed Wahab Daroushe is spearheading these efforts, and that the PLFP and the Communists are still undecided. The success of this move is heavily dependent on the position of the Islamic groups, whose tacit support could prove a crucial factor in bringing out the vote.

The implications of such an eventuality cannot be exaggerated. First, a united Arab list would encourage a much more active Palestinian-Israeli presence on the Israeli political stage. Second, it would considerably alter the mathematics of coalition-building. And third, it would compel discussion on the role and position of Israel's Arab population, raising issues about Israel's democracy which have not been seriously addressed in recent years. A third coalition venture, still in a very preliminary phase, is beginning to take shape in ultra-orthodox quarters. Degel Hatorah and Shas (The Sephardi Torah Guardians), both owing some allegiance to Rabbi Shach, have been riddled with scandals in recent years. Degel Hatorah was found guilty of electoral misconduct, and key leaders of Shas are under investigation on charges of corruption. Agudat Israel, the veteran ultra-orthodox party associated with the Lubavitcher Rabbi, has also been under pressure. As a result, some elements in these parties have floated the idea of running a joint list in the next elections. It is doubtful whether the perceived threat of a secular assault will be sufficiently compelling to overcome the acrimony which exists among these parties, now heavily divided along ethnic, religious, political, and institutional lines. But utilitarian considerations may militate in favor of a loose coalition for electoral purposes. In any event, because of the stable constituency of these parties, an electoral alliance in this sector will not have the same effect on the party political structure as would a similar

move among Arabs or political progressives.

A second major direction that could affect the institutional composition of the political scene involves the creation of new parties. It is possible to point to some initiatives of this sort. On the left, there has been talk of establishing a joint Jewish-Arab radical list. Women activists with dovish leanings are exploring the possibility of creating a women's party. On the far right, Meir Cahane's successors in Kach have announced their intention of contesting the next elections. And in all probability other small groups may emerge as time progresses. As the situation stands, it is unlikely that any of these factions, if allowed to stand for election, will pass the minimal threshold, which has just been raised from 1 percent to 1.5 percent (roughly 40,000 votes). The prospects of two other possible new parties are somewhat better. First, there are hints that electoral reform activists are investigating the formation of a moderate party that would occupy the underpopulated center of the political spectrum. The initiative in this matter has been taken by Professor Uriel Reichman, who has led the campaign for constitutional review and is intent on bringing the issue of governmental reform to the electorate, especially if the law for the direct election of the prime minister is not passed in the present session of the Knesset. The reasoning behind such a move would be to capitalize on the widespread cross-party discontent with the functioning of the government, while simultaneously presenting a pragmatic option to undecided voters (much in the tradition of the precedent set down by the Democratic Movement for Change--Dash--in the 1977 elections). If this initiative is joined by Liberals from the Likud such as Tel-Aviv mayor Shlomo Lahat ('Chich') and Herzliya mayor Eli Landau--both of whom have declared their willingness to hold discussions with recognized Palestinian leaders--then it might have an appeal in mainstream quarters, nibbling away at both Labour and Likud support (although it is important to note that political circumstances today are different than those which enabled the dramatic but ephemeral rise of the DMC in the late 1970s).

A second possibility revolves around the political potential of the new immigrants. Conventional wisdom today holds that the current mass wave of immigration--unlike the more ideologically-rooted immigration of the past two decades--may be translated into approximately five mandates in the Knesset. If these votes are divided among existing parties, then it is

estimated that parties on the right part of the range will garner three seats and Labour and its allies will receive two. Should absorption difficulties persist, and employment and housing problems intensify, then the newcomers might be pushed to run a separate list to articulate their specific grievances. Russian immigrant leaders have already held several discussions about this possibility, although no firm decisions have been made to date. Such a move would not only take away votes from the two major parties (although probably more from the Likud than from Labour), it would also--like an electoral reform party--have important repercussions for coalition bargaining. It would constitute a true floater party in any cabinet negotiations, replacing the National Religious Party which held this position in the past before it identified strongly with the right, and possibly offering an alternative to the ultra-orthodox parties that fill this role today.

The significance of changes in the party choices presented to voters either through the formation of electoral alliances or the creation of new lists must be assessed in light of the status of existing parties. On balance, the glaring weakness of the two major parties at this time tends to support the electoral logic behind such moves propounded in opposition circles.

The Labour party did not fare well in the 1980s, and its situation appears to have further deteriorated since its unsuccessful bid to oust the Likud from the cabinet in the spring of 1990. The party has been caught between its opposition status and the predisposition of many of its leaders to react as if they were still in power. As a result, Labour has been unable to define its own identity and to spearhead a viable opposition to the present government. This ambivalence has had adverse implications for the morale of party activists, and helped to nurture an image of indecisiveness in the public at large. Moreover, the party's finances have been depleted by the collapse of some Histadrut-owned industries and by the crisis in the heavily pro-Labour agricultural sector. Thus, despite an aggressive membership campaign (carried out with the active backing of key Histadrut personnel) and a serious effort to revamp outdated party organs, Labour is entering the forthcoming elections in an enfeebled position.

The standing of the Likud, at least at first glance, is not much better.

During the past few years, the Likud lost some of its parliamentary strength when five members of its Liberal faction bolted the party and created The List for the Promotion of the Zionist Idea. The propensity for fragmentation is but one manifestation of the organizational weakness of the Likud. Its institutions have been subjected to court scrutiny, and recently the party has been ordered to revamp its structures or else its ruling bodies will be deemed illegal. Moreover, Likud coffers are empty and prospects for erasing the growing debt--new funding legislation for parties notwithstanding--are dim. For Likud stalwarts, the ongoing personal struggle among the top party leadership, each hoping to assume the role of heir apparent to the aging Yitzhak Shamir, has been equally worrisome. More serious, however, has been a growing ideological split within the Likud. It is now clear that the division between the 'soft' right (those who advocate the imposition of some kind of autonomy on the population of the occupied territories) and the 'hard' right (those who call for outright annexation) goes beyond the clash of personalities. The Likud, for perhaps the first time since the Egyptian-Israeli peace talks in the late 1980s, is embroiled in a profound ideological debate which cannot but affect its standing on the eve of elections.

The problems plaguing the major electoral alignments have been replicated, albeit on a smaller scale, also in the National Religious Party (NRP) and Tehiya. At the moment, only the two smaller extreme right factions, Tsomet (which has clearly defined positions on domestic economic and social issues) and Moledet (with its blatantly anti-Arab 'transfer' platform) appear to be entering the election period in a strengthened position, and they will have to contend with the issue of the new threshold.

The implications of the reduced capacities of most existing parties must nevertheless be weighed carefully. Although many in Labour and Likud are convinced that they are entering the election year in a relatively good situation, especially in light of developments in the opponent's camp, in reality the Likud's position may be stronger. In the first instance, the ideological distance among Likud members is smaller than that exhibited between Labour hawks and doves. Second, the Likud at this time possesses an indisputable leader, whereas Labour suffers from the ongoing rivalry between Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres. And third, the Likud

enjoys the multiple advantages of an incumbent: it can take decisions designed to sway voters to its camp; it can dictate, at least to a large extent, the timing of the elections and the pace of the campaign; and it can continue to employ its proximity to state resources to buttress its electoral position.

Thus those in the opposition who advocate a remolding of the party scene may stand on firmer ground than those who argue that Labour is the only party that can mount a credible electoral challenge to the Likud. In these conditions, the ability to restructure the party scene takes on added importance. Although it is far too early to predict the outcome of present initiatives, there is little doubt that institutional developments on the party front may have an immense influence on the course of the elections, and hence should be followed with particular care in the coming months.

Preparations for Elections: The Candidates

The undermining of the electoral standing of the major parties is closely related to a growing leadership crisis in the country. It is now widely acknowledged that public confidence in the key individuals active in the political arena has diminished substantially in recent years, rendering personality issues central in the upcoming elections.

The most obvious facet of this debate focuses on the top leadership rung. At the moment, it seems fairly certain that there will be no major surprises in the list of the main contenders for top leadership positions. Yitzhak Shamir has already declared his intention of heading the Likud list in the next campaign. There is little reason to think that any other public figure will be able to put in a successful bid for the nomination against Shamir as long as he is interested in the job. Indeed, the recent announcement by Ariel Sharon that he plans to challenge the Shamir chairmanship should be interpreted, at least in the first instance, as one in a series of claims for the succession (Benny Begin has just declared his candidacy, and Moshe Arens--the most probable heir apparent--and David Levy are likely to follow suit in the near future). Depending on the nature of the relationship between Sharon and Shamir in the next few months, it is also possible that Sharon may decide to bolt the party and

run a separate list. But this will not substantially affect the Shamir paramountcy within the Likud at this juncture.

In Labour the situation is more complicated. Neither Shimon Peres nor Yitzhak Rabin have concealed their leadership ambitions (or, for that matter, their mutual antipathy). Each of them realizes that realistically the upcoming elections may be his last chance to regain power, and therefore the competition between the two will become increasingly tendentious. The leadership struggle will be further intensified by the entrance into the fray of several veteran Labour politicians, including Israel Keisar (the Secretary-General of the Histadrut), Ora Namir, Moshe Shahal and Gad Ya'acobi. The outcome of the Labour party contest is still unclear: Peres is generally considered to be more representative of party outlooks, whereas Rabin is viewed as having a broader popular base. In the present internal constellation, other candidates do not appear to threaten either of their positions at this point.

The picture in the smaller parties is better defined. Shulamit Aloni will stand at the head of Ratz, Yair Tzaban at the head of Mapam, and Amnon Rubinstein at the head of Shinui. If a Peace Bloc is formed, then the list will be headed by these three leaders in that order. The leadership of the far right parties is also not in dispute: Rehavam Ze'evi ('Gandhi') will continue to lead Moledet, Raphael Eitan (Rafal) will lead Tzomet, and Geula Cohen is likely to lead the Tehiya (now that Yuval Ne'eman has formally resigned), while there might be a minor rejuvelling of positions at the top of the NRP and the ultra-orthodox parties. The final determination of the top leadership position in each of the major parties will depend on at least three factors, the first of which relates to the status of the proposed legislation on direct elections of the prime minister. If this law is passed, it will unquestionably change the relative chances of the key contenders. Both Yitzhak Rabin and Ariel Sharon stand to gain from such a move, since while they may not command a majority within their parties, it is generally believed that they possess a broader public appeal. The main victims of this law would be Shimon Peres, who frankly suffers from a public image problem and would probably lose the leadership of Labour under such circumstances, and Yitzhak Shamir, who would have to run against Rabin on the one hand, and possibly Sharon on the other. Indeed, Shamir has now announced his opposition to direct elections of the prime minister, and may time the

dispersal of the Knesset to avert the adoption of this law should he be interested in continuing in office.

A second factor which may alter the top leadership picture, and one which is impossible to predict, concerns the health of the leading contestants. Their incapacitation (Shamir is now 77 years old, and his major opponents are well over 60) could move people like Arens or Keisar into top contender positions and require a rethinking of certain electoral calculations. And a third, albeit very remote, factor that could affect the leadership contest would be the sudden appearance of a strong new candidate heretofore inactive on the political scene. At the moment, however, Israel is experiencing a real leadership problem precisely because the personalities involved are very familiar, their frailties are well-known, and none of them inspires enough confidence across party lines to provide the kind of innovative leadership needed to design and implement initiatives which depart from existing policies.

As nothing very new or exciting is occurring at the top leadership rung, greater attention is now being devoted to contests at the second leadership level. Most parties, including those in power, are acutely aware of the fact that their attractiveness to voters depends, at least to a certain degree, on their ability to field a strong list which lays claim to superior expertise and experience without arousing undue antagonism on a personal basis. In this regard, the Likud is clearly at an advantage. It has successfully nurtured a group of younger politicians who have accumulated a substantial record in ministerial positions in recent years (most notably the 'princes'--Dan Meridor, Ehud Olmert, Ronny Milo, Benny Begin, and Benyamin Netanyahu, and their age-cohorts Moshe Katsav, David Magen and Meir Shitrit). The Likud's second generation is well-educated and exudes an aura of competence which makes it a decided electoral asset. More to the point, the Likud has succeeded in consistently bringing in new names during the past decade and providing them with vital party support.

While in real terms the younger Labour Knesset members possess the same attributes as their Likud counterparts (especially the Labour doves: Haim Ramon, Yossi Beilin, Avraham Burg, Amir Peretz and the Moshav movement secretary-general Nissim Zvilli), their position in their own

party is weaker. Moreover, because in the 1988 elections Labour was able to place new candidates in good positions on the party list and revitalize its Knesset faction, its ability to introduce new faces to the electorate in the forthcoming elections may be more fraught with difficulties. Indeed, in Labour, as in the smaller parties on the left where an impressive crop of younger politicians has also emerged (especially Ran Cohen, Yossi Sarid and Dedi Zucker in Ratz and Avraham Poraz in Shinui), the inner party competition is likely to be especially intense and the outcome uncertain.

It is these parties, however, that have the most gain from adding new and attractive candidates to their list, not only as a means of contesting Likud domination, but also of capitalizing on the widespread distaste for professional politicians evident in Israeli political culture. Their ability to realize this potential depends both on the top party leadership's commitment to rotation and on the willingness of veteran politicians to subsume their individual interests and make way for new candidates. Because of the mutual dependence between these two groups within existing parties, with minor exceptions (Yitzhak Navon, for one) the prospects for such an eventuality in present conditions are dim.

Under these circumstances, a great deal of importance must be given to the mechanisms for candidate selection within each party. The procedures within the Likud have still to be settled, although it appears as if the party will continue to choose and rank candidates according to the limited primary system it employed in the 1980s, whereby the central committee (numbering about 3,600 members) votes on the party leader and then on successive groups of seven candidates until the list is completed. Labour, as of September 1991, has committed itself to a full primary system, with all party members (over 200,000) participating in the selection of the Knesset list. Although the precise details have yet to be worked out, the new Labour mechanism, while granting incumbents some advantage because of enhanced visibility and better organization, nevertheless does open the possibility for an institutionalized turnover of candidates.

Most of the smaller parties are still in the midst of deciding on the method of candidate selection and ranking. Some will continue to rely on

elections within their governing bodies, while others are considering a transition either to a primary system or to a mixed formula whereby the central committees selects the initial list and the rank and file members order this list according to personal preferences (this mechanism is now under consideration in Ratz).

The technicalities involved in any discussion of arrangements for the determination of party lists frequently deters in-depth discussion of these issues. But any movement towards refreshing the second leadership rung and translating revitalized lists into votes at the ballot box requires careful attention to these provisions. Party activists are simultaneously cognizant of this fact and attuned to the personal implications of any major changes. Much of their energies in recent months have consequently been devoted to these matters. All parties, and especially those in opposition, are therefore confronted with the task of balancing the need to offer new candidates with the tremendous drain on their resources that disagreements over selection procedures inevitably entail. If this process does not become entirely debilitating--and the risk is there--then its results are perhaps one of the few ways of introducing leaders with some vision into what is now an essentially worn and fundamentally uncreative group of policy makers.

In many respects, therefore, the complexities surrounding the question of leadership make this facet of the forthcoming elections both potentially the most change-inducing and the least subject to major innovation. Since the influence of even minor adjustments in the composition and order of party lists can have a broad impact it is not inconceivable that the personality element will play a major, highly variable, and at this moment mostly unpredictable, role in the elections. Shifts in this area are, more than any other aspects of the elections, linked to changes in the substance and structure of the campaign.

Preparations for Elections: The Issues

Party identification and leadership preferences have traditionally played a much more important role in Israeli elections than party platforms and debates over issues. The forthcoming elections, however,

may prove to be a departure from this pattern not only because they will take place at a time when fundamental questions are at stake, but also because the profound disagreements evident within what is now a heavily divided Israeli public cannot but find an expression at the ballot box. Consequently, in these, perhaps more than in any other previous polls, considerable weight must be given to the manner in which the contents of the campaign are defined and packaged by the various contestants.

There is little disagreement today on the main issues that will come up in the elections. A preliminary (and admittedly very basic) checklist highlights six major subject areas. The first relates to disagreements over approaches to socioeconomic policy. Prominent in this category are problems of immigrant absorption, which will in all likelihood focus less on the desirability of immigration *per se* (one of the few topics on which widespread agreement does exist in most segments of the Israeli body politic) and more concretely on critiques of current plans and their implementation.

The question of immigration impinges directly on a broad array of economic and welfare concerns. Specifically, the condition of the economy is bound to be a central item: not only has inflation risen, but the balance of payments situation has deteriorated and the economy is flat (no real growth rates were recorded in the past year). Unemployment levels are higher today than at any time since the creation of the state (in October 1991 they topped 11 percent), and the proportion of jobless among new immigrants has reached a staggering 37 percent. At the same time, the massive construction campaign launched by Minister of Housing Ariel Sharon has aroused considerable controversy: the cost of new construction is being questioned, as is the efficiency of the effort, mortgage terms, the location of building sites, and the connection between new housing ventures, employment opportunities, and settlement policy. Inevitably, too, the erosion of social services will surface in this context: as the burdens of immigrant absorption and economic resuscitation have grown, education, health and welfare programs have been cut substantially. As a result, the quality of life has been adversely affected and social inequalities exacerbated. The uncertainty in such a wide array of socioeconomic concerns cannot but be magnified in an election year.

Indeed, the second major issue area, also of a domestic nature, will revolve explicitly around social relations in the country. Unlike the previous category which addresses questions of policy, social issues mobilize support on the basis of group affiliation and identity. In the 1992 elections, much like the elections of 1981 and 1984, it is likely that ethnic and class concerns will once again come to the fore given the widespread sentiment (especially among mizrahi Jews and residents of development towns and poorer neighborhoods) that the preoccupation with the influx of newcomers has not only diverted attention away from their longstanding needs, but has also been carried out at their expense. The Likud, which has traditionally enjoyed the support of these groups, will be more exposed on these issues than in the past.

Rising social tensions have spilled over into the religious sphere. The skillful lobbying of ultra-orthodox groups has resulted in the diversion of a growing amount of public funds to their institutions, enabling them to develop a parallel welfare apparatus which has increased their attractiveness in certain quarters while evoking immense resentment in secular circles. These feelings have been compounded by mounting opposition to the imposition of restrictive religious legislation (mostly centering on transportation on the sabbath and dietary laws) and by intense dissatisfaction with the ongoing stranglehold of the orthodox establishment on the decision-making process. In these circumstances, questions of religious pluralism--heavily promoted by the peace parties--will never be far from the surface, particularly in an already charged election year.

Most significantly in this connection, however, it is not unreasonable to assume that relations between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel will become a major topic in the campaign. These ties go to the heart of many of the questions now currently under review, ranging from problems of economic development, unemployment, housing and welfare facilities, to subjects that compel a confrontation with the values and concerns of Israel's democracy (such as equality, social justice, tolerance and citizen's rights). How this debate develops is of special interest not only in light of its implications for a peace settlement, but also because--given the improved political organization among Palestinian-Israelis--it will affect the prospects for coalition construction after the elections.

The extensiveness of social and economic concerns will be connected

in the current campaign with debates over the structure and performance of government, a third key area of domestic concern. This topic has been on the agenda in the past and it is likely to emerge with particular intensity at this juncture because of the extraordinary amount of activity around issues of governance during the past year. In dispute, first, are the mechanisms of accountability available to monitor the conduct of officials. Numerous instances of gross betrayals of public trust on the part of senior personnel have been recorded in recent months, and with them a demand for closer supervision of administrative behavior. The proliferation of uncontrolled patronage politics has been linked, second, to government incapacitation, to a weakening of the ability of the cabinet to make decisions and to implement them expeditiously. The paralysis of the policy making machinery has led, third, to calls for the reform of the electoral system. And while many proposals have been tabled and there is widespread agreement on the necessity of revamping Israel's unwieldy and outmoded electoral procedures, no significant steps have yet been taken in this direction. This inaction has prompted a renewal of the longstanding debate on the advisability of drafting a constitution for Israel, and especially on the urgent need, initially, for a bill of rights. The degree of public concern with these matters across the political spectrum is considerable, and the subsequent pressure will undoubtedly compel reluctant parties to confront them directly or risk losing votes at the ballot box.

The threefold set of domestic issues now on the national agenda will, it is fair to presume, be accompanied by an equally contentious series of external considerations. The first group of concerns will revolve around Israel's foreign relations, with a particular focus on the status of ties with the United States. Although in the past foreign affairs have not been a major factor in election campaigns in the country, the complexities of Israel's U.S. connections have been the subject of heated debate in recent months, and therefore cannot be neatly removed from the election trail. Moreover, the extensive American involvement in laying the foundation for the Arab-Israeli peace conference means that James Baker and George Bush are constantly undergoing public scrutiny within Israel.

Indeed, the salience of this substantive aspect of the forthcoming campaign will be closely tied to a second topic: developments in the peace

process. It is now apparent that events on the negotiating front will have a direct impact on the timing of the election, and that occurrences at both the bilateral and multilateral gatherings will be used as election tools. This was the case in the 1981, when the Likud skillfully employed its success in the Egyptian-Israeli talks to appeal to voters. At this point it is impossible to predict what particular topics will be raised in this context and how they will be manipulated by the various parties; what is clear is that much of the discussion on what is broadly termed 'peace and security' issues will focus squarely on concrete problems arising in the course of the impending talks.

Regardless of how events unfold on this front, underlying this set of issues is a third and fundamental group of questions centering on attitudes towards the future disposition of the occupied territories and the nature of Israeli ties with their Palestinian residents. This range of externally-oriented issues has usually been sidestepped in previous elections. The 1992 polls, however, will, depart from this pattern because these topics are at the heart of virtually every other subject on the agenda. Specifically, it is no longer possible to avoid coming to terms with the continuing occupation, with positions on territorial withdrawal, with the nature of interim arrangements, or, for that matter, with the status of Jerusalem. Each party will consequently have to present some idea of its preferred scenario not only for the boundaries of Israel, but also for the future relationship of Israelis and Arabs (with particular attention to Palestinians). These proposals will differ on two scores: the degree of precision (or haziness) with which these scenarios are depicted (certain parties will opt for studied ambiguity while others will depict their predispositions boldly); and the content of preferred options (with the parameters of the ideological debate being extended from, on the one hand, annexation and transfer, to serious discussion of a democratic binational state on the other hand). Undoubtedly, these stances will be inserted, in one form or another, into other facets of the campaign as well.

The scope of the topics likely to be raised during the course of this election year is consequently extremely broad, covering almost every aspect of the contemporary Israeli experience. To the known list of predictable subjects, it is important at this juncture to anticipate the

introduction of additional items during the course of the campaign, partly in response to events that will take place, and partly (as past experience has demonstrated) as a device engineered by those in power to deflect attention away from problematic questions. In any event, the quality of the issues already on the agenda does differ: domestic concerns stress policy, identity and structural divisions, whereas the external range underlines political and ideological discussions on the nature of Israel's relationships with other countries and peoples, the procedures needed to consolidate these links, and the normative predispositions which determine their direction. The relative weight given to internal versus foreign matters will therefore directly affect both the content of the debate and the nature of the discourse.

Within the next few months, every party intending to contest the elections will have to prepare its platform and decide on its contents. This process is most advanced in the Labour party, whose platform committee has already completed a first draft, to be presented at the party convention scheduled to take place in November 1991. The Likud has yet to deal directly with this task, although it is safe to assume that most of the details of the party platform in this case will reflect government policy on the eve of the elections. And smaller parties, especially those with aspirations to significantly expand their constituencies, are beginning to formulate their positions, often in innovative ways, in order to appeal more forcefully to their voters.

It is now possible to discern three separate strategies guiding the preparation of party positions, each possessing quite different political implications. The first strategy, and one consistently employed by the Likud in recent years, is based on the concept of compartmentalization. Each issue area is treated on its own terms, and a concerted effort is made to avoid making explicit connections between various problems, let alone ranking them in any preferred order. The implicit message conveyed by this strategy is that of consensus: a quest for agreement on as wide a variety of subjects possible. At the moment, there are no indications that the Likud will alter this strategy, which has served it well in the past, unless compelled to do so by other parties.

By now it is crystal clear that the Likud cannot be seriously

challenged on substantive grounds if the opposition uses this strategy. Acceding to the notion of compartmentalization means practically that contenders will be forced to mount a negative campaign predicated on demonstrating that the government has mishandled affairs in every single sphere. More significantly, this framework leaves no room for disputing the kind of thinking that has maintained the status quo in the past.

In these circumstances, it is apparent that most parties will opt for a second strategy, one which revolves around the establishment of priorities. Discussions within the Labour party and the right-wing opposition to the Likud indicate that this will be the preferred route of the established opposition. A priority-based strategy requires, first, that certain issues be ranked as more important than others, in order to dispel the Likud's claim that it is possible to deal with everything at the same time. On the extreme fringes, Moledet and (a now torn) Tehiya will place Israel's rights to the entire land of Israel at the top of their list along with security, relegating other issues to a secondary position. Labour will probably put peace (based on broad notions of territorial compromise) and economic prosperity together as key objectives, and attempt to demonstrate how the wedding of domestic and external concerns will facilitate progress in other spheres. Indeed, the second aspect of any strategy of prioritization involves demonstrating the intrinsic connection between seemingly disparate topics. To date, the linkage element is not evident in the statements of the far-right, with the exception of Tsomet, which has tied continued Israeli sovereignty over the occupied territories to social concerns. In Labour the effort to combine issues is far more advanced, and critiques of the Likud have increasingly focused on the unwillingness of the present government to integrate political, social and security concerns.

There are several problems attached to the adoption of this type of strategy, and its proponents are well aware of the constraints it imposes. First, any ordering of complex questions demands a great deal of political perspicacity: an incorrect judgement call may have very serious consequences. Second, this type of exercise requires some assessment of what is truly important to the majority of voters. Reliance on public opinion polls (a growing tendency in opposition circles) must be tempered by some attempt to anticipate developments and weave them into the priority list. And third, such a strategy implies acceptance of the fact that

the government will continue to set the key elements of the agenda. Forfeiting the right to mold the terms of the debate may reflect, as its proponents claim, a healthy dose of pragmatism. But such a move also runs the risk of exposure to serious criticism of lack of courage, imagination, and foresight. A third strategy, then, one which is now under consideration primarily in the peace parties, attempts to offer a comprehensive alternative vision for the country. Such a strategy contains several components, the first of which entails the presentation of a set of clearly defined and justified objectives for the future. Second, it necessitates the delineation of a series of concrete interim goals. And third, it possesses a programmatic dimension: carefully constructed steps in particular spheres which must be taken in order to move from the present situation to the desired future. Unquestionably, this third type of strategy, because of its holistic nature, is the most difficult to design and carry out. It also invites charges of naivete and lack of realism. But it does have several important advantages: it unabashedly seeks to capitalize on the unrest and disaffection with existing conditions and to offer a positive image of the future and a plan for how it can be realized; it is essentially constructive in intent and design; it places the Likud and the opposition in a defensive position; and it offers an opportunity to highlight certain normative questions that are all too often subsumed in the rough and tumble of everyday politics in the country. The parties associated with a potential peace bloc--Ratz, Mapam, and Shinui--are now weighing the possibilities inherent in the adoption of such a strategy in comparison to those attendant on the more conventional prioritization approach.

Within the next few months the strategic approaches of the various parties will be defined and fleshed out, affecting not only the substance of the debate, but also the terms of discourse as well as the climate of the campaign. The strategies that may lead to the greatest amount of change are also those fraught with the most risks. For this reason there is still a reluctance to opt unequivocally for a particular course. The ambivalence which marks this critical facet of the forthcoming elections can easily be perpetuated during the next year. Those interested in changing the political direction of the country may, therefore, have to reconsider their hesitations about dealing with strategic choices and devote more attention to devising innovative ways of utilizing the potential ingrained in the issues at hand to effect the transformation they envisage. The substantive

challenge is the most promising, the most difficult, and the most profound of the election period.

Preparations for Elections: The Dynamics

Every election campaign in Israel has developed a particular dynamic of its own which has, in intriguing ways, molded the shape, the tenor, and also the outcome of the campaign. Several interrelated features, many not under the direct control of the participants, have proven from past experience to have had a particular effect on the trajectory of the elections. The first, and one of the most elusive, refers to the mood prevailing in the country during the campaign. On the eve of the 1992 polls, two contradictory trends appear to be competing with each other. On the one hand, in the past few years, and especially in the last couple of months, a palpable desire for change has emerged in many quarters. This quest for a shift away from the familiar has been fuelled by deteriorating conditions domestically and by a growing dissatisfaction with the way Israel's affairs are being handled. Politicians and policy makers, far from inspiring confidence, evoke skepticism and seem to lack a sense of direction. The quest for something new has been reinforced by the government's agreement to attend a peace conference, to explore possibilities which heretofore did not seem attainable. The decision to enter into a negotiating process, albeit with numerous reservations, has ostensibly brought government policy more in line with the growing sentiment that the time is ripe to pursue different alternatives. At the same time, together with the search for some improvement and the concomitant recognition of the risk involved, an equally strong feeling of fear of the unknown has surfaced. Many people find it difficult to overcome deep-seated suspicions not easily allayed by what they consider to be a plunge in the dark. As the date of the first Madrid gatherings approaches, a growing chorus of voices have been raised claiming that the predictability of the present cannot be mortgaged to an escapade with incalculable consequences. Trepidation clearly plays into the hands of the incumbents, as Yitzhak Shamir has begun to skillfully maneuver the groundswell of doubts to put spokes in the wheels of the negotiating process. Indeed, the prime minister embodies the defensive mindset which has prevented efforts to embark on a path to resolution of the conflict in the past.

The way the dualistic mood of the country is used by the various parties in the coming months is of vital importance. Unquestionably, the far-right and the Likud (with the possible exception of the moderate wing headed by David Levy) will magnify and articulate the fears that have begun to permeate the country as the prospects of negotiations inch towards reality. The task of the Labour party and the peace bloc will be to attack the backward-looking orientation of those in power by dangling the promise of a brighter future and imbuing it with attractive and believable detail.

Much of the ability to take advantage and mold the political climate will depend on a second element of campaign dynamics: the degree of self-confidence displayed by the key actors. One of the strongest suits of the Likud and its allies has been their capacity to exude a sense of conviction in the absolute righteousness of their positions. In a period of uncertainty and equivocation, such a presentation in itself has immense popular appeal. Once again, it is the opposition that is called upon to cast doubts on such a posture. This task can be accomplished, at least to some extent, by a careful, reasoned questioning of the main tenets of the government's stance. But in order to shake the faith of portions of the public in the present leadership, it is necessary to overcome the doubt and widespread sense of helplessness which has become the Achilles heel of those who wish to change the balance of power in the country. In many respects, the conversion of the image of the opposition from one of protest to one of a depository of hope possessing both the will and the capacity to lead the country forward is an essential ingredient in determining the course of the campaign.

Both mood and confidence-building depend heavily on a third component associated with the rhythm of Israeli elections: luck. During the 1980s, the Likud repeatedly (and Yitzhak Shamir specifically) reaped considerable benefit from certain events that seemingly bolstered their interpretation of Israel's posture in the region. The most notable example is the attack on an Israeli bus near Jericho several days before the 1988 elections, which is widely believed to have made the difference between a Likud and Labour victory by moving some undecided voters into the Likud fold. This factor--the rising faith in the fact that Shamir's luck is running out notwithstanding--is clearly the least subject to control.

Since it is almost impossible to foresee the specific events that may affect electoral attitudes, it is imperative to fortify those elements of the campaign dynamic indisputably within the domain of domestic players. Indeed, the fourth determinant of the dynamics of election campaigns relates to the electoral skills developed by the various parties. Three specific tools are of particular importance: organization, mobilization, and financing. Here the large alignments are at a distinct advantage. They not only have an established and relatively well-oiled machinery capable of recruiting thousands of volunteers and mounting fund-raising campaigns abroad, they also have access to greater portions of the official electoral budget and are guaranteed, by virtue of their size, more advertising time in the state-owned media. The smaller parties, and particularly those outside the government coalition, suffer acutely in this regard. Moreover, their organizational and financial needs are arguably greater, since one of the few ways they can hope to bolster their position is by mounting an aggressive, potentially costly, and well-planned campaign. Much of the success of Shas in the past, for example, may be attributed to the masterful way it organized party stalwarts and the effectiveness of its public relations activities. In a financially-restricted context, there are few substitutes for enthusiasm guided by large doses of professionalism, requisites in rather short supply in opposition circles today. And although awareness of these organizational impediments is growing, there is little evidence that enough has yet been done to inject a greater degree of efficiency into these loosely-knitted institutions or to hire experts with the necessary political acumen to turn the electoral tide.

The ability to mobilize these resources and to plan and execute a smart campaign will depend on the timing of the elections, the fifth vital element in any analysis of campaign dynamics. Formally, the next polls are scheduled to take place in November, 1992. Few observers of the Israeli political scene believe that the government will serve out its full term, although given Yitzhak Shamir's propensity for procrastination, this possibility cannot be dismissed out of hand (and indeed it is important to note that many in the opposition--perhaps mistakenly-- actually prefer such a scenario, on the grounds that it will enable them to prepare more systematically for the campaign and to gain political capital if their predictions about deteriorating conditions are borne out by developments).

Realistically, however, it is more probable that the elections will be held either in the first few months of 1992 (February or March) or the early summer (May to July). The early date may very well be chosen by the Likud if the initial phases of the peace process do not progress to its liking. In ruling party circles conventional wisdom has it that much can be gained from such a move: by calling for a mandate from the people the Likud could present itself simultaneously as the promoter of peace, the protector of Israel, and the champion of democracy. In addition, it can put the Labour party and the progressive forces on the defensive, not only catching them in considerable organizational disarray, but also forcing them to suggest plausible ways to advance the peace process without selling Israel out to an international alliance which, in the Likud's terms, is determined to destroy the country. And, on technical grounds, a case can be made that the Likud bring forward the elections in order to obviate the need to revamp its party institutions and reconstitute its central committee in compliance with a court order. Yet, from the perspective of the ruling party such an approach does carry incalculable risks, particularly if voters remain unconvinced that the Likud did all its in power to push the peace process forward.

Given these hesitations (although from the vantage point of those in power logic does favor winter elections), it may very well be that Yitzhak Shamir will personally opt for a later date. This choice, however, is not entirely in his hands. He may be forced to disperse the parliament if his fragile coalition is shattered by the defection of its small partners or by the danger of fragmentation within the Likud itself. In such an eventuality, somewhat ironically, he may find that Labour and some of the smaller parties join forces to keep him in office and, while constantly undermining his credibility, purportedly buttress their own chances for success.

If the elections are, indeed, held later in the spring or in the first part of the summer, by this time greater clarity will have been achieved on the status of the peace effort, and appropriate arrangements made on the organizational front. The gain for the Likud in these circumstances is not necessarily readily apparent, and the separation of the Israeli from the American presidential elections may pose additional problems for the ruling coalition. From the point of view of the opposition, therefore, this scenario makes the most sense, especially if current trends persist.

Thus, the multiple ramifications of the timing of the elections make decisions on this critical variable a very close judgement call. And while in practice the Likud holds the important cards, it does not always know what to do with them: developments in the peace process may have a vital impact on whether they can be used to the government's advantage.

The factors contributing to the electoral dynamics are closely intertwined, and their combination will undoubtedly guide the choice of tactics to be used in the campaign and hence the manner in which it is conducted. The tenor of various election periods has, in the past, constituted an important dimension in the overall process. Thus, the 1981 elections were accompanied by multiple instances of verbal violence and by an emotionally charged atmosphere that highlighted social tensions. The 1984 elections, held in the shadow of the Lebanese fiasco, followed a similar pattern, albeit with lesser intensity. And the 1988 elections were, in many respects, studiously understated and sleek, relying heavily on television appeals rather than on mass rallies. The present election year has not yet taken shape, and it may still be premature to predict its salient characteristics, but given the extreme differences that are emerging and the immense significance attributed to the results of the ballot, it is not unreasonable to assume that the campaign will be marked by a good deal of drama if not open confrontation. Style, therefore, does play a part, and like other aspects of the campaign, is subject to some engineering. The list of those variables which form the rhythm of elections in Israel consists of a series of imponderables, each of which possesses substantial weight in determining voter preferences and ultimate outcomes. It would be foolhardy at this point to comment on how these elements will configure in the forthcoming campaign. Nevertheless, it is crucial to watch developments in each of these dimensions and to attempt to analyze how these affect actions in allied spheres. The sharpest tool available in this context is political aptitude: previous experience has underlined the inestimable contribution of comportment in the election process.

Israel on the Eve of an Election Year: Trends and Implications

The 1992 elections in Israel, as the preceding examination has

highlighted, promise to be particularly crucial and complex. As the Israeli polity is gearing up for the campaign, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the parties that are partners in the present government do have some tangible advantages over their moderate and progressive challengers. At the same time, rarely has the Israeli political system been as unsure of its direction and as divided internally as it is today. This condition of unrest offers greater opportunities for change than at any point in recent memory. The success of those who would like to see a different Israel--at peace with itself and its neighbors--in capitalizing on the present turmoil and steering the country along a new course depends on their ability to design new options for voters, to hone their message, and to skillfully devise means to convince a confused electorate. The expansion of choices, the injection of vision, and the capacity to conduct a judicious campaign can, in tandem, provide a formidable counterfoil to the assets held by the present incumbents. Here the burden is squarely on the collective shoulders of those Israelis who disagree with the course of the Likud and its coalition allies.

The Israeli elections, however, are not taking place in a vacuum. Outside forces will affect, either directly or indirectly, both the course and the outcome of the campaign. Because anyone concerned with peace in the region has an interest in domestic developments within Israel and is aware of the fact that the composition of the predominant political constellation in the country has a direct bearing on the prospects for the resolution of the conflict, they too, must carefully formulate their actions in the next months. Three major questions come to mind. First, what is the role of the international community, and primarily the United States, in the Israeli elections? Second, what part can regional actors play, especially in light of the new conditions that have emerged in the wake of the Gulf war and the reconfiguration of regional priorities and alliances? Third, and perhaps most immediately pertinent, what can be a viable Palestinian strategy vis-a-vis the impending polls in present circumstances? Answers to these questions are beyond the purview of this discussion. Responses that take into account the many elements that make up the electoral context must, however, be given to these critical queries in the near future.

The election period in Israel coincides with a flurry of activity on the

peace front. This proximity enhances the scope of the campaign and considerably expands its meaning. This discussion has sought to outline the main variables involved in the forthcoming elections and give some guidance on the choices they entail. As time progresses, these factors must be closely monitored and their implications elaborated. It would be rash to attempt, so early in the process, to venture a guess as to the results. Yet it is nevertheless imperative, in closing, to reiterate the crucial nature of these elections and the extensive effects they will have on the future of all the inhabitants of the region.



















PASSIA MEETING

Date : August 25, 1991.

Theme: **Israel on the Eve of Election Year**

- A presentation by Professor Naomi Chazan, Chairperson of the Truman Research Institute, Hebrew University - Jerusalem.

Participants:

Israelis : Arie Arnon - Economist, Beer-Sheva University;
Janet Aviad - Sociologist, West Jerusalem;
Idit Avidan - The Truman Institute;
Mordechai Bar-On - Historian, Ben Gurion Research Center, Sdeh Boker;
Galia Golan - Political Scientist, Hebrew University - Jerusalem;
Anat Reisman-Levy - New Outlook, Tel Aviv.
Chaim Shur - Editor, New Outlook, Tel Aviv.

Palestinians: Mahdi Abaul Hadi - Academic, PASSIA;
Azmi Bishara - Dept. of Philosophy, BirZeit University;
Musa Budeiri - Political Scientist, BirZeit University;
George Giacaman - Dept. of Philosophy, BirZeit University;
Rita Giacaman - Community Health, BirZeit University;
Faisal Husseini - Arab Studies Society, Jerusalem;
Hanna Ibrahim - Spokesman, Arab Democratic Party;
Ali Jarbawi - Political Scientist, BirZeit University;
Hanan Mikhail-Ashrawi - Professor, BirZeit University;

Mohammed Omar Yousef - Teacher, Jerusalem;
Mazen Quity - Advocate, Jerusalem;
Bernard Sabella - Dept. of Sociology, Bethlehem
University - PASSIA;
Helga Baumgarten - Political Scientist, Jerusalem.

Background

The meeting was arranged in coordination with the Harry Truman Research Institute at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and New Outlook in Tel Aviv.

On behalf of PASSIA, Dr. Bernard Sabella welcomed the guests and suggested brief self-introductions. Following such, Professor Naomi Chazan, the main speaker, expressed her thanks and pleasure, especially in the light of current world events, at being able to make her presentation at PASSIA.

After apologising to her Israeli colleagues for what she feared would be, to them, familiar substance and after stressing that hers was a preliminary assessment designed to raise points for discussion, Professor Chazan continued as follows:

Bernard Sabella

Professor Bernard Sabella thanked Professor Chazan for her contribution and then invited questions and comments from the floor.

Mahdi Abdul Hadi

I think there will be so many presentations looking into the Israeli scenarios for elections that it is not necessarily the case that this is the presentation upon which everybody will focus, analysing it to see if it will work this way or that way.

In my personal reading, carefully noticing the age element concerning the Israeli leadership (an old leadership, very stubborn regarding their doctrine and who will not change anything), I am interested in looking at the new generation: those who are preparing themselves not only to govern in the future but also to see a better place for Israel in the Middle East. What are their connections and are they willing, today, to come forward with their views and ideas and to accept the consequences of having them implemented whilst

reading carefully the Palestinian position of today, cornered and under siege? Will they seize the opportunity presented by the New World Order? This is a question about the new generation leading the Israeli future, not just one of today's Shamir, Rabin, Arens or whoever.

Mordechai Bar-On

I wish to add a few comments, or footnotes, to the brilliant presentation which we just heard, with much of which I fully agree.

My first comment may sound quite obvious, but I believe it is worth reminding ourselves of. Since there has been no dramatic shift in the overall balance of political power between the main contenting forces, that is between the Right in general and the Left, we actually talk about the movement of just a few mandates from one wing to another. That does not mean that a particular party may not move dramatically, but that the balance between the "compromising" bloc and the "rejectionist" bloc will most probably depend on the shift of

no more than 80,000 to 120,000 votes from one side to the other. This is not insignificant since the gain of one side of 4-6 mandate means also the loss of the same amount and a net shift 8-10 in the overall balance. But in such circumstances, last minute contextual and circumstantial changes may be crucial. A deepening economic crisis, which is rather likely to occur later in 1992, a worsening crisis in US-Israeli relations, the buds of which we can already see clearly today, or the intensification of the Intifada and its deterioration into more bloody levels, may easily change the election's outcome and may decide the ultimate question of who will rule this country until 1996.

Many political scientists have observed the typical conservatism of the Israeli voting pattern. But the vicissitudes of the so called "peace process" may well have a decisive effect on the growing "floating" vote and on the cohorts of new voters, namely the young and the new immigrants. It certainly will have an important influence on Mr. Shamir's personal image and the Likud's public image,

for better or worse. The trouble is that Mr. Shamir holds this card in his own hands, since he is the person who can decide the exact timing of the next election, and he is probably likely to time it to the Likud's greatest advantage. Nevertheless, the fact that in Israel one has to fix the election date at least 100 days earlier may mitigate somewhat this advantage, since so many things may happen in the Middle East in any given three months.

My second comment has to do with the voting of the Palestinian citizens of Israel, the so called Arabs of Israel. To the best of my knowledge, the Israeli Islamic fundamentalists will not run their own party because this is against the Islamic principle not to participate in the national political process in a non-Islamic State. On the other hand, a serious effort is under way to consolidate a unified Arab bloc, or list. This may not include the Communists, who insist on a mixed Jewish-Arab list as a matter of principle, but it is hoped that it will include all the others and that an agreement on residual votes between the

unified list and the Communists will be possible. The crucial question is whether the Islamic movement will agree to send some of their "second echelon" leaders to the unified list and drum up its constituency to vote for it or not. If this proves possible the Israeli Palestinians may end up with 6-8 members in the Knesset. One should always keep in mind that the demographic potential of the Israeli Arabs amounts today to some 15 mandates. This makes an estimate of 6-8 sound rather conservative. Such a caucus in parliament may not yet be allowed to actively participate in a left wing coalition, led by the Labor Party, but will enable the creation of a "blocking" majority which will facilitate the Labor Party and its allies on the Left to form a "minority coalition".

Thirdly, I tend to believe that the religious orthodox bloc in the next Knesset will decline in size. The fact that this bloc gained in 1988 eighteen seats was a result of a special opportunity. The ultra orthodox in Israel do not exceed 7-8% of the Jewish population and perhaps much less in the voting

cohorts, since they have by far many more children, nevertheless, they managed to control close to 10% of the votes in 1988. This was a peculiar situation and I cannot enter here into its explanation, but it seems to me that in aggregate the Ultras will lose some of their power next time. I expect the entire religious bloc (including the NRP) to win no more than 16 seats.

My fourth comment does not touch directly on the next elections but may add, I hope, an important insight to the understanding of the real electoral power the extreme and utterly intransigent Israeli Right. According to recurrent polls it seems that as far as attitudes are concerned, this wing of the Israeli body politic has the backing of 15-20%. But the parties that clearly represent those extremist ideological attitudes, namely Hatehiya, Tzomet and Moledet, only gained less than 6% of the votes (7 seats), and recent polls give them at most 9% next time (11 seats). Where do all their other "loyalists" hide? Who represents them in the Israeli political process?

It seems that for one reason or another more than half of the adherents of the "annexationist" philosophy remain loyal to the Likud (a few vote NRP) and are represented there by General Sharon. In much the same way the real electoral power of the consistent "dovish" constituency may well, according to attitude polls, exceed 20%; but the "Left Wing" bloc (including Ratz, Mapam and Shinui) controls only 9% of the current Knesset and will not exceed 13% according to most recent election projection polls. The other "doves" continue to vote "Labor" and seek their leadership under the wings of Mr. Ramon, Mr. Zvilli or Mr. Bar'am. This means that both the radical Right as well as the radical Left cut across party lines and must be carefully watched since a Labor Party in the Knesset with 10 "doves" is better than a Labor with only 3 or 4; a Likud with 10 ultra "Hawks" in worse than a Likud with only 2 or 3.

This brings me to my last comment. As we approach elections, the Israelis around this table, I am sure, pray for the

success of the Left-of-Center parties. Some of the Palestinians may not appreciate much the difference between Labour and Likud or for that matter between Shamir and Rabin. To my opinion this is wrong.

Naomi Chazan

First I would like to thank you, Mordechai, for fleshing out some points and I probably want to, in the spirit of this disussion, possibly disagree with a few of your comments.

First of all, on the nature of the parties and the primary system, I agree with you. It's a very big imponderable. But let me point to another direction where we have to start looking very carefully and that is organisation and financing. These are going to be much more important in this election than in previous elections because, with the primary system working in most of the parties, those who have funding, political consultants, organisation, headquarters etc., those who professionalise more quickly, are going to have an advantage. Right now, because there isn't enough preliminary work except for those who

already have positions, it seems to be that the organisations and the funds lie mostly but not entirely with the incumbents and that the real effects of the internal changes in the party we'll probably see in the 1996 elections and not so much in these, unfortunately; except in the smaller parties.

On the ultra-orthodox question I disagree with you. The strength of the ultra-orthodox does not lie necessarily in the religious field. It lies in their social service and community identity appeal. Over the past three to four years they have been able to get amazing sums of money for their institutions and therefore they have an entire alternative network of institutions: welfare institutions, educational institutions which make people feel good. I say this with a great deal of pain because I think they have played the patronage politics of Israel better than anybody. I think the ultra-orthodox deserve very high marks for callously and consciously manipulating the patronage system for their own ends. Because I think that many people want the security offered

by the social services that the ultra-orthodox parties are in a position to provide, with a great deal of pain, I disagree with you. I think we have to attribute electoral importance to the fact that they can deliver the goods. People will move to where they think they can get things, especially in an extremely constrained economic situation. That opens a debate but, I think, a legitimate discussion on the ultra-orthodox.

The substance of the peace process: of course that's why the timing is so important. Shamir holds the cards and he can do a whole bunch of things that we already know, but for what it's worth I'll repeat them: he can decide not to go to a conference and call for elections; he can go to a conference and, on the basis of the opening, decide he needs a referendum which is, by the way, electorally an extraordinarily strong position for him because he comes out as a peacenik, he comes out as a nationalist, he comes out as a hardliner and he expands his appeal tremendously. I'm sure he's thinking of it because if we can think of it around this table in the late afternoon he's

thought about it before. Finally, he can go on and continue with the peace conference. He has three options each one of which gives him tremendous power: not to go; to go and referendum; to go and continue to go. Either which way he can play it tremendously. The second possibility is the one that scares me electorally at this point. I have to be very frank about it. I think it's very problematic in terms of the electoral repercussions of this type of situation. But I was talking about something deeper as well and I don't want the deeper element to get lost in this discussion over the obvious possibility that Shamir has. The only way of someone undermining that position of strength that Shamir has electorally regarding the peace conference, is to make the substantive connection to the electorate, starting now. That means what the relationship is between the domestic issues of the peace process and what parties, hopefully progressive parties, can offer as an alternative, a viable alternative vision. That has to be begun now because that's the only real

answer to an advantage that cannot be taken away from Shamir at this juncture. So in a sense I'm agreeing with you but taking it three steps forward in terms of what it means. We don't have an answer to these advantages other than through different presentation of the issues and making these connections ahead of time.

Mahdi, I want to address your question on the second rung of leadership to which I attribute great importance. Let me just mention some names and suggest where it's going. Again, the names will open up some discussion, I hope, because I follow them carefully and I think many people here in this room do too. In the Likud it's the "Princes" we have to look at who we all know about. Having said that, I want to say that in my opinion, considered opinion at this point, the obvious successor to Shamir is Arens but it's the "Princes" that we have to keep our eyes on. That is maybe Merdor, Olmert, and Milo, [chorus of "Benny Begin"]. I'm not sure if Benny Begin is going to run in the next election. He has made major rumblings in that direction.

These four people are the moderate branch of the Likud. The other ones that we have to look to among the "Princes" are primarily Netanyahu as a hard-liner, not as a (more) moderate and obviously it's those two. Now I want to say something else that may sound outrageous at this point and that's because of the axiom in Israeli politics to never underestimate Sharon. If Sharon loses badly in the internal elections in the Likud, we cannot discount at this juncture that he will run separately. That is another factor that we have to take into consideration, at least while we are spreading out the options. By the way, the Likud "Princes" have several advantages. They are very impressive. They are impressive because they're classy, are well educated, articulate and they're in their forties and have substantial experience. Therefore they have to be taken very seriously. On the down side of that group they realise that they're fighting among each other because they realise very well that the leadership battle is about them and whoever rises to the top will do so at the expense of somebody else. So the infighting

here is particularly acrimonious.

In Labor the situation is not as good, even though Labor brought in more new faces at the last election. Probably the most interesting group is the Labor dove group which is, I think, familiar to most of you. Many of them are ex-Generals and some of them have very shaky track records, especially in their capacity to say the wrong thing at the wrong time. Some of them, particularly those who were advisers to others who also suffered from similar drawbacks in the past, are the ones who are going to be in the greatest dilemma. We're talking about how they're going to address the Left bloc or the Progressive bloc and therefore their position is not clear. By the way, I would mention Yael Dayan at this stage, as a woman. I'm deliberately naming names because I think it's important to watch them.

In the Centre and Right of the Labor Party there are not any names that immediately spring to mind, which is intriguing. There are in the Likud but not necessarily in Labor.

Some of the most interesting stuff is going to take place within the new bloc. Some of the people around this table have been mentioned in this context as well. Many of them are not people with political party expertise but many of them are drawn from the academy and have a very strong track record in the peace movement.

Galia Golan

I tend to think that Labor is going to do much more poorly than anybody anticipates in the coming election, even with Rabin. I think that everything depends on what happens in the next few months in the peace process and so forth. Obviously there are many variables and Naomi touched on just about all of them, certainly most of them. But I think we're underestimating the public sentiment with regard to Labor. I think there's going to be a tremendous decline in Labor to the point where it's going to begin, and I think it's already beginning, its eclipse as a major party in Israel. I think if you look at the state of Mapam I think that this is what is

happening to Labor. I know that's not a view shared by many people but I think that we're likely to be quite surprised at the next election, despite Rabin and despite primaries in the party.

The other thing is that I share your feeling that Arik Sharon might actually go it alone. I think that's a very real possibility. I also think that the atmosphere is very right for a Dash kind of figure, if there were a figure that could stand out. It's a thing that you said before and I agree entirely that the desire for change together with a desire for stability, a leader, assurances, a little bit of smoothing of our brows; I think that's very much on the agenda if there should appear a reformist leader. I don't see one.

I disagree a little bit about the Russians. I think that this election's going to be too early for them to be voting the way they will eventually be voting. They won't have been in the country long enough. But I wouldn't disagree with the general breakdown of 3:2. It might be 4:1, four to the Right

and one to the Left, but the next election it will even out. I think that the analysis of the population is accurate for a 3:2 split, but it might just be a wee bit too early and there might be a feeling that they have to display their loyalty to the government that's in power.

One last thing: I would be very happy if it were possible at some time in the future to arrange a similar meeting with regard to the Palestinian scene. I am very, very much interested in learning more in this connection.

Anat Reisman

I would like to raise two points. One of them is simply to agree with Galia's summation of the Labor Party. This raises a question: do you think there is a possibility of a new party led by the mayors seeing themselves as the new Centre? It seems that there isn't any central party. I know, in my neighbourhood, there are many polls, arranged by them, asking lots of questions, nagging all the time, in the last three or four months. So, I don't know how possible it is but I think it is a point to be

considered.

The second point I would like to raise: when you started talking, Naomi, I understood that these major parties are having great problems. But one of the great problems of Labor I consider is, when I look at Shamir's position, assuming that the next election would be in springtime and assuming that this sort of conference is full-time, I don't see, although I would love to, any great problems facing Shamir. The way I see it, Likud is going to be very strong. Shamir is going to be very strong towards the next election. He comes with a marvellous position. He has been tough in the peace process, he didn't give up, still there is peace. I believe there will be some growth in the market. So he will come with success towards the peace process, don't forget all the immigrants from Russia and Ethiopia, growth in the market - he is on the horse. Unfortunately, if we are speaking about being able to deliver, only the Likud can deliver.

Janet Aviad

Just two points to throw into

the pot here: I hope that the elections are later rather than sooner because I think that the longer things are cooking here, the more certain - I think that the hope for the next generation is that people are less ideological. They want a nice middle class life and that's what they can't have because of the economic problems and the peace process. If you ask the guy on the street what he [sic] wants, he wants to get rid of the Palestinian "Arab" problem. He'll say, "Get rid of the Arab problem. If it means separation then terrific. You get off our streets, we'll get off yours." That's the guy in the street today.

I think the major change that has happened as a result of the Intifada and the Gulf War is that the Moroccans have come over to us. That doesn't mean that they'd vote for us but it means that they think the way we think, not what we think, they think that they want to disengage

As far as the peace conference is concerned, the Israeli people will go for it. They'll go for it even if Shamir

says we're going to give away the West Bank and the Golan Heights. They'll go for it except the 20% that are ideological. Most of the people see their interests as being having two cars and a vacation. They're less ideological now and that's the gut feeling in Israel now. It's very important for you [Palestinians] to understand that.

My second point is that if Shamir can be portrayed as the guy who called elections because he was in trouble with peace, there's a chance that Rabin, leading the Labor Party, could say we must have the peace process and it means giving up territory. That's his position, by the way. He's no less a dove than Peres. He hates the settlers, much more than Peres. He's a soldier, so he can break your bones and at the same time make a deal. That's how he is. We've a better chance of a pragmatic election if it's later, as a result of the collapsed peace talks, with more economic difficulties. Every day Israel has more economic difficulties because there's no way ahead with the problem while you're also spending money on the

occupation.

The last thing is about the US. I know you don't like this but the US coming down hard on Israel for messing up the peace process, and I think that's how Baker and Bush will see it, if it starts, and Shamir is seen as a person who calls an election in order to block it because we're getting towards some deal that involves compromise on the territories, he cannot do it. He's already said, "I won't give it up, my successor may have to." The US, seeing that, stops aid, aid guarantees, whatever. The guarantees will be given but in stages so there's an executor's certification. President Bush says, "I needed a victory for my election, and the victory is a successful peace conference. Shamir screwed it." So there can be American pressure here also which is very, very, very important. Also American Jewish pressure. American Jews want that peace conference and they want to free the settlements. If there's a conference and Shamir is seen as the person who screwed that peace conference, I think that may be one of the major factors.

If Peres runs for Labor it's all

over. It's just all over. If Rabin runs there's a chance to get national support for him, including the grey people; the grey people who don't know today who they're voting for. That can include a lot of Oriental Jews who see a happier life, who vote for Rabin because he's strong and he's in favour of peace and they can see that. And he's giving them an economic advantage.

Naomi Ghazan

I want to thank you, Janet. I think that's a very cogent argument for waiting and I think it makes tremendous sense. I just want to add the proviso, that you mentioned, I want to accentuate it, if you like: this scenario is correct only insofar as there is no progress in the peace process. It falls down very quickly should there be, and this is again one of these balancing acts in terms of analysis that can go either way. Obviously, everything we're doing now is speculative and I think in a sense that's its advantage because we're laying out the possibilities and I think it's easier to follow them as events unfold.

have) but perhaps a little bit of bravado, even if one is not a hundred per cent sure that this arrogance is justified, can go a long way when one is talking about electoral appeal.

Chaim Shur

I would like to make a few comments and a few questions.

After this analysis about the various forces in the forthcoming elections our focus should be on who is going to form the next government. Is the next government going to be Likud or Labor dominated? I think, for obvious reasons maybe, that the Likud is going to form the next government in 1992. In order that Labor be able to challenge at all, this option of Likud forming the next government appears to solve a few problems. First of all the problem of leadership. I'm not so sure that Rabin will take over. But if Rabin won't take over, there is no chance that Labor will win. That, to me, is obvious. No matter what are the merits of Rabin over Peres I think that so far it's a draw. Rabin may be more popular with the electorate but

I'm not so sure he will be elected in the primaries.

The second thing is that Labor must be able to overcome its ambiguity and have more clear-cut attitudes. The fact is that with Labor now we don't know what is its attitude to the Golan Heights. The fact that the party is considered more dovish than the other one is, right now, in the present circumstances, not enough. We want to know what it really thinks. Are you ready to mention this so called ugly word, PLO, or just the same general term, Palestinians? I mean all these things that Labor is not so clear about mean that it doesn't have a strong appeal among the electorate because people think that they think "we are the target" because really they think that we should never sit with Palestinian representatives but they don't dare to say so. Therefore they are really not credible.

I think the third thing is the potentiality in Labor for change. I think that Labor has, to say the least, a much less aggressive younger generation. At the next election the young

ones, or the younger ones are going to take over and the younger generation in Labor is much less impressive.

The fourth thing is the ability to make the connection between political peace issues and social issues. The ability to do this has improved.

The fifth thing is not dependent so much on Labor but it depends a lot, in my opinion, on the Palestinians. The less ambiguity, if I may say so, among the Palestinians on certain issues would help Labor. The more ambiguity would help Likud. If I would have been, excuse me for saying blunt things, if I would have been Palestinian, I would ask myself quite clearly, "Who do I want to help? Do I want to help Rabin or Peres or do I want to help Shamir?" I know it's a hard question but I think it's a question that you must make. Look, I think that in the long-run I would choose Rabin. In the long-run, though I think, don't mistake me, I think that with a Labor government the problem of peace will be rather difficult. And it's true that many election campaigns

weren't based on the peace process but some were, like for instance in 1974, the problem of the Geneva conference. I think there is quite a strong possibility at the next election, the problem of the peace process will be a central problem.

One more thing. Of course, I agree that one of the problems that Labor must get rid of is the burden of the Histadut. Certainly, objectively, I think that this connection between the Histadut and the failure of the Histadut, I mean it's certainly not an asset for the Labor Party.

I have an open question. When things come to the hour of truth when we must decide one way or another, is there a possibility of a split between real doves and real hawks in both parties, both in the Likud and in the Labor? I think we must think of such a possibility.

Hanan Mikhail-Ashrawi

I have three questions. The first one is: how far has the US presentation of the peace process supported Likud and undermined the opposition? It

seems that such a process which has adopted the preconditions and constraints of Shamir has in many ways legitimised the Shamir position, delegitimised the opposition and in many ways enfeebled everybody from Labor all the way to whatever is your furthest left.

Secondly, how far has the Labor support of Shamir, for the sheer joy of seeing Shamir saying "yes, but" to the peace process, undermined again Labor and the opposition because they weren't able, as you say, to come up with a clear and viable and strong alternative to Shamir or to Likud and to say that this whole chain of developments is unacceptable and that we do want to provide a strong and brave and clear alternative that will mobilise the opposition and that will galvanise public opinion and would form a balance or a check to Shamir's excesses. In view of Labor's clear inability to work against the Likud line of dissociation of issues or their compartmentalisation, as you said; in view of their inability to come up with a platform that calls a spade a spade or the

PLO the PLO, what are the chances, do you think, of dissolving Labor, of having the Left of Labor join a possible Left bloc, especially bearing in mind that the Left or the "progressives" may be able to form the second largest party?

Naomi Chazan

In order to make sure I was not misunderstood I want to stress that I really think the peace process and its movement or lack of movement will affect the outcome [of the next election].

Secondly, as to Labor supporting Shamir: Labor has a consummate capacity at this juncture to cut off its nose to spite its face. In many respects, Labor is caught between a desire to support the peace process and a lack of desire to support Shamir. As usual, it is unable to decide what to do.

One of the fallacies, a growing fallacy, in progressive circles in Israel is to take Labor too seriously. If this were not the case we would be better able to consider viable alternatives to Likud.

As far as dissolving the Labor Party is concerned, party structures, especially when they have independent sources of income, are not so easily dissolvable. Because I am in favour of the idea of pitting hawks against doves, I must say that it only makes sense if you introduce into that equation socio-economic considerations as well. Has the US supported Likud? I don't think so. You [Hanan Mikhail-Ashrawi] obviously do. The US has supported Shamir to get him to the table, yes, but as far as election is concerned, I'm not sure. The US ambiguity on the ultimate disposition of the peace process affects internal Israeli politics and the US has a direct effect on elections. We must consider the position of Shamir but there are certain things that are beyond the control of actors here. There are other things that are in the control of these actors and it is very important how they deal with them. We must separate out that over which there is a lack of internal control and take more seriously that which we can control.

Azmi Bishara

There has been an assumption as to the centrality of the Intifada in elections. This is not my problem. My problem is that for the first time since Camp David the possibility is being presented of an Arab-Israeli peace without solving the Palestinian problem. That is to say, the Palestinian issue is not central to Arab relations. The position of the Palestinian issue is no more than a disturbance. Even Mapam sees the possibility of peace with the Arab world without the Palestinians.

This whole fascination with Rabin is a puzzle. Rabin is obliged to the peace-plan he drafted with Shamir and to no more than that. The split in the coalition was a result of the three questions posed by the US. Since the Gulf War, the US has driven Rabin closer to Shamir. Why should we accept him now?

Peace Now thinks that if there is a crisis in the peace process then there will be elections and Labor's and Rabin's position may depend on

the whole question of the Arab vote. Is Rabin willing to govern with Arabs? This is ridiculous. Shamir is ready for autonomy, the same as Rabin. The whole importance of these elections (as we stand now) is not central to which way Israel is going in the so-called peace process. Whatever the results, external factors affect Israel in the same way. Whether Shamir or Rabin wins, the election makes little difference.

Naomi Ghazan

Since I don't share any fixation over Rabin, I empathise with your feelings.

Regarding the "Intifada elections", I'm not sure I agree with you. It will be impossible to remove the Palestinian equation, not just because it is there but because other parties will not let it drop. A Palestinian state and discussions with the PLO will be vocalised by at least one party.

Hanna Ibrahim

As an old party worker, I'm used to more pragmatic discussion.

Israel is in dire need of a political coup if it is to be part of a stable, peaceful region. Unfortunately, the government does not share this position. While people may want peace, the government knows that were it not for war they would now rule a smaller state according to the UN Partition Plan of 1947.

Soon after Likud came to power many supposed it would collapse. The people of Israel must know that with Shamir in power there is sure to be a Middle East war. This will not necessarily come now but the longer it is delayed the worse it will be.

On elections, I am not authorised to judge the Jewish sector but in the Arab sector it is suggested that there are two lists:

- 1) The Communist and Democratic Front;
- 2) The rest.

The situation is not clear. The position of the Islamic movement is not clear. They may run in the form of a list of mayors or they may not. I do not anticipate a boycott and think there will be a high

turnout of electors.

We expect some help from our brothers in the Occupied Territories to help us avoid separation, creating new lists and parties which will only make things worse for us.

Possibility is, of course, not the same as reality but if we all know what we want we may yet overcome.

Bernard Sabella

Thank you. Thank you all. You have raised so many questions and provided a very good introduction for Palestinians to the complexities of the Israeli political situation.

Professor Chazan's question as to the role of Palestinians is one, I think, which should be addressed specifically.

[End of meeting].

