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Go, Olmert, go

By [Yoel Marcus](#)

A moment before the moment of truth, there are three things that need to be said on the subject of real and imaginary dangers. The first one has to do with the large number of floating votes that come up in the surveys. A person who abstains from voting is like a person who cuts off his nose to spite his face. Those who don't vote, or vote with a blank slip, are doubling the strength of the extremists, mainly. The undecided remind me of the old lady who dies a virgin because she has never found the man of her dreams. Anyone looking for the perfect leader can stop looking. We have no perfect leader. The idea is to come as close as we can.

The next point has to do with the low-grade stability of our government system, as a result of which very few administrations survive more than an average of 30 months. To have 31 lists running for the 17th Knesset, most of them of the fly-by-night type, is a waste of votes. Certainly now, at this stage of the game, Israel needs large political blocs capable of large-scale political moves.

Ariel Sharon, with the 38 Knesset seats he received in 2003, could start talking about a dream that had ebbed away and carry out the first withdrawal from the territories. If Kadima does emerge as the central bloc, it can become the core of a big, strong government that will force the small parties to unite or disappear. A country's political system can't look like an odds & ends shop.

The third point has to do with the overabundance of polls, which are both confused and confusing. Maybe the figures are right, and maybe they're wrong. But to say that a massive terror attack could reshuffle the deck is groundless. Benjamin Netanyahu's rise to power after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin may have been a consequence of the suicide bombings in Israeli cities, but it wasn't because he made political hay from the carnage. It was because the public was disappointed by the collapse of the Oslo Accords.

Since then the Arabs have not turned into Lovers of Zion, but most Israelis support Sharon's legacy, which revolves primarily around searching for some other way to reach an agreement and end terror. Ehud Olmert is his successor,

illusions aside.

Now the moment of truth has arrived: What kind of Israel do the citizens of this country want to live in? A blood-soaked country, or one with permanent borders, even if it calls for painful concessions? A country led by Bibi, who pushed Sharon out and brought disaster on the Likud? By Bibi, who is warning us that passenger planes will be shot down by rockets six kilometers from the airport? Palestinians have been living within this range for years, and no plane has ever been shot down. The public is more mature now, and less apt to be frightened by Bibi's scare tactics. Bibi, as usual, is finishing off his botched election campaign by incitement against the media.

Amir Peretz, a talented leader with his mind focused on social issues, is not ripe yet. He will not be able to muster the majority needed to sail the national ship to safer shores.

In his three months as acting prime minister, Olmert has not stumbled - apart, perhaps, from his refusal to debate his rivals on television. He is not Sharon, but neither is he Bibi, and he knows something about teamwork. He will strive to form a broad government - a sane government, his admirers like to call it. He will not negotiate unconditionally, but neither will he close the door in the Palestinians' face. "Of all the candidates, I'm the only one who has placed a clear political move on the national agenda," he told me this week. "And anyone who calls it a referendum is right. That's what it is."

Since stepping into Sharon's shoes, Olmert has acted with flawless responsibility and caution in this delicate situation of standing in for a comatose leader. "Bibi ran a government once, and we saw what that looked like," said an associate. "And the only thing Peretz has ever run in his life is a workers' committee." If Olmert has done so well in his three months as acting prime minister, there is reason to hope that he is indeed the right man at the right time.

Olmert presents his "convergence" plan as follows: "At some point, the time will come for drawing permanent borders. But let's say the Palestinians don't give us an answer. How much time shall we wait? In that case, I will work, first of all, to achieve consensus at home, and after that, global sanction. If none of this brings the Palestinians to the table, only then will we consider unilateral moves, with broad backing at home and abroad."

Olmert talks about the importance of creating a government that is as stable as possible, through a broad coalition. Sharon opened the window on an irreversible process, he says. I promise to continue what he began. That is a commitment to which we can only say amen. Go, Olmert, go.

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