



Elections 2006



Meretz Chairman
Beilin. Realistic
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There is someone to talk to

Israel's choice: Meretz's open-eyed reality or Kadima/Likud's 'bunker' mentality

Amos Oz

What is the difference between Ehud Olmert and Benjamin Netanyahu? Both claim there is no one to talk with on the Palestinian side, and both are strong believers in imposing unilateral Israeli moves on the Palestinians.

Olmert says Israel should establish its own borders without outside interference. Netanyahu says Israel should continue the occupation and oppression throughout the territories without outside interference.

Seeking the moderates

The Meretz Party presents us with a different option: Try to strengthen the moderate elements amongst the Palestinians, the ones concentrated around the president's office, to negotiate with them and to sign agreements with them.

Such an agreement, says Meretz, would fundamentally change the balance of powers amongst the Palestinians in favor of the moderates. If Sharon, instead of withdrawing unilaterally from Gaza, would have conducted the same pullout as part of an agreement with Mahmoud Abbas – Abbas would have been won huge accolades on the Palestinian street, and Hamas' victory at the polls would have been prevented.

Today, too, we would do well to recall that only 41 percent of those Palestinians who voted cast their ballots for Hamas. It is only due to a crooked electoral system that Hamas won a majority in the Palestinian parliament.

Instead of repeatedly humiliating Abu Mazen and other moderate Palestinians, Israel would do well to announce that it recognizes only the PA presidential establishment (Abbas was elected by a 62 percent landslide victory), and that it does not recognize the Hamas government.

Were negotiations with the presidential establishment to produce even a draft agreement, it could signify a breakthrough for a "bypass road" to avoid Hamas and could lead to victory for the moderate Palestinian camp. In this context, Meretz's proposal is the only answer to Olmert's and Netanyahu's

"there's no one to talk with."

Other options

Israel has got one other way to bypass Hamas: to negotiate with Arab governments for a general resolution to all elements of the conflict on the basis of the 2003 Arab League proposal (the so-called "Saudi Proposal").

This proposal calls for Israel to receive full diplomatic recognition, peace treaties and economic ties with the entire Arab world in exchange for a withdrawal to the 1967 borders and a solution for 1948 refugees that would be acceptable to all sides.

No one expects Israel to sign such an agreement. But we would do very well – before digging into a "there's no one to talk to" position – to begin negotiations with Arab countries based on this proposal.

We must remember that Arab countries also have much to fear from Hamas' election victory, and they have reason to seek out – as we do – a way to peace that would put the Hamas genie back in the bottle.

If Israel is able to pull off such an agreement with the Arab world, the Palestinians are almost certain to approve the deal in a national referendum, due to pressure from the Arab countries.

Turning back the clock

Olmert and Netanyahu are held prisoner by the self-righteous phrase, "there's no one to talk to," or it's sister phrase, "there's nothing to talk about." These phrases set us back 30 years.

In contrast to Netanyahu's and Olmert's humiliating position, there is Meretz's realistic position, which demands we open our eyes and see the possibilities of dialogue with the moderate elements amongst the Palestinians and the Arab world.

The truth is that these moderate elements are our natural partners in the struggle against Hamas and Islamic Jihad extremism.

And what about the Labor Party? There, too, are some moderate folks with their eyes open to reality. But, as usual, the Labor Party has other members whose diplomatic positions are close to the "bunker" mentality of Olmert and Netanyahu.

I would prefer to cast my vote for the sixth person on Meretz's campaign list, Tzivia Greenfield, whose positions about issues important to me are clear, rather than take a chance on the number 18 or 21 on the Labor slate, whose positions I don't know well, and for whom it is difficult to predict how they will vote on critical votes.

Amos Oz is one of Israel's most celebrated authors and has been one of the leading figures of "Peace Now" since its founding in 1977

[Back](#)