

## Analysis: A 'West Wing' lesson for Olmert?

David Horovitz, THE JERUSALEM POST

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Between them, Ehud Olmert and Hamas have turned Tuesday's election vote here into a referendum on unilateralism.

Had Fatah fared a little better in January's elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council - even adhering to basic electoral self-interest and fielding one candidate rather than many for each PLC seat would have helped - then Hamas might have been the minor rather than the major Palestinian parliamentary player. And that, in turn, might have led Kadima to maintain Ariel Sharon's semi-fiction about the potential for negotiations with the Palestinians precluding a near-immediate resort to unilateral actions.

But Hamas triumphed by a landslide, and Olmert came clean. He cut through the deliberate vagueness Sharon had cultivated regarding Kadima's West Bank intentions and made it plain for every voter to see: A vote for Olmert is a vote for "Disengagement II."

The advantage for Olmert in having clarified his message is that, if voters do make Kadima significantly the largest party in the next Knesset, he will be able to more credibly claim a mandate for unilateralism. The disadvantage? The risk that the starker position is alienating voters. Opinion polls in the final weeks of the campaign have shown support for Kadima slipping in inverse proportion to the clarity with which its party platform is expounded.

Coincidentally, that slickest of US TV political dramas, *The West Wing*, is also now heading into the final days of its (fictional) election campaign. And the episode broadcast in the US last week featured an exchange of particular relevance for the Olmert campaign headquarters.

Bruno Gianelli (played by actor Ron Silver), the brains behind the Republican presidential campaign, held a pivotal conversation with his candidate, Arnold Vinick (Alan Alda) in which he asserted that the key to election success lies in heeding, rather than spinning and steering, the voters.

"I do respect the voters. That's why I win," says Gianelli. "I find out what they care about. I don't try to tell them what to care about."

Snipes Vinick: "Not exactly my idea of leadership."

Retorts Gianelli: "Yeah, well it's my idea of democracy. The voters get to set the terms of the election, not us. They get to decide what's important, not us."

Which begs the question: Has Olmert been trying to steer us to his way of thinking, or has he rightly gauged the mood of the electorate and tapped into it, Bruno Gianelli-style?

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