



The Impact of the Israeli Elections

on the Local, Regional and International Levels:
A Preliminary Analysis

The Elections of the
Sixteenth Knesset
28/1/2003



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BIRZEIT UNIVERSITY



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Program

- 9:30 – 10:00 **Registration**
- 10:00 – 11:30 **Presentation of the Seminar:**
Majdi El Malki: Director of ALIIS
First Session: The impact of the elections on Israel.
Isam Makhoul: *Positions regarding the resolution of the conflict, their impact on the elections, and the influence of the elections on prospects for resolving the conflict.*
Abdel Malik Dahamsheh: *The policies of the Arab parties during the campaign and the effects of the elections on the Arab sector.*
Chair: Majdi al-Malki
- 11:30 – 11:45 **Coffee break**
- 11:45 – 13:15 **Second Session: The impact of the elections on the
Palestinians.**
Yasir Abd Rabbo: *The future of the Palestinian National Authority and the peace process in the light of Sharon's reelection.*
Mustapha Barghouthi: *The effect of the Palestinian Intifada on Israel the influence of the elections on the Palestinian-Israeli struggle.*
Hisham Ahmed: *Anticipated outcomes: a plan of action.*
Chair: Albert Aghazarian
- 13:15 – 14:00 Lunch for registered participants, Baest Eastern Hotel.

14:00 – 15:30

Third Session: The impact of the elections on the regional and international levels

Ahmad Subh: *A prospective analysis of Israel's position at the regional and global levels.*

Martin Beck: *Possible impacts of the elections on Israeli-American relations and their likely effect on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.*

Roger Heacock: *The victor: George Bush.*

Chair: Ahmad Harb

15:30 – 15:45

Coffee break

15:45 – 17:15

Conclusions and Recommendations

Ghassan Khatib

George Giacaman

Ali Jarbawi

Chair: Muhsen Yousef

Contents

Introduction 7

First Session

Structural social changes and the 2003 election results in Israel..... 9

By Ahmad H. Sa'di

Third Session

Israeli-American Relations and Their Potential Effects on the
Palestinian-Israeli Conflict 19

Dr. Martin Beck

The victor: George Bush 29

Roger Heacock

Introduction

The Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies (IALIIS)

The last several years have seen the emergence of an Institute of exceptional value in research and outreach. The Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies is unique in Palestine, and wishes to continue achieving its goals as the society moves inexorably towards statehood. Through its contribution to transparent and effective policy analysis on the local, regional and global levels, the Institute sustains its vocation to form the upcoming Palestinian elites in various sectors.

The MA program in international studies was established in 1994 at Birzeit University, and its curriculum presents an interdisciplinary approach to the study of international affairs (covering mainly the fields of international politics, history, law and economics).

In 1998, it was decided to create a Graduate Institute of International Studies in order to uphold and reinforce the MA program with a wide variety of extracurricular events and resources. In the summer of 2001, the Institute was renamed in honor of the late celebrated Palestinian intellectual and activist Ibrahim Abu-Lughod.

The Institute organizes both local and international conferences, attended by eminent intellectuals and open to the general public. These conferences fostered a precious interaction between the Palestinian people and the scholarly community on the local and international levels, thereby struggling against the isolation and marginality that traditionally plagues the oppressed. In addition, the Institute frequently organizes general lectures and training courses.

With the objective of perpetuating these various efforts and of reaching a wider public, the Institute regularly publishes the most important contributions to its activities - of which this book is an example.

First Session

The impact of the elections on Israel

Structural social changes and the 2003 election results in Israel

By Ahmad H. Sa'di

The Israeli elections held on 28 January 2003 resulted in a historic victory for the right wing parties. They won a comfortable majority of 69 out of the Knesset's 120 seats. Thus for the first time since 1948, the right wing parties have the chance to establish a stable government. The Likud, the main right wing party, won 38 seats, and soon after the elections it was joined by Yisrael Ba'alitah - a party that represented Russian immigrants and headed by Sharanski -, which won 2 seats. Overall the Likud won one third of the Knesset's seats, the highest achievement in its history. Counterpoising that, the left Zionist parties suffered a humiliating defeat. The Labor party, the main left wing Zionist party, won no more than 19 seats; its lowest result on record. These results show that the delicate balance between the right and the left Zionist parties, which has prevailed since the early 1980s came to an end, with a dramatic swing of the voters to the right.

Table 1

The distribution of the seats in the 15th and the 16th (the current) Knesset

	The party The 15th Knesset (1999)	No. of seat The 16th Knesset (2003)
Likud	19	38 (40)
Shas	17	11
Haihud HaLioumi	4 (8)	7

	The party The 15th Knesset (1999)	No. of seat The 16th Knesset (2003)
Mafdal	5	6
Yisrael Ba'aliah	6	(2)
Yahdut HaTorah	5	5
Overall Right Wing	62	69
Labor	26	19
Meretz	10	6
'Am Ahad	2	3
Shinui	6	15
Hmirkaz (the center)	6	—
Overall Left-Center	50	43
United List	5	2
The Democratic Front (Al-Jabha)	3	3
The Progressive Alliance (Balad)	2 (1)	3
Overall Arab Parties	10	8

The Likud's success is dramatic given the identity of its aging leader, Ariel Sharon, and the police investigations of alleged financial irregularities in the party. Until 1999 Ariel Sharon was considered unelectable; he had been considered too hawkish and warmonger by considerable sections of the world public opinion and world leaders. Moreover, throughout his long career as a general in the army and in his political life as minister and Knesset Member, he alienated wide sections of the Israeli public. In addition to that, a few weeks before the elections the police launched an overt investigation regarding alleged financial corruption scandals and irregularities carried out by senior party members and affiliates including Sharon's two sons. Despite all of that, the Likud headed by Shorn won a landslide victory. It received the lion's share of the votes in the various sections of the Jewish population, as table 2 shows.

Table 2
The distribution of the votes (in per cents) according to the main parties in various sections of the population

The Party	Jewish	Arab	Settlements	Moshavim	Development towns	Kibbutzim
Likud	31.9	2.3	28.6	32.5	33.0	6.9
Shas Haihud	8.9	2.4	8.5	8.6	15.7	0.0
HaLioumi	6.0	0.4	15.6	2.3	10.0	1.3
Mafdal	4.6	0.0	14.4	6.5	4.0	3.7
Yisrael Ba'aliah	2.4	0.4	1.7	0.0	0.0	0.4
Yahdut HaTorah	4.8	0.0	10.8	0.0	5.2	0.0
Labor	15.2	6.3	4.0	22.1	6.3	45.5
Meretz	5.2	5.4	1.4	6.8	1.7	27.0
'Am Ahad	2.4	5.0	0.7	2.2	4.9	0.9
Shinai	13.2	0.0	6.6	12.1	8.7	7.8
United List	0.0	18.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Al-Jabha	0.0	28.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Balad	0.0	21.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

The Likud received the major share of the votes in the settlements, the Moshavim (the agricultural rural communities) and in the development towns, predominantly lower-class oriental Jews localities. The collapse of the Zionist left is epitomized by the inability of the Labor party to secure the majority of the votes in the Kibbutzim, a traditional stronghold of Labor Zionism.

More strikingly is the Likud's achievements in the urban sector; it won the highest number of votes in the main cities as table 3 shows.

Table 3
The distribution of the votes (in per cents) in the major cities

The Party	Tel-Aviv	Jerusalem	Haifa	Beer Sheva
Likud	28.4	27.8	28.2	37.5
Shas	7.2	12.6	2.9	11.7
Haihud HaLioumi	2.6	5.6	6.1	8.7
Mafdal	2.5	6.5	2.8	3.2
Yisrael Ba'alah	0.7	1.9	3.6	4.8
Yahdut HaTorah	1.3	18.1	2.0	0.0
Labor	22.6	9.0	22.3	10.0
Meretz	11.1	4.8	5.4	2.6
'Am Ahad	1.4	0.8	1.8	3.5
Shinui	15.5	6.9	16.4	13.7
Al-Jabha	0.8	0.0	2.4	0.0
Balad	0.0	0.0	2.2	0.0

The data shows that the Likud won the majority of the votes in the major cities, including “cosmopolitan” Tel-Aviv and “red” Haifa (this is the nickname of the city in Zionist historiography), a traditional stronghold of the Labor party, and the hometown of the Labor party’s leader.

As to the Palestinian minority, tables 1 and 2 point to two main developments. Firstly, a decline in the voting for the Zionist parties, which traditionally received about one third of the votes. In the last elections the voting for the Zionist parties declined to its lowest point; they received no more than 22 per cent. This switch singles the collapse of the system of patronage and collaboration, through which some Zionist parties, mainly the Labor Party, had had secured a sizeable share of the Arab vote. Secondly, a dramatic decrease in the voting for the United List, a party that represents the traditional and the Islamist sections of the Palestinians; its representation in the Knesset dropped dramatically from 5 to only 2 seats. Meanwhile, there has been a steady increase in the support for The Progressive Alliance (Balad) headed by Azmi Bishara, which emphasizes

Pan-Arab and national-Palestinian (rather than Pan-Islamic) identities. Meanwhile the Front has maintained its representation in the Knesset, and won the same number of seats as in the previous one. Yet, in the last elections Ahmad Tibi, who neither shares its ideological platform nor its political program, has joined it. Meanwhile it is the first time that the Front's representation is solely composed of Palestinians. Its platform of shared Jewish-Arab struggle on class basis seems to be, at least temporally, abandoned. Moreover, the front drew its votes - as it has done since 1967 - from the Palestinian population, while despite a growing support from prominent Jewish individuals (mainly in certain academic circles), it has not been able to attract a worthwhile backing from the Jewish public.

However, the success of the right wing parties, primarily the Likud, is not a story of unimaginable triumph. There has been a growing disillusionment with the formal democratic procedure; the percentage of those who cast their votes for the Knesset elections dropped to a record low of 68.8%. The percentage of those who participated in previous elections was: 78.7% for the 15th Knesset (held in 1999) and 79.3% for the 14th Knesset (held in 1996). The previous low record of participation was in 1951 when 75.1% of the eligible voters cast their votes. The rate of the participation, however, is not equal among all sections; certain groups, which have developed a culture of dependency upon public funds such as the religious (Haredi) Jews and the settlers tend to participate, on average, more than the rest. For example, in the last elections the participation rate among settlers and Haredis reached 76%, and among the major cities Jerusalem, where many religious Jews live, scored the highest rate of 72% in relation to 66% in Haifa and only 62% in Tel-Aviv.

As to the Palestinian minority, there has been a gradual and steady trend of disillusionment with the formal Israeli politics; both its rate of participation in the elections and the share of votes for the Jewish parties have been decreasing. The rate of participation among the Palestinians had dropped dramatically in the last three elections; their rate in the 1997 elections was 77%, it decreased to 75% in the 1999 elections and dropped further to 62% in the 2003 elections. Moreover, its voting for Zionist parties declined in these elections from 33% to 30% and 22% respectively.

While Palestinian Knesset Members through their parliamentary activities can deal with some grievances - some of which like the demolition of houses is of paramount importance - at the socio-economic level, they are unable to influence the system itself, which relegate the Palestinians to the status of second-class citizens. Moreover, the majority of Palestinians began to explore extra-

parliamentary ways to reduce the negative impacts of the system's functioning on their lives such as litigation - especially to the high court of justice - and mass demonstrations. It seems that other than the Druze and some Bedouin communities, the overwhelming majority of the Palestinians no longer believe that Zionist parties can advance their interests. In particular, the divorce between the Labor Party and the Palestinians seems to be a complete fact, as it is the first time since 1973 that Labor's Knesset Members are solely Jews.

Having described the results of the last elections, which were barely surprising, many commentators have endeavored to identify the factors, which influenced the voters' behaviors. One frequently cited factor is Al-Aqsa Intifada. Indeed, according to a survey¹ conducted during January-February, 2002 by the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, the vast majority of Israeli Jews have both become more insecure at the personal and the collective levels and they became more hawkish vis-à-vis the Palestinians. According to the Report's findings 92% of the interviewees expressed fear that they or members of their family would be injured/ killed by Palestinians' attacks. Yet, at the same time they believed that through more repressive measures, rather than through negotiations, the Intifada should be handled. For example 46% of the respondents supported the transfer of the Palestinians, and 57% opposed the renewal of the negotiations with Mr. Arafat. Furthermore, 45% believed that the Arab-Israeli conflict could be solved by military means. 54% believed that the Israeli Army should be unleashed, and use its full force to quell the Intifada, while less than one third opposed. Ample evidence in the report can be brought in support of the argument that the Palestinian Intifada in its current form - particularly suicide bombing inside the Green Line - have given the right wing its spectacular electoral success.

Another frequently cited explanation focuses on the personalities of the leaders of the two camps. According to this argument, Israeli public has become increasingly disillusioned with maverick politicians like Netanyahu, Mordachai and Barak, who although were given a fair chance to lead the country have spectacularly failed. Metzna' who is conceived as relating to this category of politicians, was unattractive in relation to the experienced Sharon. This is particularly so, as Sharon was praised by the US administration, Israel's main supporter. Furthermore, Sharon is conceived as the one who could suppress the Intifada successfully. The general public conceives his brutal style, with which he quelled the resistance in the Gaza strip during the early 1970s, as appropriate, particularly after the Palestinians' rejection of Barak's "generous offer". I think that this explanation is basically established on a psychological

reductionist presupposition. It assumes that in times of uncertainty, adults regress to previous developmental stages, and begin to look for a substitution of the father, a figure that could provide safety and assurance. Thus, the old age of Sharon and his background as an experienced army general have given him a major advantage.

I think that the above-cited explanations might give an answer to the intensity of the swing to the right, but do not deal with the basic question regarding the normal voting patterns of Israeli public. Most students of Israeli society agree that tribalism, religiosity, and period of immigration are the main explanatory variable of voting patterns. Meanwhile class, locality and age exercise only a limited impact. This means that the majority of Oriental and religious Jews vote for right-wing parties (including the religious parties). Counterpoising that, most of Ashkenazi Jews tend to vote for center and left wing Zionist parties. The Palestinians tend to vote for Arab parties, the Front (a Jewish-Arab party) and to left wing Zionist parties (mainly labor and Meretz). As to new immigrants, their voting patterns take the shape of wave. In their first years (up to a decade) their majority tend to vote for right wing parties, both to show loyalty - new converts tend traditionally to be "more catholic than the Pop" - and as a result of their susceptibility to the official (Zionist) propaganda. Thereafter, their voting patterns tend to be in line with the general patterns.

If we translate these four groups to the language of statistics, we find that "Israeli Society" as an imagined community to which most people allude when they dwell on Israel - namely Jews, Hebrew speakers and old immigrants and their descendents - compose around 62% of the population; the rest 38% are composed of Palestinians and new immigrants from the ex-Soviet republics. The majority of the "established" Jews (i.e. old immigrants and their descendents) are of Oriental origin. This means that in any elections in the foreseeable future center-left wing Zionist parties along with the Arab parties will continue to occupy a minority of the seats in the Knesset. If these presuppositions are correct, then the coming governments in Israel will be headed by right wing prime ministers, and dominated by right wing parties. It is this realization that motivated many left wing Zionist politicians a decade ago to change the electoral system. They thought that through two ballots one for the prime minister and one for the Knesset, they could secure the election of left wing prime ministers, who can after their election compose coalitions dominated by the labor party. However, this electoral method was changed and the new old method of one ballot secures a right wing domination of Israeli politics for many years to come.

Finally, two points are worth mentioning. Firstly, outside pressure, particularly from the US, combined with economic hardships tends to motivate Israeli Jews to vote for the center-left Zionist parties. Secondly, an asymmetry exists between Israelis and Palestinians. For the vast majority of Israelis, the Palestinian issue - occupation, peace talks, Intifada, suppression etc. - is one of many subjects, which affect their voting decision. However, for the Palestinians it is the main issue, which will continue to dominate their lives at least in the near future.

¹ Asher, Arian (2002). *Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2002*. Tel-Aviv University: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies. It is found on the following website: <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo61.pdf>

Third Session

The impact of the elections on the
regional and international levels

*Possible Impacts of the Israeli Elections held in
January 2003 on*

***Israeli-American Relations and
Their Potential Effects on the
Palestinian-Israeli Conflict***

Dr. Martin Beck

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1. Introduction

As expected by all polls, the main result of the Israeli elections held on January 28th, 2003, was a confirmation of the policy of the ruling prime minister, Ariel Sharon. The Likud received by far more votes than any other party. Moreover, Sharon's main challenger for the position of Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, was already eliminated as a result of Sharon's victory in the primaries held by their political party, the Likud. In the elections of January 2003, no other politician qualified as a potential alternative leader of Israel. From these simple observations it can be concluded that no major direct impact of the elections on the regional and international level should be expected. Israel has been more or less isolated on the regional level, and there is no sign of change ahead. Also, the USA has been strongly supporting Israel since the June War of 1967, thereby minimizing influence from other actors of the international system (such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU)), and there are no good reasons to expect a change of the "special alliance" between Israel and the USA.

However, due to the dynamics of Israeli aims on the regional level, especially

in its conflict with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), on the one hand, and due to overall strategic interests of the USA in the Middle East, on the other, the result of the Israeli elections may exert an indirect impact. Although being indirect, this impact may have severe repercussions on the Israeli occupation policy in Palestine.

2. Possible Impacts of the Israeli Elections

2.1 The Israeli aim of prolonged occupation and the means to achieve it

The basic assumption of this paper is that Sharon has a clear preference for prolonging the Israeli occupation of Palestine, i.e. the Palestinian territories conquered by Israel in 1967 (East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip). There is overwhelming evidence for this assumption. First, Sharon's statements clearly indicate his interest in prolonging the occupation of Palestine. For instance, Sharon (2000) drew "six red lines for peace", among them that Israel's rule over East Jerusalem must be maintained and that the major settlements of the West Bank, including the road network connecting them with each other as well as Israel in the boundaries of 1949, must be kept (see also Brockes/Dodger 2001; Sharon 2001). Moreover, immediately before starting "Operation Defensive Shield" in April 2002, Sharon declared that the settlement Netzarim, located in the Gaza Strip, is of the same importance to him as Tel Aviv (Jerusalem Post 2002). Second, Sharon's political vita proves this preference. In 1982, in his capacity as defense minister, Sharon was the major figure behind Israel's effort to destroy the PLO in the course of the Lebanon invasion (Haddad 1985: 97-98). Moreover, during his first premiership 2001/02, Sharon dealt with the Al-Aqsa Intifada primarily by military means and aggressive diplomacy. To be specific, he physically damaged the capacities of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and its president, Yasir Arafat, and succeeded in isolating the Palestinian leadership on the international level. Sharon's policy implemented during the Al-Aqsa Intifada was governed by a special kind of strategy, which has been nicely described by Robert Merton (1968: Chap. 13) as a "self-fulfilling prophecy:" first Sharon claimed that the PA headed by Arafat was not containing Palestinian terrorism in an efficient way. Then, he seriously damaged the capacities of the PA, first, by physically damaging its political infrastructure, and, second, by isolating Arafat from the international system, thereby reducing both his capabilities and willingness to fight Palestinian opposition groups prone to violence. Thus, the result of Sharon's policy was to make real what he claimed to be true before he began implementing his policy.

Sharon's aim of prolonged occupation does not necessarily imply a preference for military means and purely aggressive diplomacy. Damaging the capabilities of the PA and isolating Arafat from the international system is not the only way to prolong the occupation. An alternative means available to Sharon would be the resumption of a peace process styled according to the Oslo formula. In specific, a peace process that allows Israel to maintain its rule over East Jerusalem and continue its settlement policy in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would not contradict Sharon's basic aims. What Sharon—given his aim of prolonged occupation—has to avoid is a peace process based primarily on international norms such as national self-determination and democratic rule since this would imply that, at least in the long run, Israel would have to withdraw from all the territories occupied in 1967 or, alternatively, compensate the Palestinian people for all territories captured, in a way that is approved by the Palestinian leadership. Moreover, in this case Israel would have to accept a Palestinian sovereign state with control over infrastructure (particularly the network of roads) and resources (especially water). Many of these basic ingredients of an autonomous, democratic state of Palestine were denied by Israel both in the Oslo Accords and the offers presented by Sharon's predecessor, Ehud Barak, at the negotiations of Camp David and Taba in 2000/01 (Sontag 2002; Malley/Agha 2001).

2.2 Three Scenarios and their Rationality

To summarize the argument presented thus far: Sharon aims to prolong the occupation of Palestine. This aim may be achieved by two means, first, the continuation or even intensification of diplomatic isolation, or elimination, of the Palestinian leadership and the physical damage, or destruction, of its political infrastructure (scenario 1); and, second, by resuming a peace process styled according to the Oslo formula, thereby continuing basic aspects of the occupation regime (scenario 2). Note that scenario 1 could simply materialize as the indefinite prolongation of the current situation. However, if Bush sends signals to the Israeli government indicating he would tolerate further escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Sharon might take this opportunity. It is plausible to assume that the Israeli government is interested in "solving problems" in some hot spots of the Palestinian territories. For example, in order to meet one of the major demands of the settler's movement, Sharon's government could create a huge settlement in Hebron, connecting Kiryat Arbaa with the small Israeli settlements in the Old City. Moreover, in Palestinian centers of the Islamic movement closely located to the green line, such as the areas of Jenin and Nablus, Israel could entirely destroy the political and physical infrastruc-

ture, leaving parts of these areas uninhabitable. Israel could also re-occupy the larger towns in the Gaza Strip in order to destroy the networks of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Finally, Israel could decide to expel leading members of the PA, thereby perfecting what has been described above as a self-fulfilling prophecy. In whichever way scenario 1 might be realized, it is important to note that only the outcome of resuming a peace process based on international law and the democratization of the rule in Palestine would be harmful to Sharon's interests (scenario 3).

Contrary to scenario 2, this third scenario would not simply materialize in a revival of the Oslo peace process with all its flaws. Rather, a monitoring system dominated by third parties would be introduced. Also, the aim of establishing a viable Palestinian state would be met. Since this, in the long run, would imply a dismantlement of most settlements and the furnishing of Palestinians with sovereignty over their resources and infrastructure, such an outcome would clearly contradict Sharon's aim of prolonging the occupation regime.

Since, in his first period of premiership, Sharon's performance corresponds to a large degree with scenario 1, why should we consider scenario 2? There are two reasons. First, although being a major regional power, on the global stage Israel is as fairly weak actor. Therefore, Israel is in need of the diplomatic support of its major ally, the USA, in order to "smoothly" implement its militaristic approach to dealing with the PLO. Yet, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3, there is reason to believe that at some point in the future, the USA will exert pressure on Israel in order to resume a peace process, thereby limiting Israel's ability to use military might against the Palestinians. It should be remembered that since the inauguration of George Bush Junior as American president, US-American support of Israel was not always as high and undisputed as has been since "Operation Defensive Shield" in April 2002. Three periods in US-Israeli relations can be identified. Immediately after Bush took over from his predecessor, Bill Clinton, Bush preferred not to be involved in Middle Eastern affairs to the degree that Clinton was. The failure of the Oslo peace process in general and of the Camp David negotiations in particular, was a major blow to US foreign policy. Clinton invested many of his capabilities and much of his prestige in order to be perceived as a peace promoter ending a decade-long major international conflict. Bush's initial attitude towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict did not pose a major problem for Israel since a lower diplomatic involvement of the USA resulted in more flexibility to use military means in the conflict without being forced to first clear its policy with the USA. However, after the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, Bush was

forced to turn his attention to the Middle East. This was a critical period in Israeli-American relations; the US Administration embarked on creating a worldwide coalition in its effort to fight terrorism, thereby focusing on gaining support of Arab actors. The search for Arab allies made Sharon's government very nervous; he compared the policy of the USA regarding the Arab world with the British appeasement policy towards fascist Germany in the 1930s. Sharon's remark, made in October 2001, that Israel will not accept to share the fate of Czechoslovakia, whose military absorption by Germany was enabled by the diplomacy of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, outraged the US Administration (Goldenberg/Borger 2001). Only after the USA achieved its aim of including the major Arab states in its campaign against terrorism and the militarily successful war against the Taliban, could the USA be convinced by Israel's public relations campaign that Palestinian terrorism against Israeli targets is of the same quality as Al-Qaida's terrorism against the USA and that, to put it in a nutshell, that Arafat is Israel's Bin Laden, thereby materializing Samuel Huntington's (1993) prediction of a cultural war between the Western and the Muslim worlds. Circumstances may yet change, especially if there is an American war against Iraq. After the war, the US Administration may have a preference for refreshing the Arab alliance against terrorism and strengthening the Middle Eastern regimes ready to cooperate with the USA.

Second, from an Israeli perspective scenarios 1 and 2 have both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage of scenario 1 is that it is uncomplicated, from the perspective of Israel, as its military superiority over Palestine is greater than it is on the diplomatic level. Due to the special Israeli-American relationship there can be no doubts that Israel is in a favorable position vis-à-vis the PLO on the diplomatic level. Yet, this favorable position is much more prone to shock; first, since there are other players in the international system, especially the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN), advocating international norms in the Israeli-Palestinian case to a much greater degree than the USA. Second, and even more importantly, the USA has a variety of interests in the strategic region of the Middle East, not all of which are compatible with the Israeli interest in the prolonged occupation of Palestine. Moreover, by signing UN Security Council Resolution 1397 on March 15, 2002, the USA formally adopted the position of promoting the establishment of a Palestinian state. However, the Israeli arguments in favor of dealing with the conflict in a military way have some disadvantages, especially in terms of economics. Israel suffers economically from the Al-Aqsa Intifada and its own military reaction mainly because it has lost its attraction for foreign (and even domestic) investors. Thus, Israel is currently undergoing one of its worst economic crises in

history. Therefore, resuming an Oslo-styled peace process would have some disadvantages but also some advantages to Sharon's government. If we assume that states appreciate flexibility, i.e. prefer situations in which they have a choice over different means in order to achieve their aims, we should conclude that Sharon favors a situation in which he can exert as much control over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as possible so that he can switch from one means to another without any major interference by other actors. In other words, in the current situation Sharon is not interested in obstructing the way back to an Oslo-like peace process; if such a peace process were to be resumed, Sharon would be interested in being in a position that would enable him to abort the peace process once again if such an action would be desirable to him.

3. On the Likelihood of the Three Scenarios

3.1 Scenario 1

If the USA continues its policy of not restricting Israeli ambitions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the likelihood of scenario 1 increases. Also, if the USA wages war against Iraq, the likelihood of this scenario will increase tremendously. The reason behind this is that, for the war period, the world community will be pre-occupied with the Iraqi situation caring much less about other locations in war. In other words, there will be a window of opportunity for Israel to create facts on the ground in Palestine. If Sharon anticipates scenario 2-which, as will be argued below, would be rational from his point of view-it becomes more likely that he will use the time left before being restricted by a peace process in order to change the general conditions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by intensifying the occupation regime.

3.2 Scenarios 2 and 3

After a possible war against Iraq, scenario 2 becomes more likely since the USA might try to appease the Arab regimes supporting American policy. However, according to the findings of section 3.1, it may be the case that Israel would already have taken advantage of the Iraq war, thereby intensifying the occupation regime before being pushed into a new peace process by the USA. In other words, before any peace process is embarked upon, the situation of the PA and the Palestinian people may have deteriorated significantly.

If the USA places pressure on Israel to resume a peace process, under favorable conditions it may be the case that the US-Administration begins to insist that

the peace process avoid at least some major flaws of the Oslo accords, thus pushing for a peace process which envisions scenario 3. Contrary to what we could conclude from the actual performance of American policy towards the Middle East in the last four decades, there is some evidence that the US Administration might be interested in a peaceful solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, i.e. a peace treaty between Israel and the PLO aiming to end occupation and to democratize Palestine. Such an outcome would be desirable from the American point of view since it would end a major disturbance in the relations of the USA with the Arab regimes cooperating with Washington. Since a vast majority of Arab people is strongly convinced that Israeli policy towards the Palestinian people is tremendously unjust, the Arab regimes allied with the USA are in danger of being internally reproached for being satellite states of an imperialist power. Since many of these states, especially the Gulf monarchies hosting the major global oil resources, are of high strategic relevance to the USA, we should expect from a rational US Administration that it would prefer a fair solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the current state of affairs. Indeed, there is evidence that some US Presidents tried to significantly moderate the Israeli occupation regime. For instance, in the course of the Israeli-Egyptian peace process at Camp David in 1978, Jimmy Carter tried to get a commitment from then Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to freeze all Israeli settlement activities in the Occupied Territories (Quandt 1986: Chap. 9). George Bush Senior had the same aim when he presented a package deal including freezing Israeli settlement activities and a loan guarantee of 10 billion US Dollars to Israel. In both cases, the American Presidents failed. Jimmy Carter did not secure any commitment by Israel and George Bush ended up with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's commitment not to build new settlements, which, ultimately, did not prevent the settlement boom of the 1990s. These outcomes are impossible to understand if only the power capabilities of the two actors—the USA and Israel—are taken into consideration. Thus the question arises, what explanations for this result are available? Answering this question will simultaneously provide a clue to why a fair peace process should not be currently expected even if the US Administration should push for a fair Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

At first sight, the relationship between the USA and Israel seems to fit into the classical patron client model. In such a relationship, the patron provides its client with resources the latter is in need of, such as military, financial and diplomatic support. In return the client is expected to fulfill the basic expectations of the patron. The present case, however, is different. The reason behind this is that US Administrations cannot easily use their superior power capabili-

ties in their relationship with Israeli governments because the American society as represented by the Congress, as well as public opinion in general, is strongly in favor of supporting Israel regardless of the nature of the Israeli occupation policy in Palestine. Therefore, the room for maneuver of American presidents is limited in their relations with Israeli prime ministers. Knowing that American presidents are exposed to an efficient system of checks and balances, Israeli prime ministers cannot be put under efficient pressure from US Administrations. This is why we should not expect that scenario 3 will come true even if the US Administrations should prefer it to scenario 2.

Those who have been optimistic that a fair solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is ahead have been proven wrong time and time again. Unfortunately, there is no reason to believe that this will change in the foreseeable future.

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The victor: George Bush

Roger Heacock

The American president is indeed the victor in the most recent Israeli elections but I should have added, the pyrrhic victor. What is a pyrrhic victory? Pyrrhus was a Greek general who defeated the Romans, but in the process lost his army, and thus made it easy for the Romans to conquer Greece. It means a tactical success that results in a strategic disaster. This is because in the long run, Bush personally, the region and the world can only lose from his mad choice, which is all tactics and no strategy.

The results of the February 2003 Israeli elections were a foregone conclusion. Everyone knew in advance who it was who would win, and by how much. Labor's results give it the same number of seats as Likud had in the last Knesset, the Likud has doubled its score, and the Israeli internal political picture has been modified according to criteria set out by various commentators. These developments, as significant as they may be in terms of Israeli politics and spoils distribution, don't much impact on the outside world. Indeed, nothing much has been modified in this respect. Sharon will surely set up an extreme right-wing government without Labor party participation, since the latter has rightly decided that its previous fig-leaf strategy conducted by Peres and Ben Eliezer had been a disaster. All of this, however, is only significant in local, electoral terms. What interests us, and should interest us, is the broader picture, the peace process, stability, prosperity and justice in the Middle East and in the world. In this respect, it is not Sharon's victory (also likely to be pyrrhic) that counts, but that of Bush, and therefore of the international system which he heads and of international society, which is forced to live with it.

This is because actors (states, governments, regimes, Palestinian Authorities, etc.) in this part of the world are, in the language of international relations theory, only semi-autonomous in their decisions, not independent factors. Israel and the PNA, in other words, are semi-autonomous actors, whose choices are limited by the big powers, notably the US, which dictates at least what are the red lines, how far not to go, because of overriding interests, including economic, political and military resources, competition with other powers, preventing the emergence of new regional actors. US policy, logically enough, is in other words intent on securing and extending its hegemony. Sometimes autonomous actors are not just served with red lines, but are forced to go down paths that they might otherwise not have trod.

The semi-autonomous nature of regional actors has existed in the past, and continues to be a fact of political life today. Since Israel is a democracy (albeit a so-called ethno-democracy with an overwhelming military component, comparable in that respect to Turkey), the results of elections are always watched with interest in Washington, DC, and are sometimes considered essential for the US to channel. Let us take just two relatively recent examples: Bush the father saw to it (by withholding the 10 billion dollars in loan guarantees) that Shamir was defeated and Rabin elected in 1992. Clinton, by making his hatred for Netanyahu known at all times, by working through regional proxies such as king Hussein, by manipulating his strong ties to the Zionist movement in the US, brought down Netanyahu and brought in Barak in 1999.

Now Bush, when he came to power, did not know what he wanted in the Middle East or anywhere. In fact, he himself may have thought, the way so many Arab Americans did, and so many of my political scientist colleagues here in Palestine as well, that he was going to tend to be more favorable to the Arabs and the Palestinians than Gore. He knew he was a Republican (not beholden to the Zionist lobby in the same way) and he knew he was a tool of the Texas oil industry, closely bound to the Saudi monarchy, and which made him what he is, that is to say, president of the United States. At any rate, he was literally a child, who had managed to grab the presidency although he lost by several hundred thousand votes. His rule was unstable (none of this 87% business as in the Palestinian case) and unsure. He was not exactly a unilateralist. He was, instead, an isolationist. He criticized Clinton (it seems unbelievable today) for having intervened in the Balkans, in the Horn of Africa, and elsewhere. September 11th, 2001 changed everything. It needs to be understood that he had among his advisors people who from the beginning were mapping out a strategy (opposed by others, such as Powell) that came to fruition thereafter, al-

though it was ready from the start. That strategy, as it concerned the Middle East, meant war on Iraq, the downfall of Saddam's regime, and American control over the majority of the existing resources in oil (in addition to control over oil and natural gas and future pipelines in Central Asia, a project which is also coming to fruition).

The corollary to this was support for a rightwing regime in Israel, that of Sharon which came to power at the same time as Bush (but with a clear electoral victory, and due in part to Palestinian strategies or non-strategies as the case may be, involving the Leninist idea that, sometimes, "worse is better"). Now the American administration, like the German elites in 1933 when they appointed Adolf Hitler to the post of Chancellor, thought that an accused war criminal like Sharon would be a useful short-term tool. He would show the Palestinians that they should come back to reason, and then he could be shunted aside in favor of renewed negotiations, or else he himself be redirected towards a negotiating stance. This was the position of the foreign-policy elite in Washington until September 11th, 2001. Even after that date, some (and I, ever optimistic, was one of them) thought that the political strengthening of president Arafat's "donate blood to the American people in the wake of their tragedy" strategy could ensure continued cooperation with the Bush administration, and, ultimately, the resumption of negotiations, with or without Sharon. Unfortunately, Sharon was the wrong person for the success of this strategy. His answer to the blood donation strategy was the "kill Ra'id Karmi" strategy, causing the Palestinians to react again and again, with ever more determination, and claiming then that Arafat = Bin Laden. Vice president Cheney, a deeply racist man, tainted like his president by the scandals of American big business, was the author of the right-wing extremist, Christian Zionist-backed, oil and military diplomacy strategy that had been on the table since the beginning of the Bush era. He was now able to impose with ease this vision on the administration. Bush therefore proclaimed, in the face of the overwhelming contrary evidence, that Sharon was a man of peace (in fact Sharon still can't travel to Brussels, just in case he might be questioned by some judge, but then Brussels shows again and again that it is nothing - and I am not talking of the Belgian government, which, like certain other European states, has strong positions, but of the EU). Bush added that Arafat had to leave the scene, that nothing could be done until then, knowing full well that that particular objective was impossible to achieve the minute he and Sharon proclaimed it. This guaranteed the continuation of stability in instability in the form of the low-intensity liberation struggle being waged by certain Palestinian factions backed by masses of the Palestinian poor and oppressed. On the other side there is high-intensity counter-insurgency warfare,

including economic oppression and military violence on the part of the Israeli government, bent on building settlements and thus aborting any prospect for a two-state solution.

This was exactly what Bush wanted in the aftermath of September 11. Nothing could have been worse than the political instability of renewed negotiations. Military/security instability is something that the world, and of course the US, has been used to since 1945. Protracted negotiations and diplomacy are not its specialty. For this reason, things get out of hand, and Clinton for example, bears a great deal of responsibility for the deterioration of the situation on the ground because of his statements of blame allocation after only a few weeks (really only a few days) of negotiation in Camp David, during the summer of 2000. The same could be said for US diplomacy, or incapacity to conduct long-term diplomacy, in Korea, ever since the 1950s and down to the present. The prospects for peace in the long term are of course endangered each time this American failing is revealed again.

What was the reason for this US policy of a protracted impasse with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Iraq of course. Nothing could be allowed to move until after that problem was taken care of, otherwise the holes in the Iraq strategy would allow contradictions to come pouring out. The argument that Israel is allowed to do anything it wants, whereas Iraq is punished even when it does nothing, would have been taken up by most of the countries of the world, including many in the EU and many on the UN Security Council. This could have paralyzed the US, which cannot, despite what we hear, act unilaterally, but only oligolaterally (with a few key allies) or preferably, multilaterally. So the 'man of peace', Sharon, was backed in everything he did. Mitzna and the immediate resumption of negotiations with the Palestinians was the most dangerous option the US could face. Bush let it be known that the 8 billion dollars in aid to Israel would be forthcoming soon (although now, he has to deal with a reluctant congress on this point, but he doesn't care anymore). In other words, he used the financial support and economic aid card exactly as had his father in 1992, but to maintain the Israeli prime minister in power, instead of helping to overthrow him. The other card he played was perhaps even more effective: fear-mongering. The US position regarding the conditions for resuming political negotiations was trumpeted at all times, and could only have a strong influence on the Israeli electorate. Who knows where it would have gone had this condition (the departure of Arafat, pseudo-reforms, etc.) not been stressed by the US? The victory of Mitzna in the Labor party showed that the political track still had many supporters in Israel. But these people were overawed and

intimidated by the American insistence that nothing could move until changes had taken place on the Palestinian side, changes that could never take place as long as they were being demanded by the United States and Israel. The pressure worked perfectly. Sharon, the most unsuccessful prime minister in Israeli history, so we are told, in both the security and the economic fields, came back with a huge majority. Of course the Palestinian National Authority did nothing to counter this trend. All of its moves and statements were so clumsy that they could only hurt the proponents of the political track on the other side. And today, they are advertising their willingness to negotiate with Sharon, the man who refuses to negotiate with them, which is the opposite mistake, but with the same effect. It comforts the Israeli electorate and government in their decisions and policies, according to the formula worked out by Sharon and Bush: whatever Arafat asks for must be rejected. On the other hand, it really makes no difference in this case what the PNA is doing, the shots were being called at the global, that is to say, the US, and not on the local level. Peres was an important part of Bush's strategy in the past. Now that fig leaf is gone, but it doesn't matter any more. The Iraqi war is coming. Afterwards, we shall see, thinks Bush.

Yes, but see what? It is here that one can only project that this victory of Bush can only turn out to be a pyrrhic one, because the Palestinian-Israeli but also the Syrian-Israeli impasses have been left to fester too long. As in the case of the German ruling classes in 1933, unleashing the bulldog (Hitler then, Sharon in 1992) is a dangerous strategy, because the bulldog can turn around and eat his masters. This is what Hitler did. Of course Bush has more influence than did the German ruling class in 1933, and he can if he wants put him back on a leash. Why won't he? Because his own chances of being reelected (and we are talking now of next year) will suffer severely, since the pro-Sharon faction in Jewish circles, and non-Jewish right wing elements in the US won't tolerate it. They have strongly grounded beliefs, based on racial and religious prejudice in addition to strategic considerations. It is hard to see how the course can easily be reversed under those conditions. So it is that, as in the German case after 1933, in the present case, the dog might within a year or two eat his master if the latter does not do his bidding.

Of course the situation can be reversed, but that would be the topic of another extensive argument. At the very least however, the Palestinian National Authority (and the Egyptian government, by the way) should understand that it is not by desperately courting Sharon that they will make any progress, but only by courting their own people, who, if they are convinced that they have a cred-

ible leadership and a clear policy, will follow them. Right now they are totally confused and somewhat angered by this particular about face, which reveals desperation rather than strategic depth. Even though the Palestinians, like Israel, are only a semi-autonomous actor they can act to pressure the stronger parties towards making changes in their dangerous and shortsighted policies. The fact that Iraq has temporarily swept all else off the agenda doesn't mean that one shouldn't plan for the immediate, the medium- and the long-term future. The best thing they can do is, instead of reinforcing Bush in his mistaken belief that he is doing the right things, is to help to convince him that his victory is a pyrrhic one, that may be paying off tactically, but that in the long run, can do enormous harm to the interests of the US and the world. How to do that is, as previously noted, is another story, and it would involve more resolve and far-sightedness, than is apparent today.

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