

Last update - 09:32 24/03/2006

## Yes, it is a referendum

Benjamin Netanyahu defined the upcoming elections as a referendum on the future of the West Bank, and this is indeed how they should be viewed.

Anyone who wants to perpetuate Israel's control over the Palestinian people should vote for one of the parties on the right. Anyone who admires the courage demonstrated by Ehud Olmert, who presented the voters with his plan for a withdrawal from most of the West Bank and a corresponding evacuation of settlements, and even promised that his coalition will include only parties that promise in writing to support the withdrawal, should vote for Kadima, or for Labor or Meretz, both of which support an additional withdrawal.

Israel and the Palestinians have missed many opportunities to reach an agreement, and in the meantime, additional unnecessary settlements have been established, money has been wasted, hatred has intensified and the occupation has continued. If the Hamas government does not meet the minimal conditions that Israel and the international community have set for conducting negotiations with it (recognizing Israel, ending terror and honoring previous agreements), and if Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas either cannot or does not want to negotiate with Israel over a reasonable agreement in accordance with the road map, a government headed by Olmert - if the voters give it the power to do so - will carry out another unilateral withdrawal, in place of years of waiting for an agreement.

Such a withdrawal must, at the least, aspire to broad international acceptance of the borders it will create. The internal debate over the size of the settlement blocs that will remain under Israeli sovereignty will be bitter, but there is no way to avoid it. One can only hope that a government comprised of Kadima, Labor and Meretz, plus any other party that adopts the convergence policy, will know how to navigate its way toward the Green Line wisely and effectively, and that every cent invested in the territories from now on will be earmarked solely for evacuation and compensation.

Olmert's declaration that he will start building in E1, the area between Ma'aleh Adumim and Jerusalem, contradicts the joint Israeli-Palestinian interest in preserving territorial contiguity for a Palestinian state. Building in E1 would make the withdrawal unacceptable to the United States and Europe, and a few

thousand apartments should not be allowed to become a new and unnecessary source of dispute.

According to Olmert, the convergence plan is not an electoral trick, and he does not plan to find excuses for not implementing it. He will presumably pay an electoral price among rightist voters for his clear statements. The obvious conclusion is that now is the moment for anyone who views a withdrawal from the territories as Israel's foremost existential need, and it must be hoped that all such people will make the effort to go to the polling booth and give their votes to him and to the parties that support his path. Anyone who skips the vote and thereby fails to participate in the first national referendum on the future of the occupation will not be able to exonerate himself if the next Knesset does not contain a stable majority for implementing the withdrawal.

Any apathy toward the elections, or any sense of being above it all, any self-indulgence, immature attitudes toward democracy or quests for an unattainable political ideal, could easily lead to victory for the right, whose voters are more vigilant - especially when what is at stake is a government committed to withdrawal.

---

</hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=698117>

[close window](#)