

## Parties in the Eighteenth Knesset

### **KADIMA (“Forward”)**

In 2005 Prime Minister Ariel Sharon broke away from the Likud Party to form a new centrist party, “Kadima,” or “Forward.” He recognized that for Israel to maintain its Jewish majority and democratic character, it would have to make territorial concessions. According to the Kadima charter, “The Israeli national agenda to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and achieve two states for two nations will be the road map.” Kadima was responsible for the disengagement of Israelis from Gaza in 2005. Ex-Kadima leader, former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, contends that forging a tenable peace with the Palestinians and with Syria requires that Israel offer even more land than Ehud Barak offered Arafat at Camp David in 2000. Olmert concludes that Israel will have to make some “heart-wrenching” and emotionally difficult concessions. According to *The Jerusalem Post*, Olmert warns that “[t]ime is not working in Israel’s favor” and that “[i]f Israel doesn’t initiate a political solution in an active and dynamic fashion[,] it will be harming its own interests. That’s true in relation to the Palestinians and in relation to Syria.”

*The Jerusalem Post* reports that current Kadima leader Tzipi Livni maintains her opposition to participating in the coalition with Likud and implicitly rebukes Labor for what she perceives as its duplicity, stating, “Politics is not about saying one thing and doing another.” Livni refuses to join the new coalition government due to ethical objections, citing the foreign minister appointment of Avigdor Lieberman, who claims that Israel has no obligation to adhere to the roadmap outlined at the Annapolis Conference and is known for his anti-Arab remarks, as the primary reason that prevented her party from joining.

### **LIKUD (“Consolidation”)**

Likud is a secular, center-right party that sanctions settlement construction in the West Bank and Gaza, refuses to relinquish Jerusalem and cede strategic territories in the Negev and the Golan. Likud has promised in the past to seek peace agreements *only* when Israel’s Arab neighbors and the Palestinians prove that they will honor them and be held accountable to them by the international community. While Likud takes a hard line against the Palestinians, it has successfully orchestrated several very important Arab-Israeli peace agreements. Since the last elections, the leader of Likud, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has formed a coalition with Shas, Yisrael Beiteinu (“Israel Our Home”), the Jewish House, United Torah Judaism, and Labor. Netanyahu has promised to “honor all previous international agreements – including those made with the Palestinian Authority,” *The Jerusalem Post* writes. He maintains that he will work with Palestinians to create a Palestinian state.

Some left-leaning critics are skeptical of his promises of reconciliation. *The Jerusalem Report* explains that his actions have indicated that “peacemaking with the Palestinians” will mostly likely “take a backseat” to more imminent security concerns, such as terrorist threats from Iran, Hamas, and Hizbullah. Most recently, Netanyahu warned the U.S. government that if it does not eradicate the nuclear threat that Iran poses to Israel, Israel will conduct a military strike against the bellicose Persian nation.

According to *Haaretz*, the European Union recently warned Netanyahu that ties between Israel and the EU would “suffer if [Netanyahu] did not accept Palestinian calls for statehood.” In forming a coalition with religious Zionists who want a more theocratic government (whose Law adheres to *Halakhah*), right-wing secular Zionists who want to strip the Rabbinate of civil power, and the center-left Labor party, Likud’s domestic agenda appears incoherent. Some senior Likud officials have criticized Netanyahu for abandoning a hawkishly uncompromising stance on the conflict by promising to abide by all former international agreements (including pursuing peace negotiations with the Palestinians) and cooperating with Labor.

### **LABOR**

Labor is Israel’s social-democratic left-center political party that has historically offered to surrender territories for the promise of peace and security and has at times imposed freezes on settlement construction in the West Bank and Gaza. While Likud has largely ignored the Oslo process in favor of implementing policies that would

immediately and permanently affect the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Labor reveres the gradualism of the Oslo process and wants to create conditions conducive to a tenable peace before reaching the point of negotiations.

Thus, Likud officials are not the only ones crying foul after Labor agreed to enter Netanyahu's coalition government. *Haaretz* reports that "half of the party's lawmakers objected to teaming up with the Likud leader due to his long-standing opposition to peace efforts. Kadima moved equally quickly to decry Labor's move, saying that Labor's entry into a Likud-led coalition signified ideological bankruptcy. MK Yohanan Plesner said Labor had 'signed its own death warrant.'" According to *Haaretz*, when Labor struck the deal with Likud, some Labor officials "chanted slogans like 'Disgrace' following the announcement." Labor's secretary-general, MK Eitan Cabel, even accused Ehud Barak of trying to "turn Labor into Yisrael Beiteinu."

To defend his actions, Labor leader Ehud Barak, who secretly worked to facilitate the agreement between his party and Netanyahu's, declared in an impassioned speech, "[W]e are responsible for the Labor Party, but we also have a responsibility to the state of Israel, to peace, to security. We don't have a back-up country, Yitzhak Rabin said that, and it is still true."

### **SHAS**

For joining the coalition with Likud, Shas, the Sephardi ultra-Orthodox party, has been given the Construction and Housing portfolios and the Ministry of Religious Services. *Haaretz* reports that Shas will also "be in charge of the Israel Lands Administration, which Netanyahu previously vowed to keep in Likud's hands, and of the ultra-Orthodox education system." In return for Shas's entrance into its coalition, Likud has agreed to increase funding for religious education in yeshivot by hundreds of millions of shekels.

### **YISRAEL BEITEINU ("Israel Our Home")**

The right-wing secular ultra-nationalist party has proposed several amendments to existing civil liberties in Israel, including a bill that requires that all Israeli citizens pledge loyalty oaths to the State or face disenfranchisement (being stripped of civil rights) and one confers the power to marry citizens on civil authorities, which would secularize the institution. (Under Chairman Avigdor Lieberman's proposal, marriage would remain a right for heterosexual couples exclusively.) While some civil libertarians seem confident that Yisrael Beiteinu will separate civil-legal practices from religious ones, others believe that it will violate civil liberties by rescinding them under certain conditions, thereby disregarding their "inalienable" and ineradicable nature.

Lieberman has been the target of fierce debate in Israel and in the international community due to his views towards Arabs. Opponents condemn him as a "racist" and a "fascist," believing that his mission is virulently anti-Arab. The *Times Online* reports that he "has called for the bombing of Palestinian commercial centres [*sic*] in revenge for terror attacks inside Israel." He has also "suggested that hundreds of thousands of Israeli Arabs should forfeit their citizenship in a land swap, trading West Bank Jewish settlements for Arab areas inside the Jewish state" and "has referred to Israel's Arab population – close to 20 per cent of the total – as a potential fifth column." Supporters celebrate his commitment to a two-state solution and willingness to concede territories, viewing his desire to perform "land swaps" as very sensible; they are sanguine that he will make progress as foreign minister. Recently, Lieberman announced that Israel "was not bound by commitments it made" at the Annapolis Conference of 2007 "to pursue creation of a Palestinian state," *Haaretz* reports.

Since the election, settlement construction in the West Bank has rapidly increased. While Defense Minister and Labor leader Ehud Barak has promised to enforce a strict policy of "law and order" to eliminate illegal outposts, *Haaretz* reports that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently struck a deal with Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Lieberman to build thousands of housing units for Israelis in the contentious territory.

### **HADASH ("New")**

Hadash, the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality, is a Communist party that attracts Jews and Arabs to its cause. According to *Haaretz*, Arab MK and Hadash Chairman Mohammed Barakeh said that IDF forces attacked him at a recent demonstration in Hebron. Israeli leftists and Palestinians were protesting at a settlement in the West Bank

city when IDF forces asked them to leave. IDF officials deny that they attacked anyone, and *Haaretz* indicates that a video of the incident corroborates the military's story. *Haaretz* also reports that last month "Attorney General Menachem Mazuz was considering indicting Barakeh for attacking a policeman during a demonstration. Barakeh is suspected of having assaulted a member of the Israel Prisons Service's elite Masada unit at a protest in the West bank village of Bi'ilin in 2005." The hostilities between the Arab MK and the IDF, as well as those between Hadash and Yisrael Beiteinu, which flared up in the form of opposing political demonstrations in Nazareth in January, seem to exemplify the heightened tensions between Israelis and Arabs that have periodically erupted into violence or intense conflict since the Gaza operation.

### **MERETZ ("Vitality")**

Meretz – a merger of the three left-wing parties *Ratz*, *Shinui*, and *Mapam* – is a left-wing Zionist party that aims to end the Occupation, establish a lasting peace through a comprehensive two-state solution, and maintain the Israel's Jewish and democratic nature. Meretz wants Israel to pursue a "just and comprehensive peace" with its neighbors, to honor human and civil rights, to achieve social justice, and to implement environmentally responsible policies. Meretz opposes settlement building in the occupied territories, wants Israel to become a more pluralistic and tolerant Jewish democracy, fights to eradicate all kinds of discrimination within the state (racism, sexism, homophobia, religious prejudice, and anti-Arabism), advocates for the complete separation of religious law and state legislation, and espouses a social-democratic "mixed economy" position. MK Nitzan Horowitz was recently quoted as saying, "This is a horrible government. The State of Israel was put on a clearance sale to the ultra-Orthodox and settlers. [...] Netanyahu is now holding the wheel and pushing hard on the gas pedal, and we are all driving very fast – backwards." An attorney and journalist from Tel Aviv, Horowitz is the second openly gay MK. Immediately after being seated, he proposed a civil marriage bill that would open the institution to any two consenting adults, regardless of religion, race, or gender.

### **BALAD: The NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ASSEMBLY and Ra'am-Ta'al**

Balad, the Palestinian-Israeli party that seeks the complete separation between religion and state and fights for Palestinian rights, was almost barred from participating in Israeli elections in February 2009 – along with the other democratic Arab party Ra'am Ta'al, the Arab Movement for Renewal. After the Central Elections Committee voted to prohibit all Arab parties from running in the election based on accusations that Arab parties support terrorist groups and do not recognize the State of Israel, Israel's Supreme Court overturned the ruling. Hadash escaped conflict due to its bicultural nature. As a leader in the movement to purge the Knesset of Arab political parties and lead provocateur of anti-Arab activity, Yisrael Beiteinu MK Avigdor Lieberman affirmed, "The goals of Hamas and Balad are the same: to destroy Israel. The difference between them is that the Hamas is outside of Israel, in Gaza, whereas Balad is not only within Israel, but sits in its parliament."

Exacerbating fears of Balad's anti-Israel agenda, *The Jerusalem Post* reports that "Balad party MK Haneen Zuabi [...] has welcomed Iran's growing influence on Palestinian affairs and praised Iran's quest for a nuclear weapon as a means of offsetting Israel's regional military edge. Having Israel as the region's sole nuclear power, she said, was 'dangerous to the world.'" Zuabi also declared that "the very concept of a Jewish state was 'inherently racist,' saying that Israel must be turned into a 'state of all its citizens,' which would eliminate its Jewish or Zionist nature."

### **NATIONAL UNION**

National Union is a far-right religious Zionist party that discourages agreements with the Palestinians, believes that Israel's security takes precedence over negotiations for peace with Israel's neighbors, laments the disengagement from Gaza, firmly upholds the importance of compulsory military service, and maintains a fiercely Zionist religious ideology. New National Union MK Dr. Michael Ben-Ari, a self-proclaimed student of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane and follower of his Kach movement, recently participated in a right-wing Zionist march in the Arab city of Umm al-Fahm, which is located in the Haifa district of Israel. Believing that the march was designed to instigate ethnic

violence between Jews and Arabs, Arabs and leftist Israelis engaged in counter-demonstrations to protest this perceived act of aggressive provocation. They clashed with local police who, deeming their protest illegal, used force and tear gas to contain them. Among the counter-demonstrators protesting the ultra-rightist march was Meretz MK Ilan Ghilon. On another note, National Union was also active in the movement that sought to make Likud unfreeze Jewish settlement building in the West Bank, which Likud did in an agreement with Yisrael Beiteinu.

### ***UNITED TORAH JUDAISM***

United Torah Judaism is an Ashkenazi, ultra-Orthodox party that fights to make the Jewish State more theocratic, pushing its laws to reflect religious laws and values. Encouraging settlement building and discouraging territorial negotiations with the Palestinians, the party espouses the view that the entire Land of Israel is the divine right of the Jewish people. Angry that Likud conferred authority over civil marriages upon Yisrael Beiteinu and that it expressed a willingness to modify standards for official conversions, United Torah Judaism previously refused to join the coalition. However, Chief Rabbi of the movement, Yosef Sholom Elyashiv, recently gave his MKs permission to join the coalition with Netanyahu after agreeing to be more flexible on marriage and indicating that he will negotiate on conversion matters. Netanyahu recently established a coalition agreement with the Haredi party.

### ***HABAYIT HAYEHUDI (“The Jewish House”)***

Habayit Hayehudi is a religious Zionist party that aims to maintain the Jewish character of the State of Israel, increasing its religiosity by proposing religious legislation and improving religious education. It believes that God has given the people of Israel the entire Land of Israel, and it espouses staunchly religious-Zionist beliefs. The Jewish House has agreed to join the coalition; MK Professor Daniel Hershkowitz of Technion will become Science Minister. In an effort to “resolve a dispute within Habayit Hayehudi,” *The Jerusalem Post* reports, Netanyahu’s administration “agreed to legislate a modified version of the ‘Norwegian Law’ – by which all ministers quit the Knesset and allow the next candidates on their party lists to enter, but they can return to the parliament if they quit the cabinet.” If the Norwegian Law is implemented, the Knesset could see several MKs rotated out to join the cabinet and new MKs brought in to take their places.