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Special Report

The Israeli Parliamentary Elections

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THE ISRAELI PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

On 28 October, Israeli voters go to the polls to choose 120 members of the seventh Knesset (parliament) for a four-year term. The election takes place in a period of sharply rising conflict on the Arab-Israeli cease-fire lines and amid continuing efforts by the Big Powers to achieve a peace settlement. In the tightly structured Israeli party system, the over-all results of this election were probably determined in large measure last August when Mrs. Golda Meir, prime minister and leader of the governing Israeli Labor Party - Mapam "Alignment," succeeded in winning maverick Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan's pledge not to bolt the party. With Dayan in the fold, it is almost certain that the star-studded Alignment will again be the front runner, will form the next government, and will return Mrs. Meir to the Prime Ministry. Moreover, the added domestic support Mrs. Meir gained from her trip to the US may confirm the Alignment in its present slight, but absolute, majority—provided that it can get out the vote of its possibly over-confident supporters.

In any event, Mrs. Meir is likely to preserve the present National Unity Government's coalition with the religious and nonsocialist rightist parties in order to maintain for the Arabs and the Big Powers the image of a united Israel. The issue of peace and security is the overriding Israeli concern. There is little prospect that the elections will bring any softening of Israel's opposition to a return to the pre-1967 borders or to withdrawal to any borders that Israel considers will not provide maximum security. A viable peace settlement, moreover, remains a prerequisite for any Israeli withdrawals at all.

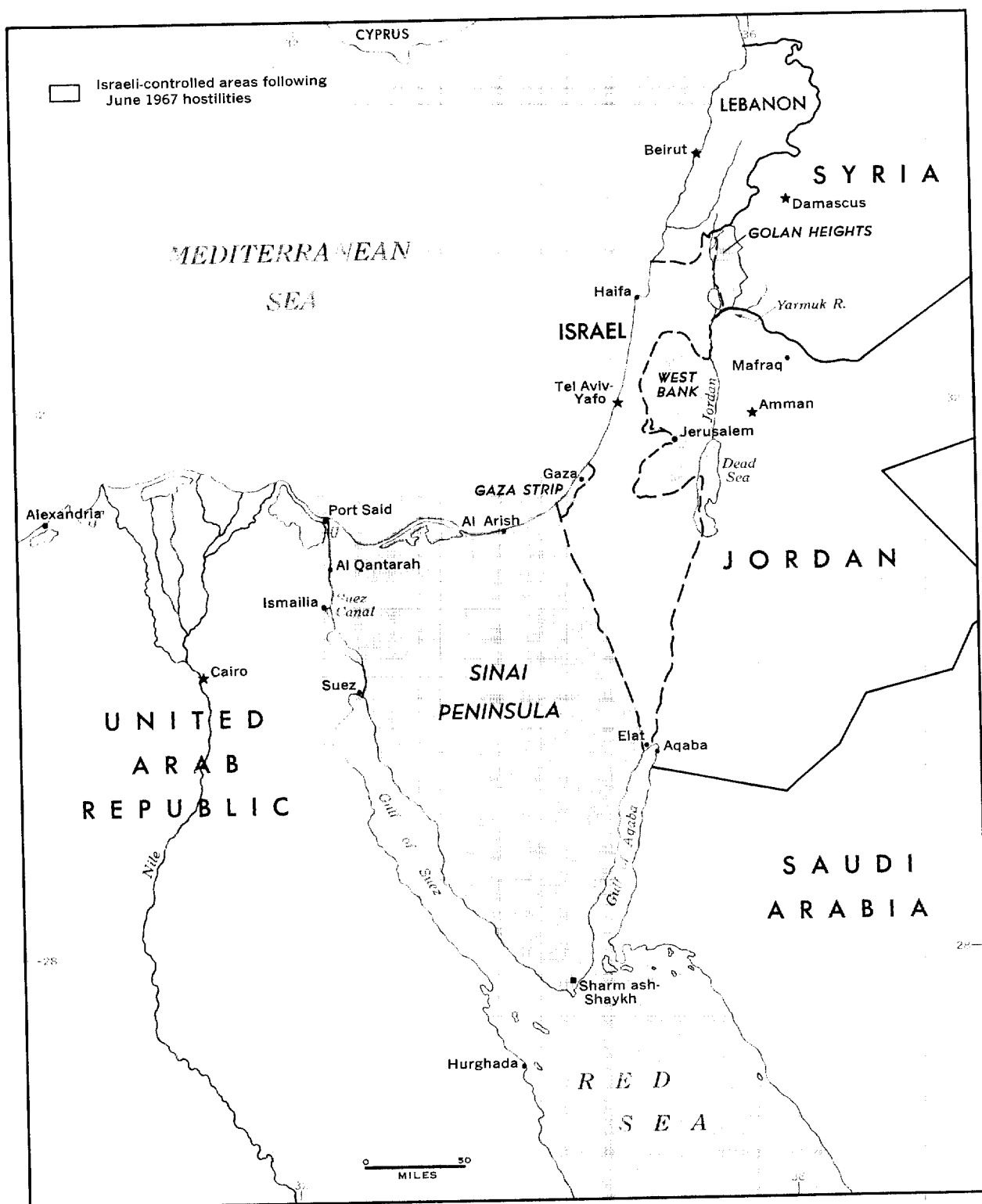
BACKGROUND

Israel elects its parliament by a system of proportional representation with a single national constituency. The Israeli voter chooses a list of candidates selected by each party, rather than any single individual. This system has resulted in a multiplicity of parties that has made coalition

governments a necessity. Mapai, the largest of the labor-oriented socialist parties, has always won a plurality, but no party in Israel's 21-year history has yet won a majority.

In this election, for the first time, the labor parties have achieved what Mrs. Meir calls a "dream fulfilled"—the unity of labor. In 1968,

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Golda Meir
Prime Minister
and leader of the
Labor-Mapan Alignment



Yigal Allon
Deputy Prime Minister
leader of Ahdut faction
of Israeli Labor Party



Moshe Dayan
Minister of Defense
leader of Rafi faction
of Israeli Labor Party



Pinhas Sapir
Secretary General
of the
Israeli Labor Party

Mapai, which has been the core of all Israeli cabinets since 1948 and has furnished all of Israel's prime ministers, merged with two smaller labor-socialist parties: Ahdut Avodah, which split from Mapai in the 1940s and is now led by the present deputy prime minister, Yigal Allon; and Rafi, a group of more recent Mapai dissidents, headed by Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan, which broke with the party in 1965. The new party was called the Israel Labor Party (ILP). This past spring, the ILP worked out an alliance with the remaining labor-socialist party, the left-wing Mapam. This grouping, called the "Alignment," now holds 63 seats (67, counting four Arab-affiliated seats) in the 120-member Knesset. It is led by Mrs. Meir, ILP secretary general Pinhas Sapir, Allon, and Dayan.

If the Alignment confirms its majority in Tuesday's election, it will be in a position to effect electoral reforms that would probably limit proportional representation and could eliminate the minor parties. An Alignment majority would bring an end to the need for coalition governments and might also change the relationship between Judaism and the state by ending the Alignment's historical dependence on the religious parties as coalition partners.

The six previous parliamentary elections show an amazing consistency in Israeli voting habits despite a vast increase in the size of the electorate and shifts in its composition. In general terms, the labor-oriented socialist parties have consistently won 48 to 51 percent of the vote, the nonsocialist "rightist" parties 24 to 28 percent, the religious parties 12 to 15 percent, the Communist and Arab groups 3 to 4 percent each, and all other parties combined less than 3 percent. This consistent pattern results from the extremely strong party system and from the unique importance that political parties hold in the life of the individual.

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The parties are the founders and sponsors of almost all the collective and cooperative agricultural settlements, and—via the labor unions—control jobs and services in the urban areas. From the very moment of an immigrant's arrival, the parties vie for his favor. They help the new arrivals get settled, furnishing them with housing, employment, educational facilities, health needs, and recreation. Moreover, most newspapers are party-run, as are most youth and athletic groups. By such services and influence, the parties have been able to capture and hold members and to command a high degree of party loyalty and discipline.

Mapai, the oldest of the labor parties, has further reinforced its position by its long-term control of the huge General Federation of Labor—the Histadrut. This union represents over 90 percent of Israel's wage earners and, with their

dependents, accounts for over half of Israel's population. This "state within a state" is also the country's largest employer, as it owns and operates manufacturing, construction, and market corporations, clinics and hospitals, rest homes, theaters, and insurance companies.

The current National Unity government, called by some the "wall-to-wall coalition," was established as an emergency government in the name of national unity on the eve of the Six Day War. It has not been changed except for Mrs. Meir's succession to the prime ministership following the death of Levi Eshkol last February. Although Mrs. Meir could depend solely on the Alignment's 63-seat majority, she has chosen to maintain the coalition in order to present a facade of unity and to keep right-wing criticism within bounds; for their part her coalition partners are happy to enjoy the fruits of participation.

THE HISTADRUT ELECTIONS: A POSSIBLE AUGURY

Most observers believe that the country-wide Histadrut—General Federation of Labor—election on 2 September was not an accurate political weathervane. Though large, the Histadrut electorate of some 990,000 is only half that of the Knesset's 1,750,000. Moreover, voting is restricted to Histadrut members, not all parties participate, and the issues are primarily economic rather than political. Nevertheless, because of their proximity to the Knesset elections, the results have been carefully scrutinized for trends, particularly this year when the shift of a few seats will determine an Alignment majority.

For the political pulse-takers, there were interesting shifts on both the left and the right. The Alignment, while still retaining a majority, dropped from its 77 percent vote in 1965 to 62 percent—off 15 percent. The nonsocialist parties led by Gahal took almost 25 percent of the vote, a 5-6 percent rise, suggesting a definite shift to the right. Another 3.7 percent would be added on the right if Ben Gurion's dissident Rafi State List, which supports the views of Dayan, is included.

On the left, a notable advance was made by the Arab nationalist, Communist Rakah Party, which jumped its vote among Arab Histadrut members (some 35,000) from under 20 percent in 1965 to 31 percent this year. Rakah's over-all percentage of the Histadrut vote is still only 2.5, but its gains demonstrate serious Communist inroads among Israel's Arabs. In the Knesset elections, this may signal a shift away from the Arab parties affiliated with the Alignment (which now hold four seats) to Rakah (which holds three).

Whether these trends will repeat themselves in the Knesset elections or will be overcome by stepped-up Alignment campaigning efforts, remains to be seen. Alignment officials tried to blame the shifts on low voter participation—only some 630,000 went to the polls. Mrs. Meir appeared worried, however, and was bluntly critical of her party. "It had been preoccupied with itself for the last ten years," she said, "and had managed to make people sick and tired."

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PROBLEMS WITHIN THE ALIGNMENT

The Alignment is far from being a monolithic structure. It suffers from internal ideological and organizational differences as well as from severe personal rivalries. The partners (Mapai, Mapam, Ahdut, and Rafi) are joined in tenuous union, and the Alignment's long-term staying power is questionable.

The veteran Mapai party is moderately socialist, but flexible enough to include private enterprise in its spectrum. Mapam is a decidedly more rigid and doctrinaire Marxist-socialist party, with a tendency in the past of following a pro-Soviet line and being "soft" on the Arab-Israeli dispute. Despite Mapam's shift toward a more bourgeois line over the past year, it is still considered by some political groups in Israel as pro-Arab and by a few as potentially disloyal. Both

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Mapai and Mapam are dominated by aging Zionist leaders of Eastern European origin, who are being challenged by younger elements in their own parties, and by the Ahdut and Rafi leaders, Allon and Dayan.

The Ahdut and Rafi groups are essentially different from the old guard parties. There are, of course, rivalries and some old scars between them, but both parties are led by and basically appeal to the Sabras. These younger, native-born Israelis are more pragmatic than ideological, less interested in Zionist philosophy than in the fact of the State of Israel, and less concerned with Israel's image abroad than with their determination to maintain the country's viability. Led by military heroes, the parties are more militant than socialist and think primarily in security terms. On domestic issues, Ahdut is more hard-line socialist than Mapai while Rafi is less so.

This internal struggle is personified in the three-way contest for the prime ministership, which pits the establishment old guard, represented by Mrs. Meir and ILP Secretary General Sapir, against challengers Allon and Dayan. The fight threatened to break into the open last February when former premier Eshkol died. To avoid a showdown and to block Dayan, the most dangerous challenger, the old guard surprised almost everyone by pulling 71-year-old Golda Meir out of semiretirement and installing her as prime minister.

Since her take-over in March, however, the redoubtable Mrs. Meir has so firmly taken control of the enlarged party, and has so solidified herself with the Israeli public generally, that both Allon and Dayan apparently have decided to bide their time until she is ready to step down. Mrs. Meir is now expected to continue in office for at least a year or two after the elections, health permitting. The struggle is certain to re-emerge eventually and

will continue below the surface in the interim. Secretary General Sapir, the hard-working "eminence grise" of the ILP, will no doubt continue his maneuvers to undercut Dayan's position in the party and if possible to weaken his political punch with the public. Sapir himself has ambitions to take over, though he lacks the color and following of the two primary challengers. Earlier this year, Sapir was in fact trying to force Dayan to bolt the party and enter a political no man's land from which Sapir hoped he might never return. Mrs. Meir overruled Sapir, however, partly because of her fear of Dayan's potential as an independent. In her direct way, Mrs. Meir last August went to the Rafi convention to plead against a proposed split, telling the delegates it would be a "catastrophe" and an "unforgivable luxury."

DAYAN AND THE RAFI PARTY

Dayan's decision not to bolt removed an important hurdle threatening the Alignment's drive for a majority. The charismatic Dayan, though disliked by the party establishment, is immensely popular with the Israeli public, particularly the younger voters. The general and his political lieutenants are fully aware of this leverage and have extracted a high price for their continued loyalty. Mrs. Meir was compelled to promise Dayan the Defense Ministry as long as she remained in power and also a cabinet slot for one of his lieutenants; moreover, she called off Sapir's attempt to pack Rafi's election list with anti-Dayan candidates.

Even if Dayan had bolted, it is doubtful that he could have won enough seats to engineer a coalition with the opposition and get himself the prime ministership. It would probably have been no more than a spoiling operation, and he would have lost his job as defense minister. In addition, Dayan has neither the personality nor the aptitude for the day-to-day grind of politics and party

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building. By not bolting, Dayan has stayed on the most certain path to power, through the Alignment machine.

An interesting sidelight is that some of Dayan's supporters are so bitter over his decision that they have formed a new party, the State List. Under the leadership of the octogenarian former prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, who led the original Rafi break with Mapai in 1965, this faction obviously hopes to make enough of a showing to entice Dayan into leaving the Alignment after the elections—but this now seems a vain hope.

THE OPPOSITION

Sixteen separate party lists were entered by the closing date on 24 September. The opposition parties offer widely divergent approaches to Israeli and Middle East problems, but none presents any real threat to the Alignment. Party platforms range from that of the Arab-based New Communist Party, which is recognized by Moscow and follows a strong pro-Nasir line, to the hard line of the Land of Israel group, which advocates the present cease-fire lines as minimum permanent borders, the expulsion of all Arabs from the occupied territories, and the development of a nuclear deterrent. At best, the opposition could aggregate just enough seats to deprive the Alignment of an absolute majority.

The possibility of a government based on nonsocialist opposition parties, however, has always been a faint back-of-the-mind worry to Alignment leaders, and this certainly played a part in Mrs. Meir's resolve to keep Dayan in the field. The opposition divides into two main blocs—the nonsocialist "rightist" parties and the religious parties—with a scattering of minor parties. The Alignment's chief concern has been that Gahal (the Herut Liberal Party bloc) would win

enough votes to entice the religious parties out of their traditional coalition with labor and bring about the defection of some of the more "hawkish" elements from the Alignment itself.

The Gahal bloc has been gradually increasing its percent of the vote, reaching 21 percent in the 1965 election. Gahal spokesmen say they expect to do even better in this election, i.e., to achieve between 26 and 30 seats. Their predictions are thought to be optimistic, but in the present siege-like atmosphere Gahal's supernationalist militancy may appeal to more voters than previously. On the other hand, the presence of Dayan and Allon on the Alignment ballot seems likely to blur the differences, and Dayan's decision to stay in the Alignment has certainly dashed any real hopes Gahal might have had of achieving an alternative coalition. Gahal may also suffer some inroads from the presence of Ben-Gurion's State List and the annexationist Land of Israel party.



Menahem Beigin
Leader of the Gahal Party

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The religious parties, the other main bloc, are regarded as somewhat anachronistic in a state where most people are not particularly religious and like to think of themselves as modern and secular. There is some identity of political and economic views between the religious parties and Gahal, but the religious parties are mainly interested in maintaining Jewish religious law and tradition among the people. Since 1948, therefore, they have been the traditional coalition partner with Mapai—willing to trade support on secular issues in return for a monopoly on religious affairs. From time to time, both Dayan and Gahal spokesmen have expressed qualms about being “at the mercy” of the religious parties.

THE ISSUES

The opposition's main charge against the Alignment is that it suffers from “bigness.” The prospect of an Alignment majority has raised fears among the small parties that they will be eliminated, and among the religious parties that they will not be needed as coalition partners. This fear has not pushed them into more than a perfunctory campaign, however. The independent newspaper *Haaretz* recently criticized the opposition parties for what it described as their obvious desire to sit in coalition rather than mount a real fight. The paper warned that the end of Israeli democracy might be at hand. Certainly, the prospect of an Alignment “steamroller” has raised some such qualms, as has the labor-oriented parties' 20-year power monopoly, and the issue may therefore play some role. Gahal, in particular, is harping on the danger to Israeli democracy if the Alignment wins an absolute majority.

The overriding issues for most Israelis, however, are peace and security, and how best to obtain them. Few in Israel really believe that the Arabs are ready to make peace. Therefore, political debate centers on security—in particular, on

what Israel's most secure borders would be and what should be done with the occupied Arab territories. There is a wide range of views, both among and within the parties, from those who want to give it all back in exchange for peace, to those who oppose giving up “an inch.”

The Alignment's stand is generally in the middle. There are differences, of course, but there is more unanimity than disagreement, most apparently on the question of what Israel's northern and southern borders should be. Discussion, therefore, centers more on tactics than substance, less on what is needed than on whether Israeli leaders should express their demands publicly prior to negotiations. Especially provocative is Dayan's suggestion that Israel should move ahead unilaterally and “draw the map”—establish defensive points and permanent settlements—without waiting for negotiations with the Arabs and in the face of Big Power peace efforts.

There is general agreement that there can be no return to the pre-1967 borders, that Jerusalem must be retained, the Golan Heights kept, the Gaza strip annexed, and control maintained over Sharm ash-Shaykh with a land connection from there to the port of Elat. Even the “dovish” Mapam, which after the war called for the return of all territories, has now moved closer to this position.

The only real argument left concerns the disposition of the remainder of the occupied territory—particularly the West Bank—and, especially, Dayan's proposal to integrate the occupied territory economically with Israel. Believing that peace is far off, Dayan wants to extend Israeli law to the occupied territories, develop them in cooperation with their Arab occupants, and establish some form of Israeli-Arab coexistence.

Many Alignment leaders—Mrs. Meir, Sapir, and Foreign Minister Abba Eban—oppose this

THE SIXTEEN PARTIES IN THE CURRENT ELECTION

The Alignment

1. Israeli Labor Party - Mapam: The ruling majority party led by Prime Minister Golda Meir, Party Secretary General Pinhas Sapir, Deputy Prime Minister Allon, and Defense Minister Moshe Dayan. A labor-oriented, moderate, socialist grouping of the former Mapai, Ahdut Avodah, and Rafi parties that merged into the Israel Labor Party in 1965 and achieved labor unity this spring with its alliance with Mapam.
2. Progress, Development, and Druze List: One of two tame Arab parties allied with the Labor-Mapam Alignment; led by Seif e-Din Zu'abi.
3. Cooperation and Fraternity List: The other tame Arab party; led by Diab Ubeid.

Religious Parties

4. National Religious Party: The traditional coalition partner with the Labor parties in previous governments; led by Haim Moshe Shapiro, Minister of Justice. Primarily interested in maintenance of religion in the state; wants to retain West Bank (Judea and Samaria) for historical and religious reasons.
5. Agudat Yisrael: An ultraorthodox religious party, led by Yitzak Meir Levin.
6. Poalei Agudat Yisrael: The labor wing of Agudat Yisrael.

Nonsocialist "Right"

7. Gahal: A merger of the former Herut and Liberal parties; a nonsocialist, free-enterprise, rightist group led by the former Irgun terrorist leader, Minister without Portfolio Menahem Beigin, and by Minister without Portfolio Joseph Sapir. Follows a militant hard line vis-a-vis the Arabs, and a "not give an inch" policy regarding return of the occupied territories.
8. Free Center: A small rebel split-off from Herut; led by Shmuel Tamir; believes that Gahal is somewhat soft and has compromised its principles by joining the government coalition.
9. Independent Liberal Party: Nonsocialist, free-enterprise reform party, led by Minister of Tourism Moshe Kol; supported by professionals and intellectuals who oppose hard-line policies of Gahal.

Others

10. Rakah (New Communist) Party: The primarily Arab-based Communist party led by Meir Wilner. Takes a strong Arab Nationalist, pro-Nasirist line, and is recognized by Moscow.
11. Maki: The small Jewish-based Communist party, which has broken with Moscow; led by Dr. Moshe Sneh, it supports the government on Arab-Israeli issues.
12. Haolam Hazeh (New Force): A small neutralist party led by maverick Uri Avneri, the publisher of a sex-and-scandal sheet; Avneri plays the role of gadfly to the government, advocates the formation of a binational Palestine, and separation of church and state.
13. The State List (or New Rafi): A group of Rafi dissidents unhappy with Dayan's decision to remain in the ILP. Led by 83-year-old former prime minister David Ben-Gurion.
14. The Land of Israel List (Eretz Israel): A new, hard-line rightist group that advocates recognition of the present cease-fire lines as Israel's permanent borders, emigration of Arabs from the occupied territories, and development of a nuclear deterrent. Led by Dr. Israel Eldad, a former Stern Gang terrorist leader.
15. The Peace List: A new party of leftists, former Mapamniks advocating peace without annexations; led by Dr. Gad Yatziv, a young sociologist.
16. Young Israel: A perennially unsuccessful group that advocates increased influence for the Oriental Jewish community; led by Yitzak Emmanuel.

concept, fearing especially the demographic threat to the Jewish character of Israel if great segments of Arab population are integrated. Mrs. Meir says flatly that she "wants a Jewish Israel...without the need for a daily census to determine when the Arab population has reached 50 percent." What this group calls for instead is enough territory for maximum security, with a minimum number of Arabs.

Other objections to Dayan's proposals are based on economic and diplomatic grounds. For example, Foreign Minister Eban maintains that Israel cannot assume that a peace settlement is impossible. He believes Israel must keep its options open and must not destroy its negotiating flexibility by prematurely and unilaterally drawing a map. Deputy Premier Allon has authored his own plan, delineating the security zones and borders he thinks Israel must retain. In many ways, he is very close to Dayan's views, but he opposes complete integration of the territories for demographic reasons.

The Alignment platform is thus somewhat vague; in fact, a special party subcommittee was required to work out phraseology that includes both main schools of thought. Dayan won his hard-line emphasis on "strategic security borders," and Mrs. Meir and company won their "nonspecificity" requirement—only Jerusalem is mentioned. The platform emphasizes a side-step position on which almost everyone in Israel can agree: no return to the pre-war borders, no withdrawal without peace, and no peace without direct negotiations. As Mrs. Meir sums it up: there is no need to draw a map until the Arabs are ready to negotiate, and until then, "Why should we argue with ourselves?" For campaign purposes, however, Mapam—which boggles at the idea of permanent settlements in the territories—is allowed to give its own interpretation to its followers, and Dayan continues to preach his

draw-the-map-now doctrine, but dilutes it slightly by adding that "everything is negotiable."

OUTLOOK

Neither inside nor outside the Alignment is there any doubt that the Alignment will take its usual big chunk of the parliament, that it will form the core of the next government, and that Mrs. Meir will be returned to the prime ministry. Until recently it seemed, however, that the Alignment might not confirm its current majority. There were several reasons for this pessimism: the relative tameness of this year's campaign; the voters' preoccupation with the daily fighting along the borders; and the overconfidence of Alignment supporters—all adding up to a good possibility of low voter participation. The Alignment is concerned over these factors and is working hard to overcome them.

Alignment leaders believe they made a definite gain as a result of Israeli reaction to Mrs. Meir's recent visit to the US and her talks with President Nixon. They now think that the publicity given her trip has added enough to the

Alignment's drawing power so that if they can just "get out the vote," it will perhaps carry them to a small—but nevertheless absolute—majority. Although Mrs. Meir did not return home with any tangible evidence of US support, her trip is interpreted by Israeli media as an endorsement and is regarded in Israel as near "triumphal" in light of the obviously warm reception she received in Washington and elsewhere. Since her return, Mrs. Meir has emphasized President Nixon's "full understanding" of Israel's position and problems and her belief that the US will continue its military and economic assistance. As one newspaper put it, Mrs. Meir achieved all that was possible by personal diplomacy.

Mrs. Meir's stock had been on the rise even before the trip. Her tough, determined stand on peace and security and her firmness in the face of external pressures have won her wide support throughout the country. Whether or not the Alignment wins the majority it seeks, Mrs. Meir apparently plans to continue the present National Unity coalition to underscore her theme of Israeli solidarity and unity.

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