



JERUSALEM LETTER

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Begin's Political Base - Post Sadat

There is little doubt in Israel that Prime Minister Begin is in complete control of the political power structure. Menahem Begin has always been the strong man in his party and has maintained his position unchallenged in the face of all comers. Today he enjoys widespread popular support as Prime Minister and continues to exert singular authority both as head of his party and as head of the government. No one for a moment doubts that he is the most powerful Prime Minister to govern in Israel since the days of Ben Gurion.

Nevertheless, it is a subject of speculation, both in the press and in the public here, as to the support which Begin might draw upon directly from his political base, namely the Likud party as well as within that special constituency which supported him in the elections, The Land of Israel Movement and Gush Emunim.

The Ha'Aretz newspaper recently published a two part series by Amnon Barzelai on the positions taken by the members of the Likud party as regards the attitudes on territorial concessions and the possibility of a negotiated peace in the wake of the Sadat overture. The fact is that the political views of the members of the Likud party have not been of any real importance in the past simply because they were a political party of the opposition. Today, because of the dominant position of Mr. Begin as Prime Minister and as the sole architect of government policy, the individual views of members of the Knesset from the Likud party still do not play any real role of importance. Nevertheless, it is possible and perhaps even likely that as events unfold in the coming days and matters will have to be decided by the government and the Knesset, the views of Mr. Begin's Likud party may yet have real importance. It is even possible that their views will have to be taken into account by Mr. Begin and his government in determining the actual conditions of a peace arrangement.

Mr. Barzelai in his articles analyzes the various parties which make up the Likud (which is, in fact, a federation of three parties): the Liberal party, the Herut party and the La'am party. He contends that one of the myths which has no basis in reality is the myth that leaders of the Liberal party in the Likud are relatively moderate in their political views. If this was in fact the case in the past, since the rise of the Likud to power, it seems to have changed. The overwhelming majority of the fifteen Liberal members of the Knesset tend to oppose any territorial compromise in Judea and Samaria.

Furthermore, key members of the Liberal party are among those who can be termed as most adamant in their opposition to any compromise. They are seen in fact to be most hawkish by their own compatriots in the La'am and Merut factions. In general it would seem that even after Sadat's visit to Israel there has been no real change in their personal views and positions.

In general, it is rather difficult to evaluate the political position and views of the Likud members of Knesset. The dramatic events of the past several weeks have occurred so rapidly and have tended to concentrate so consistently upon the Prime Minister that until now (after Begin's visit to Washington) there has been no reconsideration by the party of its positions. The Likud as a whole has met several times and heard situational reviews by Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, as have the Liberal and La'am parties, separately. Nevertheless, except for pronouncements by the heads of the Knesset factions, there has been no serious discussion or re-evaluation of factional and party positions. There has been no serious attempt to examine whether there has been any change or revision in the platform of the Likud.

The consistent answer to the charge that they have failed as political parties to re-evaluate their positions in the light of the Sadat visit is simply that the negotiations should not in any way be interfered with by Israeli political parties making prior announcements of changes in policy or readiness to give away anything.

As such, the only way to determine what the positions of the various factions are currently, is that taken by Mr. Barzelai of the Ha'Aretz who simply interviewed personally each and every one of the members of Knesset who are members of the factions making up the Likud. Below are summaries of some of the conversations with these members of Knesset which can indicate what the party position may be, if and when the Prime Minister turns to his party with a peace proposal.

From among the fifteen Liberal members of Knesset, Barzelai interviewed twelve of them, the other three being out of the country. Of the twelve, only one could be considered to be a moderate, Abraham Katz. He was the only one who indicated a readiness for territorial compromise in Judea and Samaria. Of course, Mr. Katz emphasized strongly that he would be ready for such compromise only in exchange for a full peace.

Yosef Tamir who has generally been regarded as a moderate, nevertheless underscored his insistence that any agreement must allow for settlement in Judea and Samaria.

Avraham Sharir, the chairman of the Likud faction in the Knesset, from the Liberal party, opposes any territorial compromise in Judea and Samaria, but does support Dayan's idea of a functional arrangement.

Member of Knesset Moshe Nissim emphasized the principle in the Likud platform which says "Judea and Samaria will not be given over to a foreign power." He further supports Jewish settlement in specified areas of the territories.

Minister of Energy, Yitzhak Moda'i is firm in his hawkish position. Even now, he does not see any possibility of territorial compromise. The Jordan must be the eastern border of Israel. He supports the idea of giving domestic autonomy of sorts to the residents of the West Bank in that they should be allowed to choose which citizenship, Israeli or Jordan that they want. He would insist upon Jewish settlement throughout the West Bank. He would be willing to delay Israel's assertion of sovereignty over the West Bank to a later period or even to the next generation.

There is considerable support among the Liberal members of Knesset for Dayan's idea of functional compromise. Three of the new members of Knesset from the Liberal party, Sara Doron, Meron and Gustav Badian, all shared the opinion that it should be possible to allow Jewish settlement in all parts of Judea and Samaria and along with this to allow the Arabs living in the territories some kind of domestic autonomy. Meron thought it possible to set up some kind of system which would leave in Israel's hands all responsibility for security but at the same time would allow the residents of the West Bank who wanted, to live under a Palestinian-Jordanian set-up. In general, Barzelai's conclusion is that the Sadat visit to Israel has not led to any real moderation in the declared positions of most of the members of Knesset from the Liberal party, at least in so far as territorial compromise on the West Bank is concerned.

Perhaps surprisingly, Barzelai goes on to report on the results of his interviews with the members of Knesset from the Herut faction of the Likud party and there he does detect some movement. Whereas the Herut members of Knesset had hitherto been almost monolithic in their position regarding territorial compromise, Barzelai reports that he now detects variations of opinion by different members of the party.

The firm principle guiding the Likud and especially the Herut especially insofar as the subject of Judea and Samaria is concerned, has been the paragraph in the platform referred to previously that Judea and Samaria will never be given over to a foreign power. It was by virtue of the unanimity of opinion on this subject which led to the strong and firm position of Menahem Begin. However, as a result of Sadat's visit, there has been movement and change within the Likud and especially among the Herut members. One can now detect two different factions or groups within the Herut. One continues to hold on to the principle of full Israeli sovereignty over Judea and Samaria. The other is prepared to adopt the Foreign Minister's idea of functional compromise.

The first group is typified by such members of Knesset as Geula Cohen, Dov Shilansky and Moshe Katzav. Barzelai quotes M.K. Shilansky as saying "We must make crystal clear beyond any shadow of doubt that Judea and Samaria are an integral part of Eretz Yisrael and the sooner we impose Israeli law, the better."

However, this position seems to be a minority one today within the Herut party Knesset faction even though this paragraph is part of the Likud platform in the past elections. The majority of the Herut members tend to agree that pursuing the matter of imposing Israeli law on the West Bank would be a harmful move in terms of Israeli public relations.

The idea of functional compromise in Judea and Samaria has acquired many supporters in the Herut faction; among them the chairman of the Likud coalition, Haim Corfu, as well as Michael Daiksell, Haim Kaufman, Deputy Minister of Defence, Mordechai Zippori, Yitzhak Yitzhaki and David Levi.

Similarly, in the La'am Knesset faction of the Likud, the MKs also seem to have adopted the possibility of Dayan's plan for functional compromise. Members of Knesset, Amnon Linn, Yigal Cohen and Ehud Olmert are willing to forgo Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank as long as settlement would not be interfered with and at the same time to allow a measure of internal autonomy for the Arabs living in the West Bank. The general impression is that except for MK Moshe Shamir, the other members of the La'am faction would accept some kind of functional compromise.

Regarding the attitudes of these same members of Knesset as regards the other borders of Israel, the general consensus of almost all members of the Likud party and all its factions is that on the Golan Heights there is no room for compromise, other than cosmetic adjustments. There is near unanimity of opinion that the Golan, for security reasons, must remain in Israeli hands. At most, there is a slight tendency among some of the members of Knesset of the Likud to speak of functional arrangements whereby political sovereignty would return to Syrian hands but security would require Israeli settlements and military presence throughout the Golan.

With regard to the southern borders of Israel, there does seem to be real readiness on the part of the Likud members of Knesset to accept various arrangements for Sharm el Sheikh and Rafiah. The main consideration would be that of security and as such, any of several arrangements which would ensure security would seem to be acceptable.

Barzelai's report in these two articles which appeared in Ha'Aretz are interesting from several points of view. It is doubtful that Begin would have any serious problems with his party as he goes in the direction of moderation and compromise. No one seriously regards his party followers as counter-weight to Begin's strong position of power. However, we can expect to hear sounds from some of those followers in the Knesset, of "a betrayal of principle." Begin would not have any real trouble in keeping his people in line, especially as we could expect that he could depend upon the MK and elements of the Ma'arach to support formulas of compromise. However, if Barzelai is right in his evaluation of the views of the Liberal party this would seem to preclude what some have indicated as a possibility of a moderate faction within the coalition. Some observers have suggested that in the squeeze that might yet come, there would possibly be a Peace compromise Group fashioned from the members of Dash (D.M.C.), several members of the Mafdal (N.R.P.) and the Liberal party members. This does not seem to be any real possibility and if there is to be any strong support within the coalition government for a compromise formula, it would have to come mainly from the D.M.C.

In a series of four articles which appeared in Ha'Aretz, Dan Margolit traces recent developments within Gush Emunim.

The question as to what will happen when the hour of compromise arises, if it does, has generated considerable anxiety among the settlers in Judea and Samaria. The members of The Land of Israel Movement and Gush Emunim had

found a supporter in the person of Menahem Begin and with his dramatic rise to power, had felt that their policies of settlement were assured. The Sadat visit and the dramatic events which are quickly unfolding here seem to have caused more than a ripple effect in this entire community. Dan Margolit, in extensive and intensive interviews with settlers throughout the West Bank, describes their uncertainty and anxiety as to their future. They were very much disturbed by statements of the Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan that fateful decisions will have to be made and previous policies reconsidered. So too, they were extremely concerned as to what the Prime Minister meant when he spoke about racking our brains to find a solution for Judea and Samaria. Hitherto, they had thought that Begin was clear and firm as concerned the future of the territories. At this point they find themselves being able to rely only upon one true and loyal friend in the government namely, Ariel Sharon. The Minister of Defense, Ezer Weizman also has indicated that there should be a reconsideration of our position. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Moshe Dayan has expressed dissatisfaction with the impression created throughout the world by the settlement plans of the government and even Minister of Education, Zevulun Hammer has hedged as regards settlement.

Within the leadership of the Gush Emunim movement, there is considerable controversy at present as to what policy they should adopt. For the present they have decided not to take any action. The question has arisen as to whether or not they should continue to support the policy of merely being allowed to set up several tents in a military camp or further develop already existing settlements. Both of these policies represent a compromise of their principles and at best a necessary concession to President Carter. A third possibility which is being advocated by some is that they begin to slowly move in the direction of confrontation with Begin and his government.

As a result of this uncertainty as to future political and settlement activities, the Gush Emunim movement has recently begun to move in the direction of cultural or spiritual activities. They have set up a department of settlement and have begun to develop plans and budgets and housing as well as initiating aliya and educational programs. Two of the leaders of Gush Emunim left recently for the United States to encourage aliya.

What is clear is that Sadat's visit has not changed the very deep faith of the Gush Emunim people as to the righteousness of their cause. Margolit reports that he did not find any element of doubt or tendency to reconsider ideological positions. There was no indication of readiness to reconsider their views regarding Judea and Samaria. There is no doubt in their minds as to Israel's right, as well as ability to continue to rule a million plus Arabs in the territories.

Despite their tenacity as regards their ideological principles, they do realize that there has been an erosion in public support. As a result, even within the strongest elements and centers of the Gush Emunim movement, one does begin to hear doubts and fears. Although one continues to hear speeches that they do have the power to even bring down the present government if it were to change its policy regarding the settlements, they do not have the ring of truth.

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