



ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
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Commentary...

Seinfeld vs. Churchill

By Caroline Glick

Israel's election campaign presents an unparalleled challenge to Israelis on both the Right and the Left who care about the issues challenging the country. Today, not only do that have to defend what they believe, they also have to defend their right to believe anything.

Last Friday, Makor Rishon published an in-depth report on the growing isolation and demonization of the religious Zionist camp. Hebrew University sociologist Tamar Elor explained that the front running Kadima Party presents an impossible challenge for the religious Zionist sector, represented most prominently by the settlers in Judea and Samaria.

"The settlers are an ideological sector. Kadima, as a party devoid of an identity, a face, a name or a path, is their polar opposite," she asserted.

While it has made expelling Israelis from their homes in Judea and Samaria its flagship policy, Kadima has no ideology with which religious Zionists can clash. As a result, Elor maintains that religious Zionists "cannot do anything against it. They prefer [former far-Left Meretz party leader] Yossi Sarid the idealist, ten times more than Kadima which lacks any identity."

For his part, Sarid bemoaned the superficiality of the political climate cultivated by Kadima in a column in Haaretz on Friday. Sarid exhorted Israel's intellectuals to make their voices heard arguing, "With men of letters consistently involved, it will be impossible for a reality to emerge where PR men's cannon shells roar out while the muses and their servants are silent and silenced."

Kadima's basic sales strategy is to be a party unfettered by content. Being a party that stands for nothing means that it can stand for anything any voter wishes to believe it stands for. An empty shell can be filled with anything and so can be all things to all people.

LIKUD AND Labor, like the smaller parties across the political spectrum, are at a disadvantage in campaigning against Kadima because they all stand for something. And since Kadima is not bothered by principle, it has based its campaign plan on mocking its rivals for having ideological, political, religious or social essences around which their policies are based.

The fact that Kadima, which seeks to represent itself as a party of grown-ups has more in common with Jerry Seinfeld than David Ben-Gurion was made fairly clear in a series of interviews and profiles of its prominent leaders published in the weekend newspapers. Three such articles were published in Ma'ariv.

First there was a rather creepy interview with Kadima's Deputy Minister of the Interior Ruhama Avraham who first rose to prominence in the late 1990s as then prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu's secretary. As the interview noted, the most consistent characteristic of Avraham's career has been her willingness to exploit, betray and undermine anyone in order to advance her career. Avraham makes no bones about her blind ambition. In her words, "No one who can't push me ahead is allowed to play to game."

Avraham abandoned her supporters in the Likud Central Committee in favor of Sharon's withdrawal and expulsion plan from Gaza. Sharon rewarded her by appointing her Deputy Minister of the Interior. Avraham recognized that her support for Sharon meant that "I wouldn't have a chance [of reelection] in the Likud" and so she bolted the party and joined Kadima last November.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Avraham, is that in a four page interview - where she spoke at length about her decision to change her hair color from platinum blond to honey, and about her fashion sense which she says inspired her fellow legislators to pay more attention to their appearances, and always come to her for a final check before they go before the cameras - she never once mentioned any guiding philosophy regarding the greater good.

She never mentioned why Israel is worth serving. She never discussed the dangers Israel must defend against. She only talked about herself. While admitting that when she became a mother she made a conscious decision to prefer her career to her family, "knowing my children would suffer for it," Avraham, proudly and eerily announced that she considers herself "the mother of the People of

Israel."

Aside from the interview with our dear mother with honey colored hair, Ma'ariv published a profile of the founder of Kadima, advertising executive Reuven Adler. Adler, a graphic artist by training, served as one of Sharon's closest political advisors. His competitors denounce him, noting that during Sharon's premiership, Adler's PR firm, Adler-Homsky, won the advertising contracts of such plumb state-owned companies as the Electric Company, Israel Railroad and Bezeq Telecommunications (before it was privatized). His main rival, Ilan Shiloah, was quoted stating, "In the world of advertising there is no parallel to the phenomenon of moral corruption called Adler-Homsky."

As the profile notes, "Adler is credited with the transformation of Sharon's image from an extremist, aggressive right winger," (is there any other kind?), "to a warm and doting grandfather who extends his hand in peace." His advertising partner Eyal Homsky brags that Adler "created Kadima - the name, the logo, the slogan.... It's his baby."

Ma'ariv provided a fairly comprehensive picture of Adler the ad man - who tells us both what cellular telephone to buy and what party to vote for. But while the reader came away from the story knowing about his professional development and his attitude towards his work, one thing was conspicuously absent from the account: what he stands for. Not a word was devoted to what, if anything, Adler believes in other than Adler himself.

Finally, Ma'ariv - like every other newspaper in the country, led its Friday edition with its "exclusive" interview with Kadima leader and Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Although Olmert told Ma'ariv, as he told every other newspaper in the country, that he is planning to destroy many, many Israeli communities in Judea and Samaria if he becomes elected and surrender the vast majority of the areas, as well as a number of neighborhoods in Jerusalem, to the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority, he did not once explain how doing so would advance Israel's national interests or thwart the global campaign of jihad.

Olmert said nothing about what Israel represents to him or how he came to believe what he says he believes in today. Indeed, one of the main qualities that he seems to want the public to value in him is his intellectual shallowness. As he noted to an over-solicitous, pandering interviewer, "There is no subject that justifies a three hour meeting."

Rather than contend with the serious issues that one would expect a prime minister to concern himself with, Olmert's most heated, impassioned comments related not to policy, but to his rival, Netanyahu.

His criticism of the Likud leader again, did not relate to a policy matter. Olmert's attacks on Netanyahu were a page taken from his deputy Shimon Peres's playbook. Netanyahu, he insinuated, was responsible for Yitzhak Rabin's assassination because he spoke at an anti-Oslo accords rally. Now, by criticizing Olmert's decision to transfer tax revenues to the Hamas-led PA and his plan to destroy Israeli communities in order to give the land they are sitting on the Hamas, Olmert alleged that Netanyahu is inciting his murder.

ISRAELIS ARE a people filled with contradictions. On the one hand, we are one of the most ideologically and historically driven people in the world. Jews came here from over one hundred countries, inspired and awakened by leaders of a different era who sent out the call to return to our ancient homeland. We have built this country up from the ruins of millennia of neglect and turned it into the most prosperous, advanced, open and free society in the Middle East while defending it against acts of aggression and war that have continued without interruption for over 120 years. We could never have accomplished any of these things if we didn't have a deep seated belief in ourselves and in our rights and responsibilities as a free people in our land.

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On the other hand, we are driven by fads. Stars are elevated to the level of near deity one day, only to be forgotten the next. The same goes for everything from fashion lines, hair colors, investment priorities, marriages, politicians, nightclubs and professions. Since Sharon brought ad men like Adler in to run our politics, the same has held true for ideologies and values.

On March 28, some 3.5 million Israeli voters will be called upon to determine what they value. Will they choose substance or will they choose nothing? Will they demand leaders that model themselves after Winston Churchill or will they settle for an Israeli Jerry Seinfeld? All we can do is wait and watch. (Jerusalem Post Mar 13)

The Price of Ignoring Palestinians' Needs By Natan Sharansky

Hamas's victory in the Palestinian elections is the logical outcome of a "peace process" more than a decade long that completely ignored what was happening within Palestinian society.

Rather than seriously link the peace process to the building of a free society among the Palestinians, the democratic world, including Israel, turned a blind eye as Palestinian civil society was hollowed out, its streets taken over by armed thugs and its youth indoctrinated to glorify suicide bombers and despise Israel and America, Jews and Christians.

The international community repeated its shallow formula for peace like a broken record. International legitimacy, Israeli concessions and billions of dollars in aid were used to strengthen Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas's Palestinian Authority - the "moderates" who had ostensibly renounced violence and accepted Israel's existence - and marginalize extremist groups like Hamas.

The Palestinian election result is the fruit of this failed approach to peacemaking, which amounted to nothing more than supporting a corrupt dictatorship. The world believed that seriously pressing Palestinian leaders to enact real reform would only weaken the Palestinian Authority internally and strengthen Hamas. The truth is precisely the opposite. By failing to insist that the Palestinian Authority dedicate itself to improving the lives of Palestinians, the United States, Israel, the EU and other players in the peace process made themselves contemptible in the eyes of Palestinians who saw their lives only getting worse.

When Arafat died, I had hopes that perhaps a new path to peace would be taken. But it was not to be. Abbas was not told unequivocally that without serious reforms, he would receive no support from the free world. On the contrary, he was given a pass when he blatantly refused to confront terror groups.

For its part, Israel's government, encouraged by the effusive praise of the international community, embarked on a foolish policy of one-sided concessions, which, as I feared when I resigned from the government last May, only strengthened the forces of terror within Palestinian society.

To the outside world, the Palestinians have now chosen the party of terror over the party of peace. But in the eyes of most Palestinians, the differences between Hamas and the "moderate" Fatah were not primarily in their views toward Israel. In fact, satellites of Fatah, such as Tanzim and the Al Aksa brigades, were no less responsible for the terrorism against Israel than were Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Indeed, the leading figure on Fatah's list was Marwan Barghouti, a man serving five life sentences in an Israeli prison for his role in terror attacks.

No, the real difference for the Palestinians was that a Fatah-run Palestinian Authority was rightly seen as a corrupt and feckless organization that had done and would continue to do nothing to improve Palestinian lives, whereas Hamas was untainted by corruption and appreciated for providing real social services.

With the vote being a choice between corrupt terrorists dedicated only to themselves and honest terrorists who are also dedicated to others, is it any surprise that Hamas won by a landslide?

I believe that many Palestinians who voted for Hamas voted to end corruption, to restore law and order and to implement real reform; the slogan that Hamas chose in its election campaign was not "Throw the Jews into the Sea," but rather "Change and Reform." The paradox is that the only party that Palestinians see as credible on this internal reform agenda was a terror organization dedicated to Israel's destruction and which has declared President George W. Bush "the enemy of God" and "the enemy of Islam."

Now that the Palestinian Authority's corrupt dictatorship has collapsed and a terror organization riding a wave of resentment with the status quo is assuming power, the free world has an opportunity to restore moral clarity to the peace process.

The world must base their support for this new regime on two ironclad conditions. First, Hamas must explicitly abandon the goal of destroying Israel and renounce terrorism. Second, it must dedicate itself toward building a free society for the Palestinians.

For 12 years, Israel and the world have imposed the first condition and

ignored evidence when it was violated. As for the second condition, not only were democratic reforms seen as irrelevant to peace, supporting a corrupt dictatorship was seen as essential.

If the new Palestinian regime does not abide by these conditions, the free world, including Israel, must actively confront it and withhold legitimacy, money and concessions. But we must also seek ways to support any Palestinian individuals and organizations that do abide by these conditions.

My fear is that the results of the Palestinian elections will discredit the whole concept of democratic reform in the Middle East. But that would be to discredit an idea without it having been tried. For all the talk of the need for Palestinian reform and democracy, the only thing that the world insisted upon was holding elections. Elections do not make free society. Elections in a "free society" in which there is no law and order and in which democratic institutions are nonexistent, can bring the worst elements to power.

I hope that the policy of promoting democracy in the Middle East has not been dealt a fatal blow. Like so many tens of millions of Arabs in the region, there are countless Palestinians who want a better future, and we must seek every way to work with them. If we do not, we will end up not only betraying them once again, but also endangering ourselves. (IsraelNationalNews Mar 12)

Tired of Fighting and Winning By Evelyn Gordon

Kadima's campaign spots, by highlighting Ariel Sharon and billing Ehud Olmert merely as his heir, send an unintentionally revealing message: that Olmert himself has nothing to offer the country, so he must instead exploit the popularity of Kadima's comatose founder. And an analysis of Olmert's recent statements confirms this conclusion: He indeed has nothing to offer - except lies, empty promises and evasion of responsibility.

Consider, for instance, his pledge last week that a Kadima-led government "will not invest in construction or infrastructure development beyond the Green Line," thereby freeing up "billions of shekels for infrastructure development in the Negev, Galilee and Jerusalem."

If he truly intends to invest no money at all in the territories, that belies his repeated promises to strengthen the settlement blocs. But if, as his advisers later claimed, he only intends to halt investment outside the blocs, then where will those billions for the Negev and Galilee come from? Even today, there is almost no government-funded construction in the territories outside the blocs; a freeze that excluded the blocs would thus free up almost no money at all.

Or consider his pledge to finally build in E1, between Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumim. Due to American opposition, Sharon never did this, and deputy premier Olmert, far from protesting, energetically supported this decision. Does Olmert now intend to break with both Sharon's legacy and his own previous positions and defy the Bush administration? Or is he merely fantasizing that the US, for no discernible reason, will suddenly withdraw its opposition?

Then take his statement to last week's AIPAC conference: that allowing Hamas to run in the Palestinian elections was a mistake. This decision was made by Olmert's mentor, Sharon, and Olmert himself was part of the cabinet majority that approved it, despite a recommendation by Justice and Foreign Ministry experts that Israel insist on compliance with the Oslo Accords' explicit ban on parties that employ "unlawful or non-democratic means." Yet Olmert offered no apology; rather, he acted as if it had been someone else's decision.

Then, finally, there is the centerpiece of his platform: a massive unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank in exchange for international recognition of Israel's self-proclaimed borders. Quite aside from the irony of claiming Sharon's mantle for this idea - a claim that, given Sharon's repeated pledges to eschew further unilateral withdrawals, implicitly brands Olmert's mentor and role model as a liar - it is hard to imagine a wilder fantasy than this.

IN GAZA, Israel withdrew fully to the international border and pulled out every last Israeli, soldiers and civilians alike. Yet not one single country has been willing to declare Israel's "occupation" of Gaza ended; instead, the world still holds Israel responsible for Gaza's well-being, demanding, for instance, that it allow Gazans to work in Israel and to import and export via Israeli ports. So how does Olmert imagine that a far less complete withdrawal in the West Bank would be rewarded not only with international acknowledgment that the "occupation" had ended, but with recognition of Israel's unilaterally defined borders as well? After all, unlike in Gaza, he does not intend to withdraw to the Green Line; rather, he plans to retain major settlement blocs, including east Jerusalem.

Moreover, as senior Kadima official Avi Dichter correctly noted, the army's continued presence east of the fence is essential to Israel's security. But if, as Kadima therefore proposes, Israel withdraws its settlers but not its

soldiers, does anyone seriously believe that the world would declare the "occupation" ended?

Indeed, the Gaza withdrawal demonstrates just how little international compensation Israel could expect for any West Bank pullout. In exchange for leaving Gaza, Israel received a letter from US President George W. Bush in which Bush, inter alia, wrote that "existing major Israeli population centers" in the territories make a full return to the 1949 armistice lines "unrealistic." Sharon and Olmert trumpeted this as a major achievement, declaring that it permitted Israel to "strengthen its hold" on West Bank settlement blocs.

A letter, however, is not a formal treaty; it does not even bind Bush, much less his successors. And indeed, far from allowing Israel to strengthen the blocs, Bush flatly forbade Israel to build in E1 - which, as Olmert himself acknowledged in weekend interviews, is essential to keep Ma'aleh Adumim from becoming an isolated enclave.

And that is the disengagement in a nutshell: Israel gave up concrete territorial assets in order "strengthen its hold" on other assets, only to discover that the international community never supported that bargain and refused to grant the desired quid pro quo. And there is no reason to believe that the world would behave differently in response to the far less complete pullout that Olmert is offering in the West Bank.

Perhaps the root of Olmert's delusional policies can be found in his address last June to the Israel Policy Forum in New York, where he declared: "We are tired of fighting, we are tired of being courageous, we are tired of winning, we are tired of defeating our enemies. We want to be able to live in an entirely different environment of relations with our enemies."

Unfortunately, an entirely different relationship with one's enemies is possible only if your enemies share that goal - which even Olmert admits that the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority does not. Until then, the only choices are fighting back or being destroyed, winning or losing, defeating one's enemies or being defeated by them. That is precisely why all Israeli governments pre-Sharon, even those that favored "land for peace," refused to concede land without receiving a peace treaty in exchange: They understood that until the Arabs were ready to make peace, there was no choice but to continue fighting - and that no Arab government would have any incentive to make peace if it could get the land for free.

But Olmert, unfortunately, appears to have meant exactly what he said. He truly is tired of fighting and winning - so tired that he would rather take refuge in fantasies, even if Israel ends up the loser thereby. (Jerusalem Post Mar 15)

Pull the Plug on United Nations Relief and Works Agency!

By Jonathan Tobin

Halting aid to the PA means nothing if funds shift to the 'humanitarian' front

The current debate over a cutoff of aid to the Palestinian Authority is a classic case of good news and bad news coming together in the same package.

The good news is that the United States appears to be holding firm on its refusal to keep money flowing to the P.A. once the recently elected Hamas terrorists are in charge.

Though many thought Washington would quickly fold on this issue, the administration is sticking to its hard line against sending a cent to Hamas. And Congress is poised to enact aid restrictions that may act as a break on any State Department impulse to weaken on the issue.

But along with this comes the bad news. The United States and the European Union (which is also considering an aid cutoff to the P.A.) will be diverting a lot of the money that supported the P.A. kleptocracy to humanitarian aid. That way, it is reasoned, innocent Palestinians won't be forced to suffer from the crimes of their new masters.

That rationale sounds compassionate and logical. The only problem is that the humanitarian group that will receive the lion's share of the aid is one of the most thoroughly politicized and terrorist-infiltrated organizations in the world: the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

For 56 years, UNRWA has been the symbol of the world's double standard about the war on Israel by the Arab world.

While the United Nations deals with the rest of the world's refugees with a single agency - the U.N. High Commission for Refugees - the Palestinian refugees have their very own agency - UNRWA - with a particular mission.

Unfortunately, unlike virtually every other refugee aid group (including those that dealt with the hundreds of thousands of Jews who fled Arab lands in the aftermath of Israel's independence), UNRWA's primary mission has never been to help the Palestinians deal with the reality of the post-1948 world. Resettling the Palestinians wasn't the point. UNRWA exists to keep the Palestinians alive exactly where they are, so they can serve as justification for continued conflict with Israel.

As detailed in a new Jewish Telegraphic Agency series of reports on the topic, UNRWA's record is one of complicity not only with the political ends

of the Palestinian movement, but with its violent tactics as well.

Many of UNRWA's employees are members not only of mainstream Palestinian terror factions such as Fatah, but of the Islamist Hamas group as well. UNRWA suffered a major embarrassment when its former director, the Norwegian bureaucrat Peter Hansen, admitted as much two years ago, saying it was no big deal. Indeed, in the recent Palestinian election, a number of UNRWA workers were Hamas parliamentary candidates.

Of course, why should Hansen - who helped spread the lie that Israeli forces had committed a massacre of civilians in the Jenin refugee camp in 2002 - worry about terrorist infiltration?

The man lied not only about the casualties of Jenin, in which Hamas and Fatah gunmen fought pitched battles against Israelis who were seeking to destroy terror bases after Palestinian suicide bombings, but also told tales about the fact that this and other UNRWA camps were, in fact, longstanding U.N.-subsidized strongholds of Palestinian terror groups.

Hansen and UNRWA have used the prestige of their "humanitarian" perch to routinely bash Israel for its attacks on the camps, but almost never mention the fact that Israel is reacting to Palestinian terror. But again, this is because the U.N. has always turned a blind eye to the fact that the camps under its jurisdiction were the places where terrorist atrocities are planned and launched.

UNRWA employees have used its facilities to shield terrorists from Israel, and even used its ambulances to transport both the killers and the weapons. Hamas also operates its new television station from the relative safety of a mosque in the UNRWA Jabalya camp.

And if nothing else serves to alert the world to the reality of the UNRWA camps, the steady toll of Palestinian casualties from "work accidents" - mishaps with explosives during the manufacture of terrorist bombs - at these places ought to pierce the illusions of even the most gullible foreign observers.

What should the United States do about this? Let's start with the fact that the plentiful cash that flows from the United States Treasury to UNRWA (30 percent of the agency's \$400 million budget comes courtesy of American taxpayers) is actually a violation of U.S. law. The U.S. Foreign Assistance Act requires UNRWA to assure that American money does not go to terrorists. That is an assurance that UNRWA cannot credibly give.

Superficial reforms of the group won't work. Given the almost complete infiltration of UNRWA's bureaucracy by terrorist supporters, nothing short of a complete overhaul will do.

Can the plug be pulled on UNRWA? Given the current pressure on the Bush administration to mend fences with the Arab world, it's unlikely. But if this cause gets a bipartisan push from Congress, it might help the White House focus on the way the agency is spending our money on reinforcing terrorist strongholds. Congress must follow up its legislation on aid to the P.A. with further hearings and action to halt subsidies to UNRWA.

Sadly, it may take another Palestinian terror offensive - in which UNRWA camps will again serve as bases for suicide bombings, shootings and rocket attacks on Israeli civilians - to remind the world of the "humanitarian" fraud it's been subsidizing. Even then, the Palestinian propaganda machine, of which UNRWA is an integral part, will do its utmost to prevent the truth from being heard.

But Americans have no excuse for continuing to be complicit in this deception. We - the funders of this half-century-old U.N. fiasco - must face up to the fact that this monster must be decapitated, and then rebuilt as a genuine humanitarian group.

That may seem like an impossible task. But if the pain and grief that UNRWA helps inflict on the region is to be stopped, both the White House and Congress must stop buying into the myth of UNRWA's lies.

The writer is executive editor of the Philadelphia Jewish Exponent.
(Jewish World Review Mar 15)

Kadima - Bad for the Economy By Daniel Doron

There are obviously expedient reasons for Kadima to emblazon its promotional materials with the portrait of its founder, even though he is tragically incapacitated and not likely to govern the party he endowed with so many political spoils.

Kadima and its present leader, Ehud Olmert, genuinely believe, apparently, that they carry on Sharon's heritage. And this may indeed be so, for their platform shows no inkling of novelty, nor any genuine departure from the musty banalities that have damaged Israeli politics for decades.

What must one make of a "new" party that - after so many years of a no-go peace process and a sweeping Hamas victory - still insists that "the disengagement has created a window of opportunity that permits real progress and even a breakthrough in the effort to establish a peace

arrangement... that a national, regional and international consensus exists that the road map is the only political program that facilitates a true advancement on the road to a full and absolute peace arrangement."

"Disengagement", "road map", "full and absolute peace"? Is someone dreaming? So far only more Kassams have flown through this "window of opportunity" and it only inflamed a greater zeal to destroy Israel rather than a passion for a "full and absolute peace."

Olmert has tried to cover up this absurdity by asserting that should a Palestinian partner not materialize, Israel will unilaterally separate from the Palestinians and hunker down behind a protective wall. How this wall is to prevent an irredentist Hamas "Authority" from waging a "low-intensity war" that can undermine Israel - undoing Olmert's rosy vision that in four years Israel will become a fun place to live in - is not explained.

Perhaps, as Ari Shavit claims in Haaretz, such a unilateral withdrawal fantasy is indeed a mortal danger to Israel.

Kadima fails to explain not only how its government will successfully defend Israel in the international arena or suddenly win the war on terror when so far it has failed to do so (despite some tactical victories). It also does not really explain how it is going to address Israel's critical economic problems, which except for the interlude, when Binyamin Netanyahu boldly launched some revolutionary reforms, it has mostly neglected.

Kadima acknowledges that "strong social and economic bases are a necessary condition for national strength" and that "they are in danger of falling apart, widening the already existing gaps and posing an existential danger to Israel's future existence."

It claims that "the dimensions of poverty keep growing" and yet does not connect this to the welfare policies its members advocated (again, until Netanyahu curbed them somewhat) and are intent on bolstering.

"An open and competitive market is critical for changing these trends..." Kadima's platform asserts, raising the hope that it will continue the strong pro-growth policies initiated by Netanyahu. But then Kadima immediately qualifies its "support" for an "open and competitive market" by asserting that "it does not mean that it accepts a jungle [economy], where no rules exist and the strong prey on the weak."

IN THIS biased attitude toward markets, Kadima's platform reflects the common Israeli misperception that competition is always "cutthroat" and that if you leave the market to its own devices it will inevitably lead to the ruin of the weak.

This misperception is promoted by a leftist academy and media that have convinced Israelis that their monopoly-ridden economy is a free market, a Thatcherite-style "compassionless" economy that the cruel Netanyahu has foisted on Israel. Israelis believe that the many inequities of their statist system, including its domination by strong monopolies, is a result of competition rather than the lack of it.

While Kadima pays lip service to markets, endorsing them in the abstract, it suggests in practice many steps that will greatly increase government involvement in the economy, while doing very little to remove the many monopolies and entry barriers that have made the Israeli economy lame.

"The government," the platform promises, "will build physical and human infrastructures in order to overcome market failures." The first step the platform recommends is "a change in the national order of priorities in the distribution of budgets." Namely Kadima's first priority will be to reshuffle government handouts, rewarding, under the pretext of seeking greater transparency, its political allies with funds denied to its political opponents, mainly the settlers. The bottom line is that distributive politics will continue to dominate the economy to its great detriment.

Next the Kadima platform promises government action toward "the widening of employment and increased income from work." Decades of inbuilt government failures, costing billions which in the areas of vocational training and job creation are simply ignored. Only at the very bottom of the list of objectives the platform also calls for "accelerating economic growth, increasing productivity and improved competitiveness." But little is said on how these objectives are to be accomplished, so the call remains essentially rhetorical.

The composition of Kadima's Knesset list, comprised of people with little or no understanding of economics and with wrong ideas about it (many former Labor stalwarts) does not bode well either, nor do rumors that Kadima's list of candidates for finance minister include politicians whose probity is questionable.

Altogether, not an encouraging prospect for a growing Israeli economy facing growing external threats. (Jerusalem Post Mar 15)

From the Israeli Left...

Olmert's Arrogance By Ari Shavit

In September 2000, the Palestinians began a terror offensive against Israel. They did this because they refused to accept the Camp David proposal, which promised them the entire Gaza Strip and 91 percent of the West Bank in exchange for full recognition of Israel and an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If Ehud Olmert is elected prime minister and implements his convergence plan, then in September 2010 the Palestinians will have sovereignty over the entire Gaza Strip and some 91 percent of the West Bank, and all this without recognizing Israel and without ending the conflict.

Thus will the national Palestinian movement fulfill the objectives of its wars and obtain a full strategic resolution against the State of Israel. The history books will record Olmert's unconditional withdrawal as the unconditional surrender of Zionism. No, it will not be the end. But it will be the beginning of the end. While relying on big money on one side and big journalism on the other, Olmert will lead the country to the beginning of the end.

At first glance, Olmert's plan appears enchanting - no fear, no hesitation, and very Israeli. Here, we'll take our destiny in our own hands. Within three years we'll evacuate some 80,000 settlers. Within less than five years, we will undergo a final disengagement from the Palestinians and converge within the borders of a flourishing lowlands country. We will surround our existence with a high wall, which will protect us from both the craziness of the Land of Israel and from the threat of Palestine. And so, in one term, we will isolate ourselves from all the sickness and terrors of the Middle East. So simple. So clear. How did we not think of this sooner. Why did we wait so long so that the man who saved Jerusalem could also save the State of Israel.

However, on second glance it becomes clear that the Olmert plan has a small flaw: It has no Palestinians. This is a plan whose logic is simplistic and patronizing. This is a plan for Israelis only, which ignores its ramifications on Israelis. It takes an extreme unilateral position to the point of absurdity, totally ignoring the fact that the conflict is bilateral and the political reality is multilateral. The plan, then, is an arrogant one, and the hubris that characterizes it is no less than the hubris of the person who formulated it.

What Olmert plans to do in the next few years is to establish an armed Hamas state in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. Via the nearly complete withdrawal, Olmert will promise Hamas almost total control in the Palestinian state for generations. The Palestine of Olmert will be hostile, dissatisfied and violent. Its founding ethos will be "We've chased them out of Ofra, we'll chase them out of Tzahala too."

Since Olmert is establishing this country without first assuring its demilitarization, it will have significant military capability. Since he is establishing it without removing the right of return from the agenda, it will have a destructive claim against Israel, whose legitimacy is recognized by the international community. The combination of political sovereignty, military power and a commitment to demanding return will transform Olmert's Hamas state into one that will endanger the very existence of the State of Israel.

Despite the irony, the convergence plan will not implement the Bush vision, but will destroy it. It will not build a stable two-state solution, but will create an unstable reality in which an Islamic Palestinian state systematically undermines the foundation of the Jewish democratic state.

But it is not just the stability of Israel that Olmert is endangering. He is also endangering the regional stability. A Hamas state will accelerate Jordan's collapse. There is no chance that the Hashemite rule will stand up against a Palestinian state on its doorstep whose religious fervor has just subdued the Zionists. Egypt will also be threatened. A victorious Muslim Brotherhood republic that controls a third of Jerusalem and devours the Temple Mount will be the beacon of zealotry for the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo. And in Damascus. And in Amman.

And Olmert will be supporting not only anti-Israeli terror, but also the anti-Western revolutionary movement. His radical unilateral process will disrupt the American strategy in the area and will bury U.S. President George W. Bush's dream of stability and democracy in the Middle East.

The Land of Israel must be divided. The occupation must end. A two-state solution is necessary. But the Hamas victory has made a two-state solution more distant and more complicated. Olmert's convergence plan makes it impossible. Therefore, if the public gives him the chance to carry out his arrogant plan, then March 28, 2006, will go down in history. History will remember it as the day that did not bring peace and did not bring security, but began the end. (Haaretz May 14)