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Likud heads rattled by popularity of Jericho prison raid

By Haaretz Correspondent and Agencies, By [Mazal Mualem](#)

With two weeks to go before election day, senior sources in the Likud believe the party is being rattled by its failure to woo back voters, especially following this week's raid of the Jericho Prison.

Tuesday's raid has stolen the show from the election campaign, and diverted public attention from the Likud's assault on Olmert's "dangerous" withdrawal plan, according to the sources.

The sources said that party leader Benjamin Netanyahu looked pressured and worried yesterday, following the latest polls. Until yesterday, Netanyahu has displayed confidence that the polls would change direction, and that the rise in support of the Likud would continue until election day.

"It does not look good, especially after the Jericho operation, which stole the show and diverted the public discourse from Olmert's dangerous plan, which is the Likud's campaign," a Likud source said.

On the other hand, other party sources said that the campaign against the withdrawal is proving itself, and a recent decline in the polls has been caused by a few events that harmed the Likud this week, obliterating the positive effect of dismantling the party's central committee.

These events include the prison sentence imposed on MK Naomi Blumenthal, and Netanyahu's courtship of Yisrael Beiteinu chair Avigdor Lieberman and Shas leader Eli Yishai, both of whom rejected his request to form a right-wing preventive bloc.

Netanyahu's conduct, which was roundly blasted in the Likud, raised again his intrigue-mongering image, and helped Kadima speak out against the danger of a preventive bloc.

Netanyahu is not only sticking to his negative campaign against the withdrawal, but also is sharpening it. In an attempt to bring the public debate back to Olmert's plan, Netanyahu yesterday presented his political and security

advisers. The team was formed about two months ago but kept secret until yesterday. The group is comprised of former IDF chief of staff Dan Shomron, former defense minister Moshe Arens, Dr. Dori Gold, Professor Uzi Arad, and Brig.-Gen. (res.) Ami Dror. The team met Tuesday to discuss the implications of Olmert's unilateral withdrawal plan, and members warned of its inherent dangers yesterday.

Netanyahu said the Jericho raid was "a good action, but it doesn't change the fact that Olmert is trying to hand over territories to Hamas. I don't know if all Israeli citizens understand that, that this will bring terror closer to our children. The team speaks of grave repercussions to personal safety. I've heard very grave things," he said.

Kadima sources reacted with a derisive grin, and suggested Netanyahu and his "mock war room" join the mock cabinet formed by Amir Peretz of Labor and have meetings to "vent their frustrations."

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