

Feb. 12, 2009

Livni, Netanyahu Contend for Leadership

In a demonstration of Israel's vibrant democracy, Israeli citizens went to the polls this week to vote in elections for the 120-seat Knesset, or parliament. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni's Kadima Party garnered 28 seats while former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party won 27 seats. Despite Kadima's plurality, parties with a rightward tilt will make up a majority of the new Knesset. President Shimon Peres is expected to ask either Livni or Netanyahu to try to form a government that would be able to gain the support of 61 members of Knesset. Both Livni and Netanyahu have said they are committed to continuing negotiations with the Palestinians and working to strengthen the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Israeli President Shimon Peres will ask Livni or Netanyahu to form a government.

- President Shimon Peres will have seven days after the election is certified on Feb. 20 to assign the task of forming a new government to the member of the Knesset he believes has the best chance to win the support of a majority of the elected Knesset members.
- This would usually be the leader of the largest party, in this case Tzipi Livni. However, if the president – based on consultations with party leaders – concludes that another candidate, such as Netanyahu, will have a better chance of forming a government, he can assign the task to him.
- The Prime Minister-designate will then have a total of 42 days to present a majority coalition government to the Knesset.
- If a government is not formed in the allotted timeframe, Peres may offer another Knesset member the opportunity to try. That member would then have up to 28 days to try to form a new government.



Israeli President Shimon Peres will ask either Kadima's Tzipi Livni or the Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu to form the next government.

Both Livni and Netanyahu have committed to seeking peace with the Palestinians and Arab states.

- Both Livni and Netanyahu have said they are committed to continuing negotiations with the Palestinian Authority (PA).

- Netanyahu, a former prime minister, has said he wants to “promote a genuine peace process ... to strengthen security, to accelerate economic development among the Palestinians, and to intensify regional cooperation with Jordan and Egypt in parallel with the peace process.” Livni, who has spearheaded negotiations with the PA during the past year, has said “the Annapolis process will go on; we will continue to promote negotiations with the Palestinians.”
- Israeli leaders from both the left and the right have signed and implemented peace agreements with the Palestinians and Arab states in the past. Prime Minister Begin (Likud) signed Israel’s peace treaty with Egypt, ceding the entire Sinai (1979); Prime Minister Rabin (Labor) concluded the two Oslo agreements with the PLO, ceding West Bank and Gaza land to the Palestinians (1993, 1995) and signed the peace treaty with Jordan (1994); and Netanyahu signed the Wye River Memorandum with the PLO, ceding more West Bank land to the Palestinians (1998).

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- The U.S.-Israel relationship transcends politics and is based on a long-standing friendship between Americans and Israelis, who face common threats and share a common bond.
- Israel is a strong and vibrant democracy. The Israeli public and its democratic system will determine the makeup of the new government and its policies. As White House spokesman Robert Gibbs stated, “Like our own democracy, I think whether it’s turbulent or tumultuous times or bad weather, did not seem to deter millions from voting yesterday. I think that’s the sign and strength of a strong democracy.”
- Regardless of the final composition of the government, the strong alliance between the United States and Israel will continue to thrive. Spokesman Gibbs said, “President Obama looks forward to working with whoever makes up that next Israeli government in a search for lasting and durable peace in the region.”