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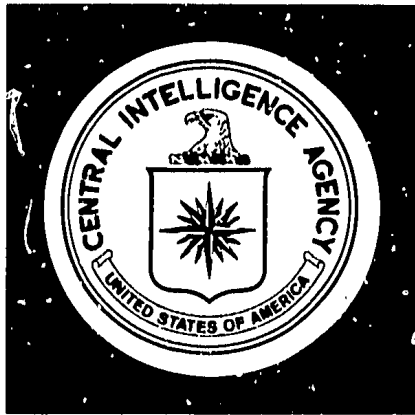
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# Intelligence Memorandum

*The Israeli Parliamentary Elections,  
31 December 1973*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
6 December 1973

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Israeli Parliamentary Elections, 31 December 1973

Summary

Although many political leaders would prefer to postpone Israel's parliamentary elections, they are now firmly scheduled for 31 December. The elections had earlier been set for 30 October, but were postponed during the second week of the fourth Arab-Israeli war. Had it not been for the Yom Kippur War, the elections would have been held in a fairly comfortable, relaxed atmosphere. The main issues would have been economic and social, with some debate about how fast and to what extent Israel should develop the occupied Arab territories. The political shifts that had developed since the last elections were not expected to alter the present parliamentary line-up significantly. In the aftermath of the war, however, the political climate is acrimonious. Mrs. Meir and Defense Minister Dayan are under fire, and the outcome is no longer automatic. Nevertheless, the prospect at the beginning of December is very strong that Mrs. Meir's Labor-MAPAM Alignment will form the core of the next Israeli coalition government. The main concern is whether or not there will be a voting shift to the right-wing Likud grouping of sufficient proportions to limit Mrs. Meir's negotiating flexibility and deny her the mandate she needs to try for a realistic peace settlement.

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The Parties

Twenty-one separate party lists have been entered in the proportional-representation balloting. Ten of them are brand new. Most of the new ones, except for the Black Panthers--an Oriental Jewish youth group protesting the Orientals' economic, social and political status--are not expected to win the one percent of the vote necessary to earn seats in parliament.

The main contest will be between Mrs. Meir's Labor-MAPAM Alignment and its main critic, the rightist Likud (National-Liberal Union). The Likud is a recently formed alliance of GAHAL (itself an alliance) and two smaller splinter parties, the Free Center and the State List. (The Likud is supported by the annexationist Land of Israel Movement, which is not a political party.) Altogether, the Likud holds 31 seats. Mrs. Meir's Labor-MAPAM Alignment holds 57 seats and counts 4 more seats from the "tame" Arab parties which vote with it. Mrs. Meir's Alignment and the Arabs are in coalition with the National Religious Party (NRP), with 12 seats, and the small Independent Liberal Party, which has 4 seats. The coalition counts a total of 77 seats out of the 120 seats in the Knesset. The 43 seats outside the coalition are held by the Likud, two ultra-conservative religious groups, two Communist parties, and a few independents.

Pre-war Election Prospects

Before the Yom Kippur War, most observers estimated that Mrs. Meir's Labor Alignment would at most lose a half-dozen seats and was certain to retain control of the next government. The projected loss of Alignment seats was based on signs of economic and social discontent stemming from inflation, heavy taxes, widespread strikes, housing shortages and from the economically disenfranchised Oriental Jewish community. Her main coalition partner, the NRP, was expected to retain its present strength.

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Mrs. Meir was planning to campaign on a platform of programs to alleviate these domestic problems; her main opposition--the new right-wing grouping, Likud--was rent with internecine wars and personality clashes, and there were doubts that it would hold together past the elections. Even though the Likud includes in its ranks the formidable Menahem Begin--the anti-British terrorist chief and unchallenged leader of GAHAL--and three popular retired generals, Ezer Weizman, Arik Sharon, and Avraham Yoffe, it was expected at best to make only slight gains, perhaps four or five seats, and to present no threat to Labor's 25-year monopoly of power.

Elections held in the Histadrut (Israel's giant federation of labor which covers 90 percent of Israel's organized labor) on 11 September seemed to confirm the view that major changes in the Israeli voting pattern were not in sight. Mrs. Meir's Labor Alignment did drop from 62% to 58% of the federation vote, but the Likud made no gains, maintaining 22% of the vote. Most of the Alignment's loss was to several small Oriental parties, notably the Black Panthers, and to two labor allied groups, the Independent Liberals and the Religious Workers.

#### Impact of the War

The Yom Kippur War introduced several new factors into the election campaign. It clearly shifted the focus from economic and social issues to the larger questions of war and peace. The mere outbreak of war had a negative impact on the ruling Alignment's election prospects. Subsequent criticism of the government's failure to anticipate the Arab attack, its handling of the war, the enormous cost in lives and equipment, and Israel's supposed knuckling under to US pressure almost certainly have eroded popular support of the coalition.

On the other hand, for the first time in 25 years there is a good possibility of serious peace negotiations with the Arabs. This prospect should

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offset some of the issues raised by the government's conduct of the war, even though it resurrects all the arguments between "hawks" and "doves" about which territories to hold on to, how far to trust the Arabs, what is a viable peace, etc. These issues had appeared to be settled in favor of the "hawks" at the beginning of the election campaign in September. Now the heavy costs of the war have produced strong new pressures for peace in Israel.

These rising domestic pressures to reach an accommodation with the Arabs are of course reinforced by heavy external pressures on Tel Aviv: the world-wide impact of the Arab oil embargo, Israel's almost total diplomatic isolation and sole reliance on the US for diplomatic, financial and material support during the war, and the knowledge that US support of Israel, while strong, is not unlimited. These developments should aid Israeli political elements advocating a flexible program. Thus, the Labor Alignment has recently taken steps, at the urging of party doves, to soften its election platform. The new platform emphasizes that Israel's "central aim is to achieve peace." It speaks of "territorial compromise," and insists that Israel must maintain its Jewish character, which means, in effect, that it cannot annex areas with heavy Arab population such as the West Bank or Gaza Strip. At the same time, the platform holds to some long-standing Israeli demands: that Israel must have defensible borders and will not return to the lines of 4 June 1967, that a united Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel, and that Israel opposes the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on Jordan's West Bank. While softening its platform, the Alignment had to seek to refute Likud's anticipated charge that Israel is embarked on a "give-away" program. The party central committee confirmed the new platform on 6 December by a solid affirmative vote of 291 to 33.

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Mrs. Meir probably will seek to play down the alleged military bungling while emphasizing that she must try for a peace settlement and needs a "mandate." She will make it clear that she is not ready to relinquish anything vital to Israel's security. Although her government would undoubtedly be more flexible in peace talks than the rival Likud, there are clear limits beyond which Mrs. Meir cannot go. The Labor Alignment has never won a majority, and coalition government is a fact of Israeli political life. The Alignment's most important coalition partner, the National Religious Party, is conservative on the territories question--insisting on retention of Jerusalem and other holy sites on the West Bank. If concessions on Jerusalem are made or advertised, NRP support for the government will evaporate and in all likelihood most of the NRP Knesset members would defect to the Likud. The NRP will be in a kind of fulcrum position with its influence enlarging in direct proportion to Labor's loss of strength to Likud. Substantial gains for Likud would also provide Minister of Defense Dayan with greater influence within the Israeli Labor Party.

Likud, the Alignment's main antagonist, has essentially a negative program. Its main component, GAHAL, has consistently resisted any idea that Israel would withdraw from the occupied territories and has been generally hostile toward compromise with the Arabs. While Likud-supporting generals like Arik Sharon have emerged as new military heroes, no major segment of the Israeli electorate is inclined to respond with votes to a platform based on no more than criticism of the government's failure to anticipate the Arab attack, charges of errors in military judgment, and a "not-one-inch" stand on territorial compromise.

The election, therefore, may produce considerable heat, but is not likely to result in any marked shift to the right. Likud has no present prospect of winning enough seats to form the main core of a new governing coalition replacing (and breaking up)

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the Labor-MAPAM Alignment. The danger is that if Likud does well enough--if it wins, say, close to 40 seats--Mrs. Meir may be pressed to take them into a "national unity" government. There it could team up with other hawks to dominate policy and destroy any flexibility Mrs. Meir has for negotiating a peace settlement.

### Conclusions

Reports of a sharp drop in Mrs. Meir's popularity continue to circulate in Israel. There are a number of factors, however, which indicate that Mrs. Meir and the Labor Alignment will continue to lead a coalition government--perhaps with fewer seats--in spite of dissatisfaction with their handling of the war, the ache of heavy casualties, and continuing economic and social problems at home. The Yom Kippur War has caused some fundamental changes in Israeli thinking about the merits in the supposed security of the status quo and the risks of trying for a peace settlement. These derive from the following factors:

- the Arabs fought better and were more united than in previous wars, and would be more capable, militarily and politically, in the future;
- the cost to Israel in lives and equipment (in Israeli terms) was enormous, and new wars could be even more costly;
- the war raised the question of whether territory alone is worth the price of repeated warfare;
- the war underscored Israel's virtual isolation in the world, its dependence on Washington, and, ultimately, its subjection to the requirements of US vital interests;

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--the Soviet Union demonstrated its willingness to provide strong political and military support to the Arabs and to act vigorously to avert a clear-cut Israeli victory.

--the Arab oil strategy proved to be an extremely effective weapon capable of forcing the West to accommodate Arab demands.

One other indication of the outcome of the elections is the remarkable consistency and persistence of the Israeli voting patterns formed during the first elections in 1949. Political parties are part of the fiber of life in Israel, and party discipline is strong. It seems unlikely that the Israeli voter, in a time of great uncertainty about the future, will radically change that pattern now. A mass vote for Likud--an anti-socialist, free-enterprise party--would require the Israeli voter to close his eyes to pressing international and regional issues and, more important, to abandon his support for the liberal socialist policies Israel has followed since its inception.

The tantalizing prospect for peace in the Middle East that has been held out to the world and the Israeli citizen would evaporate with a Likud-dominated government, which would have nothing to discuss with the Arabs. The concessions made to the Labor Party's own so-called doves, as reflected in the outcome of the party leadership's conclave in the last week of November, suggest that Israel's politicians read the mood of the electorate as preferring the risks of negotiation by a strong Labor government to the prospect of renewed war under an unstable right-wing coalition.

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Present Line-up of the Israeli Political  
Parties in the Seventh Knesset

|  | Number<br>Seats |
|--|-----------------|
| <u>Government Coalition:</u>   |                 |
| Labor-MAPAM Alignment* (Israeli Labor Party ((Mapai, Ahdut, Rafi)); MAPAM) | 57              |
| Alignment Minorities Party (Arab parties)                                  | 4               |
| National Religious Party (NRP)   | 12              |
| Independent Liberal Party (Moderate non-socialist)                         | 4               |
|  | <u>77</u>       |
| <u>Outside Coalition:</u>  |                 |
| **GAHAL (Herut-Liberal Bloc)--right  | 26              |
| **State List (dissident RAFI)--center right                                | 3               |
| **Free Center (Split-off from Herut--right)                                | 2               |
| Agudat Israel (Ultra-orthodox religious)                                   | 4               |
| Poali Agudat Israel (Religious, labor arm of Agudat)                       | 2               |
| Haolem Hazeh (New Force) (maverick: Uri Avneri)--left                      | 1               |
| RAKAH (Arab Communists)  | 3               |
| MAKI (Jewish Communists)   | 1               |
| Independents (individuals)   | 1               |
|  | <u>120</u>      |

\*Make-up of Labor Alignment: 57 seats:

|       |           |
|-------|-----------|
| MAPAI | 34        |
| Ahdut | 8         |
| Rafi  | 8         |
|       | <u>50</u> |
| MAPAM | 7         |
|       | <u>57</u> |

\*\*Likud (National-Liberal Union)

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**PERCENTAGE TALLY OF KNESSET  
ELECTION VOTE, OCTOBER 1969**

|  | <u>Percentage</u> |
|--|-------------------|
| Alignment                                    | 46.22             |
| GAHAL  | 21.67             |
| National Religious Party                     | 9.74              |
| Alignment-affiliated Arab<br>and Druse lists | 3.51              |
| Agudat Israel                                | 3.22              |
| Independent Liberals                         | 3.21              |
| State List                                   | 3.11              |
| Arab Communists (RAKAH)                      | 2.84              |
| Poali Agudat Israel                          | 1.83              |
| Haolam Hazeh                                 | 1.23              |
| Free Centre                                  | 1.20              |
| Jewish Communists (MAKI)                     | 1.15              |
| Land of Israel                               | 0.55              |
| Peace List                                   | 0.37              |
| Young Israel (PAZ)                           | 0.15              |

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