

Israel: Sharon establishes new government with ultra-nationalist and fascist parties

David Cohen
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Less than a month after his victory in the national elections, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has formed a coalition government with an eight-seat majority based on his Likud party, the neo-liberal and avowedly secular Shinui party, the National Religious Party and the National Unity Party.

The National Religious Party (NRP) is headed by Efi Eitam, who was a brigadier general in the Israeli Defence Forces. Eitam is considered as one of the most radical right-wing politicians and is an open supporter of ethnic cleansing—expelling or killing the entire Palestinian leadership and reoccupying the territories now under Palestinian control. The National Unity Party, headed by Avigdor Liberman, is a fascist formation that calls on Sharon to bomb Palestinian cities and towns, expel the Palestinians, and employ torture against Israeli leftist activists.

“If it was not a Jewish government, we could have said this was an anti-Semitic government with fascist elements,” was the comment of Yossi Sarid, the leader of the small social democratic party Meretz, during the discussion in Israel’s parliament, the Knesset.

Sharon’s new government was established after failed negotiations with the Labour Party, intended to form a secular unity government together with Shinui. Labour leader Amram Mitzna insisted that the new government support the eventual formation of a Palestinian state, the evacuation of the Zionist settlements, and the building of a security fence between Israel and the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza strip. Sharon told Mitzna that he was ready to adopt a secret document of understandings with Labour, but in return Mitzna would have to accept a government that included the National Religious Party and National Unity.

Mitzna could not accept Sharon’s ultimatum, but

reassured him that Labour would support the government’s policies towards the Palestinians as long as they were coordinated with the US. The Bush administration has, in recent weeks, made much of its desire to see the eventual formation of a Palestinian state, in order to secure the support of the Arab regimes for its planned war against Iraq. Washington also favoured the resumption of a coalition government between Likud and Labour, in order that Mitzna, Shimon Peres and company could provide a political cover for Sharon and a restraining influence, at least in the short term.

Likud’s open bloc with the ethnic cleansers of the NRP and National Unity has fatally undermined the pretense that Sharon can be persuaded to secure a peaceful settlement with the Palestinians. The *New York Times* concluded, “With so many within Mr. Sharon’s Likud opposed to creating a Palestinian state, the prospects for diplomatic progress and implementation of President Bush’s vision of such a state by 2005 had receded. But with the Labour Party ending coalition talks and reports that Mr. Sharon is nearing agreement with the ultra-right National Union, whose leader advocates expelling Palestinians from the Occupied Territories, those chances have become even more bleak.”

The new government will also seek to carry forward aggressive austerity measures and attacks on the Israeli working class, in line with Shinui’s “free market” economic philosophy, which rejects even the basic democratic right of workers to strike.

Sharon’s decision to create the most right-wing government ever indicates his determination to finally implement his vision of creating a Greater Israel through the permanent seizure of the Occupied Territories, either driving out the Palestinians altogether

or confining them to a number of tiny cantons surrounded by the Israeli military.

In his speech announcing the formation of the new government, Sharon stressed that he intended to carry forward a political process based on President George W. Bush's June 24, 2001 speech on the Middle East, which included a reference to an end to the occupation and a two-state solution. Before there is any progress on the diplomatic front, however, he insisted that there would have to be an end to the Palestinian "terror," a change in the Palestinian leadership, and fundamental "reform" of the Palestinian National Authority. The Palestinians would have to give up the right of return for refugees if they wanted to reach a comprehensive agreement with Israel, and concede that Jerusalem remain a united city under Israeli sovereignty—a series of demands that exclude any possibility of a negotiated settlement.

Sharon understands that Bush's "vision" for the Palestinians is a variant of the type of "regime-change" that was pioneered in Afghanistan through the installation of a despotic puppet regime, and which Washington now plans for Iraq, with Saddam Hussein replaced by a pro-American but no less undemocratic government. He calculates that after the war against Iraq is concluded, Arafat will share the fate of Saddam Hussein, and "regime change" will follow in other Arab states, such as Syria—thus redrawing the political map of the Middle East in Israel's favour.



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