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**HOW AND WHY DID ARIEL SHARON BECOME PRIME
MINISTER AND HOW DID THE POLITICS VIOLENCE
IMPACT ON HIS ELECTORAL SUCCESS IN 2001?**

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Abstract

There are two questions that are examined in the thesis. They are: Why and how did Ariel Sharon become Prime Minister? How did the political violence impact on his electoral success in 2001? When looking at these questions there are a few specific events that had a significant impact on Sharon and the election. The main event is the second Intifada, and the perception of violence that went along with it. Public opinion of Sharon was slowly shifting prior to the elections, and by the time the vote came around, there had been daily violence for months, and people were ready for a change. There are three main theories within the literature that can help explain, at least from the aspect of the electorate, how Sharon came into power. The first theory states that the electorate will vote against the party, or person, in power, regardless if they are right-wing or left-wing. The second theory outlines a polarization that will take place, whereby the electorate is forced further to the right or left, depending on where their political allegiance laid previously. The final theory discussed is one in which there is a shift to the right. People become more hardline in their views, and subsequently, they want a more hawkish leader fighting for them.

The author used the research gathered in order to reach a conclusion as to which theory pertains to the case of Ariel Sharon and the elections in 2001. There are three specific factors which are analyzed in relation to Sharon's success. Political factors at the time of both his election as leader of Likud, and his election as Prime Minister are crucial to understanding what happened in

2001. Along with the political factors, both historical factors and public opinion are scrutinized in order to accurately reach a conclusion about the elections. The February 2004 elections witnessed the largest victory in Israeli history, as well as the lowest turnout in Israeli history. All of the factors come together to give a clear picture of what lead to the election of Ariel Sharon on February 6, 2001.

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Introduction

Why and how did Ariel Sharon become Prime Minister? How did the political violence impact on his electoral success in 2001? In order to reach a conclusion on these research questions it is necessary to understand the public opinion surrounding Sharon prior to the elections, along with his reputation throughout his years in government and in the public eye. In this thesis I examine the dramatic change in Sharon's reputation and the impact of the Second Intifada on his electoral victory. Furthermore, I explore and evaluate factors that enabled Sharon's election, specifically political factors, historical factors and public opinion. Along with this I analyze in which ways Sharon's campaign made use of the electorates' perception of the violence, looking specifically at his use of the second Intifada in campaigning and his portrayal of Barak's reputation while Prime Minister, from the time of his failure at Camp David in 2000. I argue that the Intifada caused a shift to the right in the electorate, which in turn benefitted Sharon and gave way to the main focus of his electoral campaign; one in which he could play off of the perception of violence held by the citizens of Israel. Moreover, I argue that Sharon was seen as the only (or default) option for Prime Minister at the time, and not necessarily the best option. As this research shows, he was able to climb to the position of Prime Minister due to haphazard political circumstances surrounding Netanyahu's resignation from Likud's leadership in 1999 and because of internal political factors in the Likud at the time of the Second Intifada.

Ariel Sharon was elected Prime Minister in 2001 with a record high percentage of the vote, showing that it was clearly a security win. The election that was called in 2001 was a special case in Israel because for the first and only time it was a direct election for the Prime Minister only: the Knesset did not change. Eighteen years earlier Sharon was removed from the position of Minister of Defense and was condemned over his role in the Lebanon War and the massacre at Sabra and Shatila. Security is always a leading issue in Israeli elections, and the election of 2001 was clearly marked with security concerns over the near outbreak of the Second Intifada. It has been demonstrated in the literature that public perception of political violence can have a large impact on elections. During the 2001 elections this model seems to apply. Not only did the perception of violence appear to have impacted on the electoral results, so too did the candidates' manipulation of that very perception and the security issue more broadly.

Methodology

In order to test the impact of the political violence on the elections I analyzed a number of different sources. These sources include public opinion polls, which were used to examine any changes in Sharon's popularity up to and during the campaign in 2001, campaign speeches given by both Sharon and his opposition, as well as the campaign materials that were used during the 'campaign propaganda time' which is allotted to each candidate leading up to the election (specifically commercials).

I gathered material from many of the polling companies in Israel, along with data collected in the book series *Elections in Israel*. I was fortunate to arrange an interview with former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who was close to Sharon at important historical junctures. I have integrated his unique perspective into the thesis. His first hand experience with Sharon and the election campaigns proved to be invaluable. Through an analysis of the primary materials it is possible to test the impact of the Intifada on the electoral campaign of Ariel Sharon on the one hand, and the outcomes of the election on the other.

Literature Review

There are three main approaches to the study of the impact of terrorism on elections that will be addressed here. The first approach argues that the electorate will vote against the party that was in power when the attack happened (Montalvo 2012; Bali 2006; Bali 2007; Chari 2004). Evidence for this approach comes mainly from the Spanish case study. In Spain, in 2004, the right-wing Popular Party (PP) was leading the government, and it was under the control of this government that Spain became involved in the War in Iraq. The PP did not obtain parliamentary approval before involving troops in the war, “even though all major parties and over 85 per cent of all Spaniards were against the war” (Chari 2004: 954). It is because of this participation that Madrid became the target of a deadly terrorist attack on March 11, 2004. Montalvo theorizes that:

If terror acts happen close to election times, then the effect of the political race and the increased media attention amplifies the discussion on incumbents' merits or mistakes. In fact this was the case in the terrorist attacks in Madrid. The incumbent party had decided to participate in the war in Iraq against the general opinion of Spanish citizens, and the attacks were linked quickly to Spain's participation in the war. This led voters to recall many other instances that they did not like about the policies supported by the incumbent party during the previous four years" (Montalvo 2012: 105).

The attack came mere days before the elections of March 14, 2004, and the result was an unexpected upset for the incumbent PP party, who, until the results were tallied, was expected to win with a 4 per cent lead. Chari outlines some of the reasons for the electoral results that came as a result of the attacks. Immediately following the attack the PP placed blame on the ETA (Basque terrorist group), and continued to blame them even after information came out that contradicted this accusation. The Spanish public was growing weary of the lack of transparency from the PP, as well as some of their policy decisions; namely their involvement in the war. By the time the results of the election were tallied the PP lost almost seven per cent of its vote from the previous election, and the Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) won with a five per cent margin (Chari 2004: 958). It is important to understand how the terrorist attacks were able to catalyze this kind of turn-around.

In the Spanish election following the terrorist attacks in Madrid there was a seven per cent increase in voter turnout from the previous year. It is possible to hypothesize, as Chari, Bali and Montalvo do, that the terrorist attack mobilized the electorate to vote. According to Chari "approximately 1.6 million of the almost three million new votes gained by the PSOE came from voters who

had abstained in the 2000 election” (2004: 960). Those who had abstained in the previous election but chose to vote in 2004 were mostly center and leftist voters, as well as the young voters who otherwise felt no need to participate in the elections (Bali 2007: 670).

In order to evaluate the affect of terrorism on the electorate Bali analyzes polls and surveys from before and after the election in order to the understand the shift that took place. She concludes, using data from post-electoral polls, that the terrorist attacks had a significant impact on the electoral outcomes. Bali looks at three different aspects of the voting process in order to assess the impact of the terror attacks, they are: “the decision to turnout to vote, the vote choice decision, and whether the attack influenced citizens” (Bali 2007: 675).

Her findings were that:

The results for the 2004 election revealed an unexpected turnaround in the margins between the main two parties, and the socialist PSOE led by Jose Zapatero won with 42.6% of the votes, or 11,026,163 votes, against the PP's 37.7% of the votes, or 9,763,144 votes. The immediate popular explanation for the electoral defeat of the PP focused on three factors: discontent with the government's foreign policy in Iraq, dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the early stages of the investigation [into the terror attacks], and a larger than expected turnout that gave vent to these discontents” (Bali 2007: 674).

Bali's hypotheses are concurrent with her findings and she is able to show that the terrorist attacks of March 11, 2004 did indeed impact on the electoral outcome only days later. Bali is not alone in her findings though. Montalvo reaches the same conclusion in a different way. Montalvo provides evidence proving the effectiveness of strategically timed terrorist attacks and how they can impact on the electorate by using a difference-in-differences estimator “to

provide evidence on the issue of the effect of large events on electoral outcomes” (Montalvo 2012: 96). Although it is difficult to draw conclusion from a one time terrorist attack, the Spanish case does outline some important aspects of the impact of terrorism.

The second theory pertains to polarization and its relevance to the electorate. Little has been written about this theory of voter behavior and terrorism, and what has been written is focused on the Israeli case study (Arian, Shamir, & Ventura 1992; Berrebi & Klor 2008). Even though there is not much written on this aspect of voter preferences it is still an important theory to study and understand, as it may very well explain the behaviors of many voters. According to Cas Sunstein, “in brief, group polarization arises when members of a deliberating group move toward a more extreme point in whatever direction is indicated by the members’ predeliberation tendency....group members become even more aligned in the direction they were already tending” (Sunstein, 1999, 4/5). Polarization can bring forward negative consequences within the government because it fragments and destabilizes democratic regimes (Berrebi & Klor 2006: 292). Berrebi and Klor state: “there is not a clear theoretical prediction regarding the effects of terrorism on the ideological polarization of the electorate” (2006: 292). However, even with this being the case they still recognize the validity of this approach and feel that it is “important to empirically explore this issue given the vast ramifications that polarization has on a country’s political system” (Berrebi & Klor 2006: 292). Berrebi and Klor conclude that there is evidence to show that after a terrorist attack, depending

on the location of the attack in relation to the voters, there can result a form of polarization where those who were already left-leaning will move further to the left, and those who were already right-leaning will move further to the right. It is particularly seen in constituencies that were previously left-leaning. This being said, they do not believe that this is the case overall for Israel, however, they do see evidence of it in the election in Israel.

Arian, Shamir and Ventura, among other theories that they look into did notice a degree of polarization taking place as well. Arian, Shamir and Ventura write:

Those who said the *Intifada* had a hardening effect on their attitude were much more likely to have had hard-line views before the beginning of the uprising. The opposite is also true: those who reported a softening of their views because of the *Intifada* were much more likely to have begun with dovish views (1992: 325-26 – italics in the original).

From the data collected by these researchers it is clear that there was some form of polarization within the electorate and they believe that is the case in both short-term and long-term voting behavior.

The third approach argues that the electorate will shift to the right following a terrorist attack. Again, there is little written about this approach outside of Israel, however, there is definitely proof of this theory in practice in the American case following the attacks of September 11, 2001. One of the main explanations for this shift is that the right wing candidates are often seen as the ones who will not stand for terrorism, and the most capable of protecting the people (Berrebi & Klor 2006, 2007, 2008; Arian, Shamir & Ventura 1992; Echebarria-Echabe & Fernandez-Guede 2006). Berrebi and Klor developed an

in-depth formula, one which uses the “variation of terror attacks across time and space”, to evaluate the impact of a terrorist attack on a given community, specifically within Israel. They found that “the occurrence of a terrorist attack in a given locality within three months of the elections causes an increase of 1.35 percentage points on that locality’s support for the right bloc...” (Berrebi & Klor 2008: 279).

Within their research Berrebi and Klor separate the region of Israel-Palestine into several localities, thus making it possible to breakdown voting results per area, while analyzing the location of the terrorist attacks and its impact on said results. One of the hypotheses given by Berrebi and Klor states that: “the Israeli electorate increases its support for the right bloc of political parties after an attack because this bloc is identified with a higher emphasis on terrorism deterrence” (2008: 289). To put it another way, the electorate is likely to vote for a hawkish party because they are seen as the ones who place more weight on issues concerning security. Also, as was the case in the 2001 elections:

Because the right bloc has policies that places more weight on security related issues, terror attacks during the tenure of a prime minister from the right bloc may be perceived as inevitable, whereas terror attacks during the tenure of a prime minister from the left bloc may be perceived as preventable by using stronger deterrence policies (Berrebi & Klor 2008: 289).

This being said, it is vital to look at the makeup of the government going into an election during a time of political violence. It is difficult to conclude definitively the reasons for a left wing incumbent being voted out in favor of a right wing

candidate. However, it is possible to gain an understanding of major variables that influenced an election the most.

Not all case studies can be used to explain the outcome of elections. This is seen in the case of Spain and how drastically it differed from other studies. In Spain there was an increase in voter turnout, although not a record-breaking number, and the incumbent party was voted out in favor of a left wing party. The only similarity between these two case studies is that in both cases the electorate voted out the incumbent in the hope of having a new government with new policies that could maintain the safety of the citizens. There is still much to be researched in this field, specifically the case of Israel in 2001 because it was a special election that was called due to an outbreak of violence. However, with the work that has been done it is possible to gain an understanding about the possible explanations for election results following a terrorist attack or periods of terrorism.

In this theoretical context, there are three possible derivative hypotheses. The first hypothesis implies that Sharon was elected simply because the public voted against the incumbent prime minister, regardless of the alternative. The Second hypothesis is that because of the political violence that was taking place the electorate was polarized and therefore those voters who were historically center-right became more hard-line in their stance and voted for Sharon. The third hypothesis is that because of the Intifada the electorate as a whole shifted to the right and therefore was willing to vote for Sharon and his policies. I evaluate these three explanations in this thesis as well as the

historical and political factors that enabled Sharon to become a contender for the position of Prime Minister.

This thesis proceeds as follows: In the first chapter I review Sharon's military and political history, as well as the public perception of him that remained until after Netanyahu's resignation. In the second chapter I explore the political factors that enabled Sharon to move into a position of power within Likud. The third chapter looks at what the political climate was like prior to Ehud Barak resigning from the position of prime minister and calling for an election. I outline the historic political factors and public opinion factors that made it possible for Sharon to be elected as prime minister in the February 2001 election. The last chapter attempts to apply one of the theories presented above in order to explain Sharon's climb to the top within Likud, and his eventual election to the position of prime minister.

Chapter One: Sharon's Political History

Early years

Ariel Sharon was born Ariel Shinerman, in Kfar Malal, Mandatory Palestine, in 1928. He grew up there with his family and fought in the Israeli War of Independence with the Haganah. He continued his military career and established a special operations unit called 'Unit 101', which was designed to carry out cross borders reprisal attacks (Hiro 2003: 482). In 1953 Sharon was involved in an attack in the West Bank village of Qilya, with his troops from Unit 101. Over 60 Jordanian civilians were killed in this attack and as a result Unit 101 was dismantled and Sharon was condemned for his involvement, both by the public and the government.¹ However, this incident did not hinder Sharon's military career and he continued to hold the rank of Major General. This would mark the first of his public condemnations. "During the Suez War in 1956 Sharon, leading a brigade, exceeded his orders and engaged in a battle that resulted in many victims" (Hiro 2003: 482), and caused him once again to receive criticism.

In 1967 Sharon was promoted to the position of Brigadier General and again led troops into battle. He and his troops were victorious and praised for the success of their mission and military initiative. He was moved to the head of the Israeli Defense Forces southern command in 1969 and "his iron-fist policy toward the Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza proved controversial" (Hiro 2003: 482). In the years that followed, Sharon

¹ "Ariel Sharon – Milestones of his Career", (04/01/2006), CBC News http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/middleeast/sharon_timeline.html

remained the head of his command and an esteemed general. However, as 1972 approached Sharon knew that his time in the military was limited, because at that time there was an expected retirement age at 45 years old (Sharon 1989: 266). When it was made clear to Sharon in early 1972 that his retirement was expected he began to think about what he would like to do next. Two things came to his mind. He had a passion for farming, and an interest in politics. He proceeded with buying a farm and upon his retirement in July 1973 he began to dabble with politics.

Sharon did not leave the military overly willingly. He pursued as many roads as possible to stay in his command. He approached Chief-of-Staff Elezar, Minister of Defense Dayan and even the Prime minister, Golda Meir, all of whom told him his time had come (Sharon 1989: 265). Therefore, on July 1, 1973 Sharon retired from the army and began his civilian life. He started this new chapter by working on his farm, but it was not long before he had his sights on something much larger. Sharon began to think about the political system in Israel, its downfalls, and how it could be better. Through this, he came to the conclusion that there needed to be an opposition coalition party that could truly challenge the leading party, Labor, who had been in power since the creation of Israel. Sharon approached Labor and some of the other parties before approaching opposition leader Menachem Begin, to discuss the possibility of forming a new coalition party. Begin agreed to meet with the other parties and soon there were negotiations taking place between Begin's party, Herut, and other opposition parties. After weeks of grueling negotiations an agreement was

reached, and on September 14, 1973, the Likud party was formed. A week later Sharon was formally inducted into Likud and he was named as the campaign manager for the party in the upcoming elections only two months away (Sharon 1989: 286).

Less than a month after the creation of Likud everything would change for Sharon when he received a phone call from the Southern Command asking him to report for reserve duty immediately because there was intelligence information that they wanted to show him (Sharon 1989: 286). On October 5, 1973 the Southern Command contacted Sharon and they requested that he report for duty immediately. It was Erev Shabbat, and at sundown it would mark the start of Yom Kippur. However, his return to the military would be short lived. In the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War Sharon commanded a division that established a bridgehead over the Suez Canal. This would be the end of Sharon's active military career because of the tactics he chose to use during an operation. According to CBC News:

Sharon's strategy is again called into question, this time before a military tribunal. Although the tribunal rules his military action effective, his decisions at Suez were in violation of his orders from the head of Southern Command. Amid growing tension between Sharon and the Southern Command, Sharon [was] dismissed from military duty.²

Following his dismissal from the military he returned to the Knesset, then resigned, and shortly after, in 1975, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin made him his special security advisor. Prior to the elections in 1976 Sharon started his own party, Shlomzion, with the intention of taking a stance against the other parties.

² "Ariel Sharon – Milestones of his Career", (04/01/2006), CBC News http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/middleeast/sharon_timeline.html

He wanted his political voice to be heard. In the elections Shlomzion earned two seats, however, they did not stay an independent party for long (Knesset Website). Immediately following the elections Sharon, and his party, joined Likud, the winner of the elections and with the change of government in the following elections, Sharon saw yet another change in positions.

When Menachem Begin became Prime Minister he made Sharon the Minister of Agriculture. Sharon made quite a stir in this position as well. Hirsh Goodman discusses how Sharon was seen in the Knesset during a budget scandal that took place when he was the Minister. Goodman states:

The wounds suffered in the great battle of the budget are still fresh. Defense officials will never forgive Sharon for making cheap political capital out of what they believed to be a legitimate struggle over the country's security. They will not forget or forgive the series of selective, self-serving leaks about waste and incompetence in the military or Sharon's public statements that the budget could be cut by billions. The figure given by the minister of agriculture was random and unchecked - but politically expedient. And coming from a former general, his words carried credibility, though his information was anything but credible (1981: 210-211).

Because of The utmost respect given to soldiers, and because Sharon held such high positions, he was seen as trustworthy. His colleagues soon forgot the reasons for him no longer being a general in the army. As will be seen in the following years, when Sharon finds himself in trouble again within the Knesset, there are few that will stand behind him, and he will eventually be forced to step down from his position.

1981-1983: Lebanon and Resignation

There is very little information surrounding Sharon and the public's opinion of him at this time, and according to Seliktar; "the research on public opinion on the war is largely confined to commercial polls" (1984: 47). However, as will be shown, public opinion about Sharon at this time comes out in written works about him. In 1981 Sharon was made the Minister of Defense in Begin's Second government. There was definitely doubt about him holding this position.

Goodman writes:

And they [fellow politicians] shake their heads in despair when they think of Sharon as the man in charge of Israel's policies in the administered territories. They recall how command of the Gaza Strip was taken away from him because his pacification measures were so brutal that even the country's most hardened soldiers felt that they were unacceptable, even in dealing with rampant terrorism (1981: 211).

He had not improved his image in the years that followed, even though he stayed relatively out of the public eye. He was praised for his success in the Six Day War of 1967. However, one victory was not enough to erase his previous failures. The research that is available about this time only points to the opinions of his colleagues and how they perceived his positions within the Knesset and military. It is clear that there was not a warm embrace of Sharon during these years, and this is apparent because of the way that he was written about, and the way that his peers viewed him.

Sharon often found himself at odds with his fellow military colleagues and politicians. This was the case when he was made Begin's Minister of

Defense. Goodman examines the climate surrounding Sharon during these years and the views of those who worked with him. He writes:

He [Sharon] reminds them of the post-1973 war of the generals. He is a man, they feel, who never carried out orders but always created his own reality, as was the case in 1973, sometimes regardless of the possible consequences. He is a man for whom 'prudence' is a foreign, perhaps a non-existent word. They are worried about how Sharon, who is impervious to any view but his own, will deal with the collective advice of the general staff on issues on which expert advice is essential (1981: 211).

This is not a glowing declaration of one's abilities, especially someone who is going to essentially be running the national army. The pessimistic point of view that many held in regard to Sharon proved to have some shred of truth to it following the war in Lebanon.

The invasion into Lebanon began on June 6, 1982. It is written that, "on the morning of 6 June 1982 Israel mounted Operation Peace in Galilee with the dual aim of securing the evacuation of all foreign forces from Lebanon and installing a regime in Beirut that would conclude a peace treaty with it. About 40,000 Israeli Defense Forces soldiers marched under heavy air cover into Lebanon" (Hiro 2003: 236). The public, and Knesset members, had been told that this operation would last 48 hours, and the army was only suppose to reach into Lebanon approximately 40 km, however, they continued forward and reached Beirut. Public opinion for Sharon was slipping by this point once again because he was seen as the man behind the invasion. "Some cabinet ministers later accused...Sharon of hiding the army's real plans from them".³ Sharon was entering into some domestic trouble that no one could have predicted. Public

³ "The Lebanon War", (08/01/2006) Ynet News, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3284684,00.html>

support did not seem to be on his side and “national consensus all but broke down and questions regarding the goals, dimensions, political effects, and moral implications of the war arose simultaneously on the battlefield and at home” (Temkin 1987: 22).

Israel pressed onward into Lebanon and by mid June “the Israeli siege of Beirut became a domestic and international embarrassment for the government of Begin and Sharon. International public opinion quickly turned negative with images of civilian casualties at the hand of the powerful”.⁴ This was the beginning of the downward spiral of public opinion that Sharon was facing in regard to his political career. Sharon wanted a new order to persist in Lebanon, one that was led by the Christians within the country. “The plan was Sharon's brainchild and its stated objective was to help transform Lebanon into an independent country, free of armed Palestinian groups and ruled by the country's Christian leaders”.⁵ There are many implications that came from the invasion into Lebanon. First, it was perceived that Sharon misled the Israeli government as to what the actual goals of the invasion were. Second, some argued that the war actually went against Israel's security strategies, and third, many felt that Israel was engaging with Lebanon unnecessarily (Rabinovich & Reinharz 2008: 400).

Three months after the invasion the massacre in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps took place. This was a two-day killing spree from September 16-18 1982, perpetrated by the Christian Phalangists within Lebanon.

⁴ The David Project, 2010

⁵ “The Lebanon War”, (08/01/2006), Ynet News, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3284684,00.html>

The Israeli army authorized and facilitated the entry of Phalange militiamen into Beirut to 'mop-up' the Palestinian camps, or neighborhoods of Sabra and Shatila, where, according to its information, PLO combatants were still positioned. The result was a massacre (Kahn Commission February 7, 1983).

There was a huge outcry within Israel when word of the massacres got out, and Sharon, among few others, was to blame. As Minister of Defense he was seen as the man in charge of the actions of the IDF, and as the one who allowed such a horrible killing spree to happen. The role of the IDF in the massacre is different depending on who is recalling the events. What is common throughout is that the IDF allowed the Phalangists access to the refugee camps, and did not enter afterwards to stop anything.

Following the news of this event the Israeli public cried out for something to be done, for justice to be served. The largest demonstration in Israeli history to that date took place in Tel Aviv to protest and demand that the government of Israel, specifically Sharon, be held responsible for the murders. The Peace Now movement came out in fierce protest against Operation Peace of the Galilee. It was the central force behind the mass demonstration held in Tel Aviv on September 25th 1982, calling for the establishment of a national inquiry commission on the massacre in Sabra and Shatila, as well as the resignation of Defense Minister Ariel Sharon.⁶

The demonstrators wanted to force the government's hand into holding Sharon responsible for the murders. It is estimated that 400,000 people came out to the streets to demonstrate with Peace Now, and as it turned out this had

⁶ The Knesset Website

an effect on the government, specifically Prime Minister Begin. “Begin initially preferred a less formal investigation but was ultimately forced to comply with public opinion and in late September he appointed then-High Court of Justice President Yitzhak Kahan to head a committee of inquiry”.⁷ A commission was established to look at the events that took place and decide whether blame was to fall upon any of the ministers or commanders. The Kahan Commission, as it is referred to today, made “recommendations that included a call for Sharon to be removed from his post. On the day of the publication of the Commission’s report, on February 10th 1983, Peace Now held a demonstration in favor of the Report’s implementation”.⁸ In February 1983 Sharon was forced to resign as Minister of Defense and was given the position of a minister without portfolio.

1983-1999: A Quiet Time

Sharon stayed involved in the Knesset. However, there is little written about him during this period. In 1990 he became the Housing Minister and it was during this time that there was a huge influx of immigration from the Soviet Union. Sharon had to deal with the increase of immigration and the proposal to bring in thousands of new housing units. This caused problems among the lower class in Israel because hundreds of low-income Israeli families were unable to pay their rent at the time. Housing cost were rising and because of this poor families were being forced to leave their homes due to the rising rent costs, while at the same time Sharon was proposing building new houses for

⁷ Ynet News, 2006.

⁸ The Knesset Website

immigrants and not taking care of his other citizens. His plans caused uproar within many sectors of Israeli society. Brinkley illustrates this in his article for the New York Times when he writes: "Environmentalists, builders, local authorities and others vigorously opposed granting Mr. Sharon the new powers, which enable him to override or ignore many local and national laws and regulations concerning housing construction. Many of the opponents complain that with emergency authority Mr. Sharon could trample the nation's urban and environmental planning" (1990). Once again, the policies enacted by Sharon created quite a stir among the public in Israel and were subject to fierce opposition.

Not everyone in Israel was upset by Sharon's new housing plans though, and within the Knesset and other political circles some people felt that he was perfect for the job, and that if anyone could handle the situation it was him.

It is because of just these sorts of problems that many of Mr. Sharon's most ardent political opponents say they are grateful he is Housing Minister and "immigration czar." It has become commonplace talk here that if anyone in the Government can tackle the daunting immigration problems now facing the nation, it is "General Sharon. "He's a bulldozer," said Yossi Ben Aharon, the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff (Brinkley 1990).

Other than this episode, there is not very much written about Sharon in this time. He was under the radar for the most part. Perhaps that is because he was not making any controversial decisions at this time, because he was not given the power to be as influential as he had once been. He was somewhat considered a "political outcast" outside Likud and a right wing hardliner within Likud. However, he did remain a member of the Knesset and held a few

different positions. Sharon was the Minister of Trade between 1984-1990 and the Minister of Housing from 1990-1992. It was during this time, around 1989-1990, that Sharon was challenging Yitzhak Shamir for the leadership of Likud. However, Sharon found himself unsuccessful in the task of taking over the leadership. During the 1990s, overall, Ariel Sharon had a relatively marginal role in the government. He sat on different committees within the Knesset, but it was not until the late 1990s that he was given more authority within the Knesset. It took the election of Netanyahu and Sharon's appointment to Minister of Defense for him to regain much of the power he lost over the years.

It was this last position that set Sharon up to eventually run for the leadership of Likud and successfully be named as the chairman, first as a temporary position and finally as the permanent head of the party. Towards the end of the 1990s Sharon was still a very marginal political player and his public image was still very low. It was not until after Netanyahu stepped down as leader of Likud in 1999 that Sharon's public image began to improve, thus paving the way for him to become the leader of the opposition party. Sharon had a turbulent history within Likud, and was not always looked upon with admiration. However, he was one of the founders of the party and therefore an integral part of it. It is possible that had Sharon not been removed from the position of Defense Minister he could have risen to the position of leader of Likud far soon than he actually did. Throughout his many years in the public eye, he laid the groundwork to be seen as a potential leader. It is clear in his case that the saying 'no press is bad press' is true because, even though he

was surrounded by negative press, he was still seen as a strong fisted, unwavering leader, and when the time came that the party needed a strong leader, Sharon was in the right place at the right time.

Chapter Two: Likud Elections 1999 and Barak's Resignation

The elections of 1999 were a system of direct elections for prime minister, while simultaneously running the elections for the Knesset. This was the second time that this particular system was used. The electoral reform was enacted before the 1992 elections and used for the first time for the 1996 elections. The elections for the Knesset were still under a proportional representation system where every party presented fixed-lists and the constituents voted. However, the threshold for the Knesset was increased from 1 percent to 1.5 percent. The election for the prime minister was a “winner-takes-all system”, with a run off between the top two candidates in the second round if there was no clear majority winner in the first round (Arian & Shamir 2000). The 1999 elections left the Knesset without large parties, and saw a shift to the increase of small and medium parties. The electoral reform that took place allowed the constituents to split their vote for the parties they felt they aligned with on the one hand, and the leader they wanted as prime minister on the other, thereby weakening the big parties.⁹

Netanyahu was elected in 1996 in the first election under the reform. Once Netanyahu became prime minister in 1996 the peace process, namely negotiations, slowed down to almost a standstill (Barari 2004: 126). This is one of the reasons Barak was able to use the peace process to his advantage. In 1999 Barak ran on a platform of peace and as the leader who would finally reach a settlement with the Palestinians. He was determined to finish what his

⁹ The impact of the electoral reform will not be looked at in depth in this thesis.

colleague, and mentor, Yitzhak Rabin, had started with the Oslo Accords. During the elections Barak was seen as the last hope for peace, and the only one able to progress the stalemate that the negotiations had entered since Likud had been in power from the last election in 1996.

Netanyahu's government fell after several political failures and loss of confidence in Netanyahu among leading Likud members and coalition partners. On May 17, 1999 Israel held simultaneous elections for the Knesset and the Prime Minister. Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak faced off in direct election for prime minister. Netanyahu suffered a devastating defeat as incumbent when Barak gained 56 percent of the vote. Netanyahu's party also suffered during this election when they only received 19 seats in the Knesset, compared to the 32 seats they held previously. Following the elections Barak was given 45 days to form a coalition, and he succeeded in this task, even though the final coalition was a mosaic of many parties. Barak's coalition was made up of Meretz, The National Religious Party, United Torah Judaism, Shas, Center Party, Yisrael B'Aliyah, and Labor/One Israel.

Twenty-eight minutes following the release of the exit polls, on the night of May 17, even before the official numbers had been tallied, Netanyahu took to the podium at the Likud headquarters in front of thousands of Likud supporters, and announced his intended resignation from Likud and the Knesset. He began his speech by conceding to defeat and congratulating Barak on his electoral success. Netanyahu then continued to thank two individuals: his wife Sarah and Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon. The animosity between Netanyahu and Sharon

was no secret, but Netanyahu was gracious enough to thank Sharon for standing by him “during the hard times”.¹⁰ Netanyahu “recognized the fact that even though he hadn’t wanted to appoint him to a cabinet-level position, and despite their personal differences, [Ariel Sharon] had remained loyal and fought for a doomed campaign to the [end]” (Sharon 2011: 328). Sharon went to the podium following Netanyahu’s speech and praised him for his hard work and dedication as Prime Minister. This praise led to some speculation that Sharon and Netanyahu had discussed privately the option of Sharon taking over the role of chairman, prior to the announcement on May 17th.¹¹

There was support within Likud to find a temporary chairman for the party until such time that primary elections would take place. Limor Livnat, a senior member of Likud, vocally supported not only choosing a temporary chairman, but also suggested that it be Sharon (Karni 1999). In an interview with Ehud Olmert, when asked why Sharon was chosen, he simply answered “He was the only one, that’s all”. He continued on to explain: “He was Netanyahu’s number two for everything... He was the foreign minister, he was very active in the party, and it was the most natural thing”.¹² Likud ministers and top party officials chose Sharon, on May 18, 1999, to serve as the party’s temporary chairman until “Likud can elect a permanent successor to Netanyahu” (Barzilai 1999). It was by default that Sharon was chosen; there was no one else fit to take over the position. This appointment/election to the

¹⁰ “Dignified Netanyahu exit speech blunts the long knives in Likud-for now” Haaretz May 19, 1999 .

¹¹ “Dignified Netanyahu exit speech blunts the long knives in Likud-for now” Haaretz May 19, 1999

¹² Interview with Ehud Olmet January 17, 2013 Tel Aviv.

position of temporary chairman of Likud would prove to be the first of a few integral aspects of Sharon's election to prime minister. Silvan Shalom and Meir Sheerit opposed the selection of Sharon stating that it would give "an unfair advantage to Sharon over the other candidates if he decided to run for the position of permanent chairman" (Karni 1990). However, these reservations did not seem to concern the leadership too much and they "decided to permit Sharon to run for the permanent chairmanship", if he so chooses (Barzilai 1999).

At the time of Netanyahu's resignation, Sharon was "widely viewed in party circles as an acceptable vehicle for a time-out before the fight over the permanent chairmanship. His age is considered an insurance policy against his running for prime minister in 2003, when he will be 76" (Barzilai 1999).

Netanyahu "backed his selection, thinking that the 71 year old leader could keep the chair warm for him for a few years – a better option than opening the door to the up-and-coming Silvan Shalom and Ehud Olmert, who might seize long term control of the party" (Hefen & Bloom 2006: 330). Over one thousand Likud members and supporters gathered at Beit HaChayal, in Tel Aviv, on May 27, to show their support of Sharon becoming the temporary chairman of Likud. It was expected that there would be a secret ballot vote for temporary chairmanship, however when Yisrael Katz withdrew his candidacy the night before the vote was set to take place, Sharon ran uncontested, thus winning again by default. Katz was known as Netanyahu's confidant and he believed that if Netanyahu's supporters who were still in the party voted for him then it

was possible to beat Sharon for the seat of temporary chairman of the party. However, as the election date drew nearer Katz realized that while he could be elected as chairman of the central committee, it was unlikely that he would be elected as chairman of the party, and therefore he withdrew his candidacy.¹³

On May 27, 1999, Netanyahu officially resigned from Likud and Sharon was officially and unanimously chosen as temporary chairman of Likud. During the ten days between the selection of Sharon and his official election as chairman he, “promised to conduct open primaries to the election of permanent chairman within three months according to the Likud constitution” (Karni 1999). Sharon himself stated that whomever was elected during the upcoming primaries would not necessarily be the Likud candidate for the elections set to be held in 2003; there would be new primary elections held prior to any election (Barzilai 1999). Sharon would not comment on whether he had the intention of running in the primary elections for the permanent chairman, even though sources believed that he would. In an Opinion Editorial by Sima Kadmon, on May 28, 1999 she was very critical of Sharon and the power that he had recently acquired, accusing Sharon of spinning a web within Likud. She wrote:

As temporary chairman Sharon is going to control every internal process. He will have all authority that the Likud chair has, even all the authority that Netanyahu had. The Likud fell into his hands like a ripe fruit and is going to be used as a tool for his short range objectives, all without him promising he is not going to run for the leadership of Likud.

September 1999 - Primary Elections

¹³ Interview with Ehud Olmert, Tel Aviv January 2013.

The summer following the general elections in May 1999 was relatively uneventful for Likud and Sharon. Sharon was working hard to rebuild the party and improve its image. He felt that under Netanyahu's leadership the public image of Likud had diminished and he was determined to bring Likud back as the main party. However, during this time he only managed to begin fixing some of the internal party problems and had yet to focus on the public opinion aspect. He was sitting as the temporary chairman of the party, and according to the constitution, primary elections were to be held within 90 days of the official chairman, Netanyahu's, resignation. The primary elections were set for September 2, 1999. Three Likud members announced their candidacy: Ariel Sharon, Meir Sheerit, and Ehud Olmert. In the beginning, Olmert was ahead in the polls, expected to win the primaries, however, the end result was a crushing defeat by Sharon over his competitors.¹⁴ Ma'ariv quoted Olmert during the campaign when he stated: "I am the only one who is suggesting a winning alternative to Barak's regime against one who can't anymore, Sharon, and one who is not capable, Sheerit" (Rahat 1999). Sharon's campaign, however, proved devastating, especially to Olmert, who was the main target of his attacks. During the elections in May 1999, when Barak defeated Netanyahu, Barak used a video recording of Olmert where he said, "I am familiar with Barak for many years....I do not think he [Barak] will divide Jerusalem".¹⁵ This proved to be a useful tactic for Barak to use during his 1999 elections campaign, and even more beneficial for Sharon to use during the campaigning for the Likud

¹⁴ Interview with Ehud Olmert January 2013, Tel Aviv

¹⁵ Ibid.

primaries. According to Olmert, Sharon took the video to every meeting that he had with Likud members leading up to the primary elections in September, and played the clip at the meetings, saying that this was his competitor, and the man responsible for Barak's victory over Netanyahu.¹⁶ Olmert believes that it was this campaigning strategy that won the primaries for Sharon. However, it seems that there is more to Sharon's victory than just this tactic against Olmert.

Sharon was seen as an older member of Likud, and as such, no one really viewed him as the next Likud prime minister, but rather as a placeholder until someone else stepped in. The position went to the most non-threatening member of Likud, in terms of holding the position through to the next election. This, however, is not how Menachem Rahat saw things. He wrote in *Ma'ariv*, on September 2, 1999 that the winner of the primaries would be Likud's candidate for Prime Minister in the next elections (Rahat 1999). Sharon promised during his campaign that before the next elections, which was scheduled for 2003, the party would hold primary elections once more, therefore, whoever was elected during the primaries in September 1999, was not necessarily the party's pick for the prime ministerial candidate. These primary elections proved to be "a dirty war, packed with curses, defamation, claims of tapping and moles" (Rahat 1999). Both Olmert and Sheerit wanted, more than winning the election, to prevent Sharon from winning. The goal of the two men was to prevent Sharon from receiving the 40 percent needed for him to win the election. However, their effort was to no avail, and Sharon won a large victory over his competitors. He garnered 53 percent of the vote while Olmert and Sheerit received 25 percent

¹⁶ Ibid.

and 22 percent, respectively. However, according to Olmert, it is because Sharon used the video of him saying Barak would never divide Jerusalem that Sharon was able to win the election.

All registered Likud members were eligible to vote in the primary elections but voter turnout was very low. Only 35 percent of members went out to vote (Ma'ariv, September 3, 1999). It was predicted that there would be a low voter turnout. However, it was not expected to be as low as it was. Immediately following the tally of the vote Olmert and Sheerit called for another vote, a run off of sorts, but their request did not make it far and the results were final. The two men were hoping to use the clause in the Likud constitution which states that if the winner of the primaries does not win by gathering over 50 percent of the vote, then there would be a run off between the top candidates. Since Sharon won 53 percent of the vote there was no basis for another ballot. Therefore, on September 3, 1999 Sharon emerged as the official leader of Likud, and this would be an important factor and crossroad in his eventual emergence as the prime minister of Israel, as will be explained below.

It was this nomination, to the position of permanent leader of Likud, that really changed the political fate of Sharon. After he was named as the leader of Likud many more possibilities opened up for him. It is significant to note that had Sharon lost this election it is unlikely that he would have been in any position to run in the upcoming election for prime minister. The fact that Sharon was seen as the only option for the position of temporary leader of Likud paved the way for him to remain in that position following the primary elections. It was

not necessarily that Sharon was the 'best man for the job', or more so, that he was the only eligible option at the time. As will be seen, this will remain the case in the 2001 election.

The Aftermath of Camp David

Prime Minister Barak saw an opportunity that not many others saw, and decided to enter into negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. He rushed into the negotiation even though he did not have the support of the Knesset, or even support from his own party. Ehud Barak wanted the Camp David Summit to be 'the summit to end all summits', but this was the wrong attitude to have when entering into negotiations; it left no room for compromise, and was an 'all or nothing' mentality (Mally & Agha 2001). Both parties left the Camp David negotiations with a bitter taste. Nothing was accomplished and everyone knew that the failure of the negotiations was going to be detrimental upon their return to Israel. Only a few months later great violence broke out in the region, some laying blame on the failure of Camp David.

Intifada

The beginning of the violence that constitutes the Second Intifada is said to have begun on September 29, 2000, just one day after Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon walked on the Temple Mount, in a provocative demonstration of his authority and the rights of Israelis. Sharon spoke to the Wall Street Journal just a few days after his walk and said that the reason he

went to the Temple Mount was to “inspect and ascertain that freedom of worship and free access to the Temple Mount is granted to everyone” (Said 2000: 28). However, Sharon neglected to mention the military presence that he brought with him, which was seen as a threat and reinforcement of the Israeli occupation by many Palestinians. On that first day, September 29, 2000, at least five Palestinians were shot dead by the Israeli Police or Army.

According to the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, as early as November, 120 people had been killed, 6000 wounded: these figures do not include the fourteen Israeli deaths and a slightly larger number of wounded. The Palestinian deaths include at least twenty-two boys under the age of 15... (Said 2000: 29).

Shamir poses the question: “did the Israeli unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon create a perception among Palestinians that negotiations were not the best way to achieve their goals?” (2000: 8). The Palestinians saw that even with ongoing violence in Southern Lebanon Israeli forces pulled out and it is possible that they were hoping for the same outcome. This is yet another piece of ammunition Sharon will use against Barak during the election campaigns. According to Jeremy Pressman, the Palestinians were growing weary of how they were being treated since the Oslo Accords, and that dissatisfaction only grew in the years that followed. He stated:

Popular Palestinian discontent grew during the Oslo peace process because the reality on the ground did not match the expectations created by the peace agreement. From 1993-2000, many aspects of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip deepened rather than abated. Palestinians expected their lives to improve in terms of freedom of movement and socioeconomic standing; when both worsened, significant resentment built up in Palestinian society. This discontent, further felt by the failure of the Camp David summit in July 2000, laid the

groundwork for popular support for a more confrontational approach with Israel (2003: 114).

The Palestinians were very hesitant of the idea of holding negotiations, stating that the promises Israel made in the Oslo Accords were yet to happen, and without some sign of good faith from Israel, they did not want to negotiate again. Arafat thought it was too soon to hold negotiations, because nothing had changed since the signing of Oslo, and he felt that if the negotiations fell through it would end in tragedy for both sides. Palestinian negotiators were also worried that if the negotiations failed, they would be the ones blamed for its failure, and this would cause even more problems at home between the PA and their people and between the Palestinians and Israelis. Barak held similar sentiments to Arafat when the negotiations were beginning. He believed that if Camp David did not end in an agreement, there would be confrontations once again between the two sides. The two leaders knew full well what would be the consequences of leaving the negotiations without an agreement.

By the time Camp David had finished, and the leaders returned home, tensions were high. Barak was missing the support of the Knesset. Due to the summer recess of the Knesset, he was able to survive on borrowed time for a few more months (Ottolenghi 2001: 147). A blame game took place between the two sides, both holding the other responsible for the failures, and no one knowing exactly what happened. Israelis and Palestinians were beginning to feel the disenchantment that resulted from the failure of the negotiations soon

after news spread about Camp David. All it took was a catalyst to spark the Intifada.

Barak's Resignation, Netanyahu's Challenge, and Sharon's Big Opportunity

On November 28, 2000 Prime Minister Ehud Barak announced that there would be early elections called, likely in May 2001. This announcement sent the entire Knesset into a debate about when the elections should be held. One of the dates published in Yedioth was May 22, 2001, but the parties had not decided (Duick, Shebi, & Alush 2000). However, the discussions within the Knesset turned out to be a waste of time when, on December 9, Barak shocked everyone by announcing his resignation and therefore forcing elections for the premiership, but not for the Knesset. According to the Basic Law at that time, elections must be held within 60 days of the Prime Minister's resignation. The new electoral system that was in place following the 1992 reform changed many things for the election of the Knesset and the position of prime minister. Emanuele Ottolenghi wrote about the implications on Barak because of the electoral reform, and what it meant once he lost support from the Knesset. He looked specifically at the loss of support or a show of non-confidence from the Knesset, and wrote:

The rules established by the direct elections law meant that losing parliamentary support did not automatically lead to the government's downfall or new elections. This was meant to strengthen the executive and shield it from coalition instability. In theory, the system also enabled the prime minister to delay the

timing of early elections and gave him some leeway in trying to choose the date for his own advantage (2001: 135).

It is because of this that Barak was able to call elections for only the prime minister. Ottolenghi goes on to state, "Special elections thus became an important loophole, especially given that none of the drafters of the law ever thought that a prime minister would resign and then run again in the ensuing special elections. The law did not exclude this scenario and therefore gave the ruling prime minister an instrument to confront an uncooperative Knesset or an unsupportive party by appealing to the people directly through a plebiscite over his leadership" (2001: 141). Therefore, since Barak knew he was able to resign and still run for the position of prime minister again, it gave him the chance, he believed, to regain legitimacy from the people of Israel, which would in turn, hopefully, help his standing in the Knesset.

According to the law (Basic law: The Government), the resignation came into force 48 hours after the prime minister hands in his letter of resignation to the President. From that moment, a special election for the prime minister only must take place on the last Tuesday following a 60-day period. Such a mechanism is designed to reduce to a minimum the time-period of a power vacuum, and makes it harder for both the prime minister's party and the leading opposition party to appoint new leaders as candidates, given that the primary elections for party chairperson would take too long to organize (Ottolenghi 2001: 141).

Immediately following Barak's resignation, which was termed 'a dirty trick', many believe that "there would be a repeat of 1999 and that Netanyahu

would run against him” (Morris 2006: 673). As will be explained, this was not the case. On December 10, 2000 Likud members started to discuss who would run in the elections as the Likud leader. Sources within Likud estimated that there would likely be a run off between Sharon and Silvan Shalom (Duick 2000). The reason they saw these two as the only candidates was because at the time Netanyahu was not permitted to run unless the Basic Law was changed, which was seen as unlikely. By only calling for direct elections for the prime minister, and not dissolving the Knesset, Barak effectively blocked non-Knesset members from running in the race for premiership. In other words, he blocked Netanyahu. According to the complex voting laws in Israel “only if the Knesset is dissolved, does any citizen have the right to stand as a candidate for prime minister” (Ha’aretz Staff 2000). Since Netanyahu resigned from the Knesset in May 1999 he was automatically excluded from running. However, in the days following Barak’s resignation there would be a bill put forward in the Knesset, attempting to change the Basic Law in order to allow non-Knesset members, and Netanyahu in particular, to run. Uzi Benziman, an Opinion and Comment writer for Ha’aretz, stated that since the polls were showing that Barak would have a much harder time beating Netanyahu than he would in beating Sharon, this gave him the reasoning and the only explanation for why he resigned in the manner he did (Benziman 2000).

There was a lot of controversy within the Knesset at this time regarding what the best course of action would be. Many politicians felt that the Knesset should be dissolved and full elections be held some time in May, however, there

was no consensus within the Knesset. There was a bill submitted to the Knesset to overturn the election law, and allow for Netanyahu, and other non-Knesset members, to run in the direct elections. Netanyahu announced, on December 11, 2000 that he was considering running for the premiership and stated that Barak's resignation was "a clear admission of failure" (Ha'aretz Staff 2000). At the same time that the Knesset was deliberating about the "Netanyahu Bill" (allowing non-Knesset members to run in direct elections), there was also a bill submitted to dissolve the Knesset. On December 11 Yossi Sarid was quoted saying that Barak was trying to sabotage Netanyahu, and was "making concerted efforts to convince Knesset members to vote against the bill to dissolve the Knesset and bring forward a general election" (Alon, Mazal & Nir 2000). The result of this would have been the allowance of Netanyahu to run in the election.

The week following Barak's resignation was a busy one for Likud. The central committee was deciding where they stood on the 'Netanyahu Bill' and on Sharon being the possible prime ministerial candidate in the upcoming elections. On December 13, 2000 Yossi Verter reported on the events of the night before in the Likud headquarters. The members of the Likud central committee gave Sharon a message, "'Thanks but no thanks.' As far as they are concerned, Arik can go home. And the sooner he clears the way for Benjamin Netanyahu, the better" (Verter 2000). Even within his own party he was not seen as a potential prime ministerial candidate at that time; there was always a hope that someone better would step in, namely, Netanyahu. By December 15

Netanyahu definitively announced that he would only run if the Knesset was dissolved and the Members of Knesset were up for election again. Netanyahu knew that he could not hope for a stable coalition with the make up of the Knesset as it stood; it would be yet another failure for him and his political career and one he could not afford.

As the days drew nearer to when the Likud primaries were set to be, stress and worry rose within Likud because Netanyahu still had not definitively stated whether or not he would run in the primaries. The 106,000 eligible Likud voters knew that it was unlikely that Netanyahu would run if the Knesset was not dissolved, but that did not stop them from devising ways to ensure that if he chose to run, he would win the primaries. One of the suggestions made within Likud, and the one that had the most backing, was that there would be a double ballot vote for the primaries. This meant that, since the primaries were scheduled before the Knesset was set to pass or fail the bill to dissolve itself, Likud members could vote for Netanyahu, and then place their Second choice, if he decided not to run. By December 19, 2000 the speculations within Likud were over. The Netanyahu bill passed within the Knesset 65-45. However this vote proved to be a complete waste of time because the bill to dissolve the Knesset failed 69-4, due to strong divide on the issue. All in all, this meant that Netanyahu would not be running despite the change of the basic law.

Most important, since everyone within Likud was waiting for Netanyahu to challenge Sharon's leadership, there was no one prepared to run against Sharon when the decision came down from the Knesset that they would not

dissolve. According to Olmert “there was no one that could [run against Sharon]. If Bibi didn’t compete...there was no one else that had any chance.”¹⁷ Olmert, like many others, believed that if Netanyahu challenged Sharon, he likely would have won. However, this is not how it played out, and once again, by means of a political default, Sharon was sitting as the leader of Likud. The country was about to enter into direct elections for the Prime Minister, a position Sharon now had a good chance of winning, simply because of Barak’s failures leading up to the election. Sharon was ahead of Barak in the polls from the beginning, and, as will be seen, his popularity only rose in the weeks leading to the election.

¹⁷ Interview with Ehud Olmert [January 17, 2013, Tel Aviv]

Chapter 3: The Election

Introduction

As December came to a close it was becoming more and more evident what the upcoming election would look like. Ariel Sharon was running as the Likud candidate, much to the dismay of many Likud members, and Barak was running as the Labor candidate. Public opinion polls were showing Sharon leading as the favorite to win the election; however, that did not slow down Barak in the least, and there would be a month long head-to-head battle between the two men for the position of Prime Minister. The election came at a crucial time for Israel. The Second Intifada was entering its fourth month of violence, and the people of Israel were looking for someone who could protect them. Suicide bombings and other terrorist attacks were becoming more frequent and Barak was seen as failing to secure Israel against such actions. The citizens of Israel were faced with two options: one, a man who had yet to provide them with the security that was needed, and the other, a radical who had been forced out of the position of defense minister less than 20 years earlier. Sharon did an excellent job in changing his image from one of the 'bulldozer'-radical, to that of the grandfather of Israel and protector of the citizens.

There are three main areas that will be evaluated in this chapter: public opinion surrounding the elections and the sense of security; the electoral campaigns of both Sharon and Barak; and voter turnout. Sharon entered the race for prime minister as the default leader of Likud, and he soon became

seen as the only option for returning the country to a state of security. Sharon's history was no secret. However, when displayed next to Barak's failures, he was seen as the lesser evil, and the only one who could actually help with the dire situation in Israel. It was finalized in late December that the two men running would be Sharon and Barak, although their television campaigns did not begin until the middle of January.

Each candidate was allotted 120 minutes to broadcast on Channels 1 and 2, along with 120 minutes on the radio. The television 'campaign propaganda time' began on January 16 with each candidate receiving 20 minutes. Ehud Barak, One Israel, had the first spot on January 16 and Sharon, Likud, had the last broadcast on February 5 (Gilbert 2001). There were very strict rules regarding what could be shown on the broadcasts and each candidate had to meet the standards, or their broadcast was pulled from viewing. One of the instances deemed inappropriate for showing was in Sharon's original jingle when he is shown with young children. This was outlawed because of the emotions elicited when young children are shown in relation to the terrorism that was taking place. It was the Central Elections committee that deemed what was, or was not, appropriate to be shown during campaign propaganda time.

Public Opinion and Polls

As was seen in the earlier chapters, public opinion surrounding Ariel Sharon over the years was divisive. He went from being loved to hated and

back again numerous times throughout his career in the army and in politics. But in 2001, when the Second Intifada was beginning to monopolize the minds of Israelis, Sharon quickly became loved and needed again. Public opinion polls taken as early as December 2000 for Ma'ariv and the Jerusalem Post, showed Sharon as the front-runner in the election race. How soon the electorate forgot about Sharon's past, and the questionable spark to the Intifada. Emotions can have a huge impact on the electorate, as was discussed in the introductory chapter. However, it is important to note the relevant connection to the election in 2001. Arian and Shamir wrote, "anxiety can move people to pay more attention to politics and to acquire new and more accurate information about what is going on. Voters react emotionally to matters of public policy, to political parties, and of course candidates" (2002: 22). This theory materialized during the 2001 election when the vote was seen as extremely emotionally charged.

In a pre-election survey, the pollsters attempted to gauge the emotions that were being felt by the constituents, and their reactions to the candidates. The question asked was, "Now we want to ask you about the feelings you have about the candidates for prime minister. Has [candidates name], by his personality or by his actions caused you to feel [emotion]?" The results were, indeed, fascinating, although not all together unsuspected. The results were as follows:¹⁸

¹⁸ Asher Arian and Michal Shamir, *The Elections in Israel: 2001*, The Israel Democracy Institute, 2002: 23

Table 1

Emotion	Barak %	Sharon %
Anger	61	29
Fear	44	23
Hope	36	49
Pride	26	40

This chart provides us with a good indication of how the people were feeling toward the candidates leading up to the election. According to Arian and Shamir, after analyzing the aforementioned data, hope was the main emotion that drove the election, and this was seen clearly through Sharon's utilization of this emotion in his campaign material, specifically his jingle (see below). In the surveys that Arian and Shamir analyzed they found that compared to Barak, Sharon was seen as the one capable of handling security and foreign affairs, along with being able to withstand pressure and stand firm during negotiations, dealing with terrorism, fostering unity, reliability and putting the needs of the country above all else.

In the weeks leading up to the election there were numerous polls and surveys being conducted in order to gauge the opinions of the electorate. Arian and Shamir provide results from some of the more common questions asked of the respondents. When asked what the major issue was at the time that the government should deal with 79 percent of the Jewish respondents answered security issues (security/peace/ terror) (Arian & Shamir 2002: 15). Arian and Shamir tracked the changes in the response given by the constituents over the

years and they found that, "In 1969 (War of Attrition), 1988 (a year into the first Intifada), 1996 (a few months after the wave of terrorist attacks), and 2001 (the Second Intifada), foreign and security issues were mentioned by more than 70 percent of respondents" (Arian and Shamir 2002: 15). However, they also found that in the years in between, 1981, 1984, and 1999, less than 30 percent mentioned these specific issues. Obviously, the security situation as it was in Israel at the time was first and foremost on the minds of the electorate. Therefore, a leader who was perceived as capable of restoring peace and security had an advantage.

In the same surveys and polls it was also concluded that 71 percent of respondents found the general condition in Israel to be bad or very bad, compared to the results of the previous election in 1996 when only 26 percent gave the same response. One of the most telling conclusions drawn from these polls was in response to the question about the governments' performance. Eighty-nine percent of those asked thought that the government was doing not well, or not well at all (Arian & Shamir 2002: 16). According to Arian and Shamir, "Israeli public opinion in 2001 was characterized by a shift to the right and a shift to greater wariness regarding the Palestinians and the future...What had changed were the expectations of the citizenry, which became much more pessimistic" (Arian and Shamir 2002: 17). As was outlined in the literature review, these conclusions are fitting to the situation as it was in Israel.

On January 14, 2001, just before the election campaigning took off, Daniel Bloch wrote in the Jerusalem Post, "The success of Sharon in the polls, and his

almost inevitable winning of the coming elections, is more an outcome of Barak's grave mistakes and lack of political credibility than an act of admiration for Sharon". Entering January 2001, Sharon was leading the polls, although, Hanoch Smith postulates that his lead was because of the way the question was posed to the constituents and the results may have been skewed. Most of the pre-election polls asked "How would you vote for prime minister if the elections were held today?" Smith believes that "since no one is actually going to vote at the time, the answer reflects the respondents view only at the time" (Smith 2001). This method is able to project the current standing of the public, but in no way does it represent firm positions, or even intention for voting come election day.

In December 2000, the Smith Center, a polling institute, conducted a poll for the Jerusalem Post, in which they asked Smiths' preferred question, "for whom are you intending to vote for prime minister on election day?" The question posed in this form caused voters to think ahead and make some kind of commitment. The poll found that 40 percent intended to vote for Sharon, 20 percent for Barak, 25 percent were undecided, and 15 percent said they were not going to vote. Smith concluded that because 40 percent gave no commitment, this meant that the race was "open to radical change" (Smith 2001). However, throughout the election campaign period, the polling results remained relatively static. Only ten days before the television and radio campaigns began Dahaf Polling Institute released a poll in which it showed Sharon with 50 percent of the vote and Barak with 32 percent. Three days after

the campaign began Gallup, another polling company, conducted a poll for Ma'ariv in which Sharon had 47 percent, and Barak had 29 percent.

There was very little fluctuation in terms of the voting percentages. There was always a large percentage of constituents that were undecided or choosing to abstain from the vote. The day before the election Sharon was still leading the race, and with the largest margin that has been seen so far. On February 5, according to a poll conducted by Dahaf, Sharon was expected to take 56 percent, while Barak was only predicted to gather 38 percent. Even the polls conducted on the day of the election did not anticipate the results as they were with Sharon having such a huge margin over Barak.

Campaign January 16 - February 1, 2001: '*Only Barak can make Sharon the Prime Minister of Israel*'

The two men fought shamelessly against one another, each one recognizing their opponent's downfalls and trying to campaign accordingly. However, there are some shortcomings that are harder to defend against than others. It is clear to see, mainly through newspaper articles from the time, that Barak lost the confidence of the constituents. Following his failure at Camp David, and the violence taking place known as the Intifada, Israelis felt that Barak could not keep them safe. On January 7, 2001 Daniel Bloch wrote, "It seems as if Barak produced a new election slogan 'only Barak can make

Sharon the prime minister of Israel”’. Newspapers proved to be a valuable source when analyzing the campaign period, alongside other valid sources.¹⁹

In terms of the television campaign, Jonathan Mendilow’s (2003) book, *Ideology, Party Change, and Electoral Campaigns in Israel, 1965-2001*, is a valuable source. In his book he breaks down every campaign broadcast and analyses what topics each candidate spent time addressing. The analysis is done in terms of seconds spent on each topic, and then the results are converted into a percentage of total broadcast time. Through his research Mendilow found that Barak only spent 9 percent of his broadcasting time addressing his previous term in office, and of that, 5 percent was spent discussing his ‘success’ in Lebanon, even though many did not see his actions as successful.

As the incumbent, Barak should have been able to use his campaign to show the successes of his term in office, however, with his record that was not possible. Instead, during his campaigning he apologized for his failures and asked for a second chance, saying that he knew where he went wrong, and would not make the same mistakes again. Mendilow believes that, “In effect, he was asking the voters to vote for him in spite of his record, for the sake of ‘the most important goal - peace’” (2003: 222). Even though Sharon had a dark history following him, he did not have the failure of a past term as prime minister haunting him. Mendilow quotes Arthur Finkelstein, campaign advisor for Sharon, when he said, “by definition of who he was, Sharon provided security. What he needed to do was to show that peace could be accomplished through

¹⁹ I was unable to obtain video recordings from the ‘propaganda time’ of each candidate

security” (Mendilow 2003: 224). Showing that he was the candidate who could provide security became the backbone of his campaign, regardless if the outcome was a peace agreement. This was proven in Mendilow’s research, which showed that Sharon did not address his prospective peace negotiations in his television campaign.

Through Mendilow’s analysis he found that Barak’s main campaigning strategy was to “rally the electors to a compelling vision of peace and to persuade them that all current setbacks should be disregarded” (Mendilow, 2003, 221), mainly because he was in the dark shadow of his failure to generate a deal with the Palestinians. Sharon’s task was easier because he “by contrast, could suffice with voicing commitment to positions that were accepted by the vast majority of the electorate and using the turbulent background of the elections to turn the contest into a referendum on Barak’s leadership and personal credibility” (Mendilow, 2003, 221). Both candidates warned the electorate of the ‘trouble’ that would come if the other were to be elected. They both believed that their opponent, if elected, would likely exploit the position of premiership and move forward with dangerous agendas. Both men spoke about stopping the actions, which caused the standstill in the government, and facilitating the unity that was needed.

Throughout Sharon’s campaigning he stated his vision for a peace agreement, which included “no settlement [being] uprooted...not [giving] the Palestinians a foothold in Jerusalem or on the Temple Mount, and the Jordan Valley will be Israel’s forever” (Gazit 2001). With both men holding strong,

clearly outlined positions, which did not necessarily align with one another, the election quickly evolved into a battle between their political opinions (Gazit, Jerusalem Post, 2001). However, both contestants believed in establishing peace in the region, and security for the citizens of Israel. In every campaign rally that Sharon held there were posters scattered all over reading 'Only Sharon will bring peace' and 'Ariel Sharon, a leader of peace' (Lefkovits 2001). Sharon was succeeding in presenting himself with a specific image, that of the protector of Israel and the only man who could keep the people safe. From the beginning of the campaign in early January, until the election in February, anytime Sharon had a speaking engagement, or campaign promotion of any kind, one could see these posters lining the walls, and could hear the jingle singing praise to Sharon.

One of the key campaign techniques utilized by Sharon and his team was that of a jingle, or campaign song. Even today, when talking about this election at a café with some university students, they recalled the jingle and could still sing the whole thing. It goes to show that good campaigning stays in the minds of the constituents. Sharon's jingle did not only inform the people that he was running, but it attempted, successfully, to change the image Sharon had prior to the election. The jingle was played in the background at rallies, and repeatedly on the television and radio during Sharon's campaign propaganda time. The words, translated from Hebrew, are as follows:

We want unity and security;
We want a leader with experience;
We want to think about tomorrow;
To know that it's possible,

Jerusalem forever;
With hope and a future;
Israel wants a leader;
Ariel Sharon;
Only Sharon will bring peace,
A peace that will protect us;
Sharon is a leader for peace;
Peace that will keep us safe;
Peace that will keep us safe;
Peace that will keep us safe;
Sharon the leader for peace;
Ariel Sharon.²⁰

The imagery in this jingle is obvious, and it is clear why the words would stick in the minds of people, even ten years later. With the situation in Israel as it was because of the Intifada, Sharon did not waste anytime playing on the scared emotions of the electorate to promote his image as the protector. Dafner states it best when he wrote in the Jerusalem Post “the point of Sharon’s campaign is abundantly clear: ‘Think Sharon, think peace’”, this is exactly what Sharon was going for in his campaign (Dafner 2001). It is seen through the polls and surveys that Sharon was thought of in terms of security, which was exactly what he wanted. It seems that there was nothing as effective as this jingle in Barak’s Campaign. He relied heavily on his past supports; which proved to be detrimental when many of them chose not to vote.

Voter Turnout and Its Impact on the Election

Voter Turnout was at an historical low during the February 2001 elections.²¹ The overall turnout for this election was 62.3 percent; 19 percent

²⁰ Sharon’s jingle, from Youtube.com, translated by Saar Glazer

Arab Israeli turnout and 68 percent of Jews. The record low turnout, prior to the 2001 election was in 1951 when only 75.1 percent voted. Many scholars have studied the reason for the poor voter turnout and there are a few very good explanations. First, due to the dissatisfaction of the electorate, Barak supporters began to slip away. "There is apathy in the electorate that never existed in previous election campaigns. It is mainly prevalent in the constituents that voted Barak in 1999. Some of them are moving back to the Right, while many others, including the Arab voters, are going to stay home or put a blank slip in the voting envelope. They do not care if as a result Sharon is elected" (Arian & Shamir 2002: 37). Barak lost the confidence of his supporters and many of them chose not to vote, rather than to vote for him.

The second leading theory as to a reason for the low turnout was because many Arab-Israeli voters chose not to go to the ballots either. There was a general feeling of dissatisfaction and many Arab-Israeli voters felt they were being pulled in too many directions because of the violence that had erupted, especially the killing of 13 Arab Israeli citizens by Israeli security forces. There is an underling perception of distrust and dissatisfaction held by many Arab-Israelis due to their treatment by the Jewish majority state laws (Jamal 2002: 57). Jamal concludes that many Arab-Israelis may have chosen not to vote as a way to show their civil disobedience, and community togetherness. Because these two specific and large population sectors decided

²¹ Israel turnout figures are based on the population registry, which includes all eligible voters, including citizens who are out of the country on election day. If this group is excluded, the baseline electorate is 90 percent (Arian and Shamir 2002: 34)

not to vote, it made it possible for Sharon to obtain as high a percentage as he did, and for Barak to leave the race with very little support being shown.

It was clear from the beginning of the electoral race who was going to be victorious. What is interesting in this case is why. From the point of announcing their candidacy in December to the campaign propaganda through to the election Sharon was constantly in the lead. Sharon was what the people wanted. The citizens of Israel were looking for a leader who could protect them and bring them back a sense of security. This was repeatedly shown in public opinion polls during this time period. The people were scared of the future, due to the many suicide attacks within Israel's cities. The sway of the general public toward the political right and Sharon in general was no surprise. The public opinion mirrored that of previous times of turmoil in the country, which was shown through the polls analyzed by Arian and Shamir. Just as Sharon was in the position by default to be named temporary leader of Likud, and then again, seen as the only presented option as the permanent leader, it was the same when the time came for the people to decide on a leader for the country. Between Barak and Sharon, the latter was the clear favorite in the context of the Intifada and violence.

Ehud Barak had a lot working against him when he decided to run as the incumbent in the 2001 special election for prime minister. During his time as prime minister he managed to push the government into negotiations they were not ready for, fail at those very negotiations and sit by while the country spiraled into yet another Intifada. This did not bode well for him in the minds of the

electorate. Barak had to convince the people to trust him, once again, even though he had nothing to show for the first time they gave him their trust. Sharon, on the other hand, had a political advantage, even though he had a shady past following him. For his entire career Sharon had been seen as a bulldozer, and the man you want in your corner when going to war. This became essential to his electoral victory. The people in Israel needed a leader whom they felt could protect them, and Sharon was seen as the only option against Barak. Once again, by default, Sharon was chosen as the people's leader. Through the use of his campaigning, he was able to project himself as the solution to the dire situation. However, Sharon's perceived ability to protect the nation against the violence that was happening on a near daily basis was not the only thing that contributed to his sweeping success. The detrimentally low voter turnout had an influence as well, though he would have won even if Barak's supporters came to vote, though in a smaller margin.

There are many things that influenced the election of Sharon in February 2001. Among them are his public opinion, campaign and voter turnout. The public may not have always been on Sharon's side, but when the country was in turmoil, they know who they could turn to. Through Sharon's campaign he made it clear that he was the only candidate that could secure peace in Israel, and voting for Barak would be even more detrimental. As was mentioned, many believed that Sharon won not because of his successes and popularity, but because of Barak's failures. Voter turn out was historically low, for different reasons, most of all being the disenchantment towards Barak and his

capabilities. Sharon was lucky enough by default to be in the position of leadership within Likud, and able to enter the race for prime minister when he was up against Barak, and not someone who could actually challenge him.

Conclusion

This research explored and explained the reasons that Ariel Sharon was elected to the position of prime minister in 2001. In the literature review three theories were outlined of voter behavior in times of terrorism and violence; the electorate will vote against the party in power, the electorate will polarize, and that the electorate will shift to the right. The first approach, in which the electorate will vote against the party in power, is a viable explanation for the elections of 2001. Ehud Barak was elected prime minister in 1999 and over the two years that he was in the role of leadership he was seen as nothing but a failure. Every attempt he made at peace or negotiations turned out to harm his people rather than benefit them. It is very plausible that the election of Sharon was based not on his merit as a leader, but rather on the failures of Barak. This was shown through many newspaper articles and public opinion polls leading up to the February election.

The case study presented in the literature review is that of Spain in 2004. There was a terrorist attack directly prior to the elections and the people felt that it was the government's fault because of their involvement in the war. The electorate in Spain believed that if their right wing government could not keep them safe, then perhaps the left-wing government could. It is significant to note that this approach goes directly against the third approach presented, which states that the electorate will shift to the right during times of violence. In Israel this has continuously been the case. When violence and terror break out the

constituents lean further right, believing that a more hawkish government would be better able to protect their interests.

The case of the 2001 election in Israel is a mixture of both of these theories. First, the people of Israel were disenchanted by Barak's failures and preferred to vote for Sharon rather than to allow Barak back into the position of control. In this case the people voted against the 'party in power'. However, since Barak was a member of the Labor party, a party that was to the left of Likud, it could also be argued that the electorate shifted to the right, feeling the need for a stronger leader, one that would not fold under pressure.

The second theory presented in the literature review claimed that the electorate's views will polarize; they will be pushed further to which ever wing they are on. Those who were moderate right-wing supporters will become extreme right-wing supporters, and vice-versa. It is difficult to prove this theory in regard to the 2001 election because it was a special election for only the prime minister, and it was in the shadow of Barak's epic failures. It was not evident whether Barak's supporters became more hardened in their positions, but it is clear that many of Barak's supporters chose to vote for Sharon, or not to vote at all.

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to outline the possible reasons for Sharon's election to the position of prime minister in 2001. I presented three viable theories, and outlined the factors that were present throughout his career. The conclusion I have drawn from my research is that Sharon made it to the position of prime minister by default. He was the only option from the

beginning of his climb to the top within Likud, and when his failures were placed beside Barak's during the election campaign they proved to be insignificant. Sharon's career was a turbulent one; he wavered in public opinion, never being loved, or hated, for too long. When reviewing his military history he went against many orders that he had, but in the end he was triumphant in the minds of the electorate. He made it into the position of Minister of Defense, only to be removed after a short while for his involvement in the massacre in Sabra and Shitila. This greatly damaged his political career, and had it not been for his forced resignation, it is possible that he would have become prime minister far before he was.

Sharon spent nearly two decades with minimal authority in the government with before Netanyahu brought him into his government as the Foreign Minister. However, when the time came that his party needed a strong leader, he was chosen, but not because of his abilities. Sharon was appointed/elected as temporary chairman of Likud in 2001 in haphazard political condition after Likud's loss of elections and Netanyahu's resignation. Sharon was simply seen as a nonthreatening member who would only temporarily lead and restore the Likud. No one believed that he would actually run for the position of prime minister when the next election came up. Therefore, by complete default, Sharon was placed in the position of temporary chairman. Only a few months later a similar situation played out when the primaries were held and he was once again elected. This time he had

competition but he was still seen as the only option when looked at in comparison to Olmert and Sheeṭrit at that time.

Sharon was the official leader of Likud for just over a year when the Second Intifada broke out. To this day, many people still blame Barak for the Intifada because of his failure at Camp David, and his inability to stifle the violence. Barak knew he was in trouble, and that he had lost the support of the Knesset, so he did the only thing he could think of; he resigned and called for a special election. It was clear at that point, even to Barak, that almost anyone could have beaten him in the election, but he felt he had a better chance of defeating Sharon than Netanyahu. This is the reason he called for special elections, knowing that it would effectively block Netanyahu from running. When the time for Likud primaries came around everyone was expecting and hoping for Netanyahu to challenge Sharon, and inevitably win. However, this was not the case and Netanyahu decided not to run, leaving no time for anyone else to prepare and challenge Sharon. Once again, Sharon remained in leadership of Likud by absolute default; he faced no competition.

The election of 2001 was unique because of the Intifada and the fact that it was a special election for only the position of prime minister. The Intifada proved to be an invaluable tool that Sharon was able to utilize to his benefit during his campaign. Through the years Sharon became known as the 'bulldozer', a strong fisted leader. When the country was in turmoil over the violence happening everyday, a leader of this sort is exactly what they want. Sharon had a good campaign to show the people that he was the leader who

could secure their safety, and the safety of the families. Barak, on the other hand, had the failures of his past term in office following him around like a shadow, and was seen as the cause of the violence. When it came time for the people to put their faith in one man, many felt they only were given one option: Sharon.

There are two important causes that led to the election of Sharon: Barak's failures and the Intifada. Barak was perceived to have misled the country and as a result there was extreme violence taking place on a daily basis. He had been unable to protect the citizens and was not seen as a viable option for prime minister. The Intifada gave Sharon ammunition against Barak, and provided him with a platform to stand on. He was easily able to paint himself as the only one to protect the country, especially when running against the person seen responsible. At that time, anyone could have beaten Barak, and such it was the case. Sharon was not elected based on his abilities, but rather on the lack of abilities Barak possessed. The country gained one of its greatest leaders by default.

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