

Barak's Landslide Victory:

Middle East Reactions

May 19, 1999



Brief Analysis

Optimism About the Peace Process, Post-Netanyahu

"The powers of rationalism which want to put an end to extremism and violence have triumphed. . . . This is a message from the majority of the Israeli public to Barak that it wants to close the chapter of conflict with the Palestinians and with Lebanon and Syria." ---Palestinian Authority (PA) negotiator Hassan Asfour (Agence France Presse, May 18)

"Netanyahu fell into the trash bin of history . . . He will be gone forever and good riddance. He's a racist and no other Israeli leader will ever be as bad as he was. The Palestinian people were patient for three years through his arrogance. We helped bring him down. We are the ones who made this statue fall." ---PA justice minister Freih Abu Meddien (New York Times, May 18)

"We're very, very optimistic. We [Barak and I] see eye to eye on many issues and we're very optimistic of taking the peace process forward." ---King Abdullah II of Jordan (New York Times, May 19)

"We are ready to extend a hand to Mr. Barak, to cooperate with him as long as his policy aims to save the peace process. . . . We are ready to work for a change in the general atmosphere in the Middle East which was seriously poisoned during the last three years and especially in the last few months. . . ." ---Egyptian foreign minister Amre Moussa (Agence France Presse, May 17)

The Election Results are Irrelevant

"Whether Barak or Netanyahu wins, whether it is the Labor party or the Likud, the winner must know that he has only one choice, namely an unconditional withdrawal from southern Lebanon. . . . They are both the same and the only difference between them is the style of their maneuverings and aggression." ---Hizballah chief Shaykh Hassan Nasrallah (Agence France Presse, May 18)

"The Qassam fighter [i.e., the member of Hamas' military wing] will continue to fight but the difficulties he faces affects when, where, and how he will strike. It doesn't depend on whether Labor or Likud are in power." ---Hamas spiritual leader Shaykh Ahmad Yassin (Reuters, May 17)

"There will be superficial breakthroughs but it will be a phase of confrontation, challenge and real struggle, and not a phase of peace. . . . The Zionist entity elected Barak to try to improve its image, not to offer concessions to Palestinians." ---Hamas political chief Khaled Meshal (Reuters, May 18)

"Counting on the Labor party (led by Barak) is nothing more than a mirage and an illusion, [although Likud was] more flagrant in its anti-Arab racism and hostility." ---Al-Iraq, a pro-government Iraqi newspaper (Agence France Presse, 5/18)

"Most of the Israeli wars against the Arabs were carried out by the Labor party, including the Qana massacre There is no difference between Barak and Netanyahu and the best proof of that is his speech after he was elected. He

ruled out withdrawal to the June 4, 1967, lines." ---Lebanese prime minister Salim Hoss (Reuters, May 18)

"There are no basic differences [between Likud and Labor]. It's true that the Labor Party shows more flexibility but it will do nothing to unblock the peace process unless international pressure is applied, especially from the United States and Europe." ---Faruq Kaddumi, member of the PLO executive committee (Agence France Presse, May 18)

"The Palestinians are deluding themselves if they hope to gain from the relative moderation of the new prime minister. . . . The dangers to peace come not from those who act publicly but from those who plot and execute their plans through cunning like (Yitzhak) Rabin and (Shimon) Peres." ---Al-Riyadh, an independent pro-government Saudi Arabian newspaper (Agence France Presse, May 18)

"Almost all the major wars between the Arabs and Israel were led by the Labor Party leaders. Furthermore, most of the townships in the occupied territories were constructed while the Labor Party was in power. . . . In view of the expansionist policies pursued by the Zionist parties, it seems that the optimism of the supporters of the compromise peace process will remain unfulfilled." ---Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran (BBC, May 18)

A Skeptical Approach

"Barak did not go into whether he would implement the Oslo accords or the Wye River agreement or stop settlement which are issues which we believe to be necessary to give a serious push to the peace process." ---Palestinian negotiator Dr. Saeb Erekat (Agence France Presse, May 18)

[Barak needs to] "make radical changes in Israeli policies, towards a complete withdrawal from occupied Arab land and a just and comprehensive peace based on UN resolutions. . . . After three years of extremism under Netanyahu, Israelis wanted to rid themselves of the Likud nightmare and its anachronistic ideas which have divided and isolated the country." ---Tishrin, the Syrian government newspaper (Agence France Presse, May 18)

"We should not put too much hope in the new Israeli government which must be judged on its concrete actions. . . . We must judge the new Israeli government on its respect for the terms of reference of the peace process, especially on the principle of exchanging land for peace." ---Arab League assistant secretary general Ahmad Ben Helli (Agence France Presse, May 18)

"I would not be surprised to find out that Barak is a difficult negotiator. But Netanyahu was not trying to negotiate. He was trying to dictate. . . . The option of going forward quickly is there. . . . We have the support of the Israeli people, of the Palestinian people, of the United States, and of the international community." ---PA minister for Jerusalem affairs Faisal Hussein (New York Times, May 19)

Compiled by Benjamin Orbach.

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