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Labor peace plan: Lease West Bank settlement blocs from PA

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Labor Party Chair Amir Peretz's diplomatic team is formulating a platform calling for the long-term leasing of large West Bank settlement blocs from the Palestinians, adopting the model of Great Britain and China with regard to Hong Kong.

The team, which includes former Foreign Ministry director general David Kimche, former minister Uzi Bar-Am, MK Yuli Tamir, Dalia Rabin, former Foreign Ministry official Avi Primor, and former consul-general in New York Alon Pinkas, will unveil the platform in the upcoming weeks.

The platform will call for adopting the findings of the Sasson report on illegal outposts. Peretz has said in discussions with the team that the outposts should be dismantled in keeping with the law.

A timetable will be set for final-status talks with the Palestinians, and will not include an interim agreement or a temporary Palestinian state. Peretz has said that a "conditional" state is not the right solution, because violent confrontation would continue. According to the platform, only if negotiations were to fail would unilateral steps be considered. The platform will state that talks will be held with the elected Palestinian leadership, but not with Hamas.

The platform will also declare Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel. However, it will allow for reexamination of the status of the Palestinian neighborhoods and villages surrounding the city by raising the issue of municipal boundaries.

The platform's "Hong Kong principle" refers to the agreement between Great Britain and China in 1898, according to which Great Britain leased the islands of Hong Kong for 99 years. When the lease ended in 1997, China took back the islands with a pledge to preserve their democracy.

Using this model, the large blocs of settlements, Ma'ale Adumim, Gush Etzion and Ariel, would remain under Israeli control in exchange for monetary or

territorial compensation to the Palestinian state.

Peretz slams Sharon over illegal outposts

On Tuesday evening Peretz slammed Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's policy regarding the removal of illegal outposts in the West Bank. Earlier in the day, [settlers erected](#) 14 such outposts across the West Bank as an act of defiance against the government.

"The fact the Sharon is considering reaching a compromise between the rule of law and the Yesha council [of West Bank settlements] is an unheard of scandal. No one is authorized to mediate with a wholesale disregard of the law," Peretz said.

"The outposts are damaging Israel's image as a lawful state. While Sharon continues funneling resources to the outposts he ignores the periphery towns, the Negev and the Galilee," he went on to say.

Labor boosts diplomatic, defense image

Sources close to Peretz recently said they are aware that the public senses a lack of diplomatic and security expertise in the Labor leadership, but this would disappear once Labor presented its Knesset slate. The sources said Peretz is planning on shoring up the party with senior figures from the diplomatic sphere, who would not necessarily be the party's candidates for the Knesset. This, in addition to a cluster of security figures, would deliver an appropriate response to Labor's perceived weakness when compared to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Kadima party, especially following Shimon Peres' move from Labor to the new party.

However, Peretz also has made it clear he does not intend to give up his social agenda despite criticism and slipping public opinion polls, since the election eventually will be decided over such issues.

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