

# Arab Reactions to Sharon's Victory in the Israeli Election

Feb 16, 2001



## Brief Analysis

**A**rab reactions to Ariel Sharon's overwhelming victory in the recent Israeli national election were mixed. Some condemned him with a confrontational tone, while some suggested that the election made no difference — that is, that all Israeli leaders have basically the same stance. Several Arab leaders opted to take a "wait and see" approach. An optimistic minority of Arab commentators viewed Sharon's leadership in a positive light. The following is a representative sampling of Arab reactions to Sharon's victory.

### Condemnation

"The Zionist entity has reached its highest level of extremism. It is pushing the region towards a devastating explosion through which Israel plans to eliminate the peace process and revive its plans to affirm its occupation of Arab lands and extend its control over the whole Arab world." —Syrian government-backed newspaper al-Baath, February 8, 2001

"On the basis of Sharon's criminal past and his extreme orientations, he would herald a new ominous era that threatens the peace process with dire consequences, as his return to the political platform means unequivocally that Israel is preparing itself for an anti-peace alternative and is heading toward more bloody violence in all the region." —Syrian government-backed newspaper al-Baath, February 6, 2001

"This proves that Israel does not want peace and never wanted it." —Syrian foreign minister Faruq al-Shara, reported by Agence France Presse, February 10, 2001

"The Israelis have not made up their minds about what the peace process is. They are interested in the process but not actual peace. This atmosphere produces people like Sharon." —Kamel Abu Jaber, head of Jordan's Institute of Diplomacy, quoted in the Christian Science Monitor, February 8, 2001

"[Sharon is a] right-wing fanatic who relies on power. [He] has no project for peace; he has no project for reconciliation with the Arabs. At heart he is racist." —Abdel-Monem Said, head of the al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, quoted in the Egyptian newspaper al-Ahram, February 8, 2001

### Relative Indifference

"We are not concerned with Sharon, [Ehud] Barak, or [Shimon] Peres. The occupation must become a losing enterprise in economic, human, political, and propaganda terms. [Sharon] is the last shot in the Israelis' arsenal. Let them use it, and they will realize that they must leave our land as they did Lebanon. The intifada will persuade the Israelis of the futility of the occupation." —Marwan Baghouti, leader of the Fatah movement in the West Bank, February 6, 2001

"We may not prefer Sharon because of his long record. But we will deal with him as we have dealt with [Yitzhak] Shamir and [Binyamin] Netanyahu." —An unnamed senior Egyptian official, quoted in al-Hayat newspaper, February 6, 2001

### Wait and See

"We respect the decision of the Israeli people. We hope the peace process will continue." —Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat, quoted in the Chinese newspaper Qi Deliang, February 6, 2001

"We will wait and see what Sharon will do." —Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, quoted in the Egyptian newspaper al-Ahram, February 8, 2001

"We must not make up our minds in advance about the performance of Sharon and his government." —Jordanian prime minister Ali Abu Ragheb, quoted in the Jerusalem Post, February 11, 2001

"Amman has found it very hard to accept his occasional hostile statements, but has considered such statements as a direct part of his election campaign aimed at pleasing his extreme right-wing constituency. This does not mean that Amman will be ready to tolerate unrestrained comments of this nature made without any justification, especially those that aim at sowing conflict and discord between the Hashemite kingdom and Palestinian president Yasir Arafat." —Bassam Badareen, political writer for the London-based al-Quds al-Arabi newspaper, February 6, 2001

"We are ready to deal with any prime minister who has been elected by the Israeli people. We are ready to go immediately for any negotiations as long as the new Israeli government will commit itself to proceed on a peace process." —Top Arafat advisor Nabil Abu Rudeineh, quoted in the Chicago Tribune, February 7, 2001

"If Sharon pursues his extremist positions while he is prime minister, it will be very serious and this will necessitate an appropriate Arab reaction." —Egyptian foreign minister Amre Moussa, as reported by Agence France Presse, February 11, 2001

#### Optimistic Minority

"[Israel] signed peace treaties under hard-liners like Menachim Begin. Sharon will not be more extreme." —An unnamed senior Egyptian official, quoted in al-Hayat newspaper, February 6, 2001

"Sharon may try to clear his black history of terrorism, like Begin did." —Imad Fawzi Shueibi, a prominent Syrian political sociologist, quoted in the Christian Science Monitor, February 8, 2001

"I think Sharon is going to sign a peace deal." —Hisham Yanis, a prominent Jordanian actor and entertainer, quoted in the Christian Science Monitor, February 8, 2001

This report was compiled by Mohamed Abdel-Dayem.

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