

Forum Ponders Changes after Likud Victory

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Jerusalem, Israel—Following the decisive victory of the Likud party in the March 17, 2015, elections, the Jerusalem Forum for Peace and Security met to discuss how this may influence Israel's foreign and security policies.

In the March 19 meeting, which took place at the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus, the chairman and the three speakers expressed their views with one clear consensus: Israel is heading toward a political confrontation internationally, and the coming years will be rather challenging for Israel.



Brig.-Gen. (Ret.) Yossi Kuperwasser, the former director general of Israel's Ministry for Strategic Affairs, predicted that the change in foreign and security policies would be clearly toward the right wing, in light of the majority of right-wing mandates. He explained that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will not negotiate with the Palestinians, since he believes it is wrong to negotiate with anyone who does not recognize Israel as a legitimate state, and, further, because the Palestinians have rejected plans of dividing the country between Jews and Palestinians, starting with the UN partition plan in 1947. Brig-Gen. Kuperwasser concluded with a more optimistic comment, stemming from his experience of working with Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who signed the peace treaty with Egypt in 1977. He noted that there is also a possibility that a right-wing government will be better positioned to sign a peace treaty with the Palestinians, as it will face no opposition from the center-left parties.

Mr. Yaki Dayan, former consul general of Israel to Los Angeles and a specialist on Israeli-U.S. relations, estimated that the relationship between U.S. President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu will

worsen. President Obama's ideology is in conflict with Israel's national interests on two fundamental issues: The first is the threat of nuclear Iran, and the second is the establishment of a Palestinian state. However, Mr. Dayan sees the alliance between the United States and Israel as fundamentally strong and stable. The relationship between President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu is expected to continue to be cold; however, no fundamental or serious crisis in Israeli-U.S. relations is predicted at the moment.



Mr. Pinhas Inbari, a veteran Arab affairs correspondent and a senior analyst for the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, said that the West Bank is an important key for regional stability. A withdrawal of Israel from those territories will inflict instability on Jordan—much like what happened in Egypt after Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

Mr. Menashe Shaul, a Middle East expert, journalist and commentator, related the changes in the Arab world's attitudes toward the State of Israel in the past 50 years; Mr. Shaul explained that Israel no longer is seen as the greatest enemy. There are other and more serious problems, such as the rebel group Islamic State. Mr. Shaul noted also that the Arab world is fascinated by the success of Israel—a small country without natural resources. They are also interested in the democratic system in Israel, which by its structure allows Israeli Arabs to be elected to Parliament.

Professor Eliezer Glaubach, president of the Jerusalem Peace and Security Forum, concluded the discussion: "Israel is surrounded by 22 Arab nations, which are part of the bigger Muslim world. This fact has implications on the security situation of the State of Israel." However, Professor Glaubach pointed to the Arab League's proposal and suggested discussing it. "The new Israeli government should be aiming to achieve a peace agreement with the Palestinians as well as maintaining the military deterrence of Israel—not in order to put it into use, but rather to ensure the security and peace of the State of Israel."

