

ANALYSIS / Netanyahu's anti-Obama flak jacket

By Yossi Verter, www.haaretz.com

The lead players in our political race pricked up their ears to hear the words "actively and aggressively," which U.S. President Barack Obama used to describe his policy in the Middle East.

Tzipi Livni was the first to take advantage of the wording. Do we want to return to the Bibi days, between '96 and '99, with his problematic conduct toward the U.S., she demanded last week?

Netanyahu cannot change the past. It is engraved in newspaper archives and biographies written by top Clinton administration officials. But he argues that things have changed. Today, both Obama and Hillary Clinton understand that the solution lies in a more gradual and cautious approach.

Kadima's election broadcast cites Dennis Ross, one of Clinton's men, blasting Netanyahu. But Netanyahu has an essay Ross wrote in the Wall Street Journal about 18 months ago that calls on Bush's administration not to rush into a "far-reaching" agreement but to invest in developing the economy in the territories. That is, in fact, the "economic peace" I'm talking about, Netanyahu says.

Obama will play a role in our election campaign, which has two weeks to go, although it is hard to say how big that role will be. Anyone who has already decided to vote for Likud and the right - or for Kadima and Labor - will not change his mind. It all depends on the floating voters between the blocs, especially between Kadima and Likud. So Obama will not make the difference here.

Perhaps in the next elections, in two years or so, after a right-wing-ultra-Orthodox government reigns with Netanyahu, Lieberman, Begin, Ya'alon, Yishai and Orlev, the penny will finally drop.

Netanyahu understands this very well. He knows this is his last chance. He does not want to leave the stage humiliated and outcast, as he did 10 years ago. So his strategic goal, if he is elected, is to add Labor and Kadima or either one to his party, as an anti-Obama flak jacket.

This article can also be read at <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1058447.html>
