

## **Peretz unveils new peace plan, January 9 2007**

By Mazal Mualeb

A day after Ehud Barak officially announced his intention of running for the Labor Party leadership, party chairman and Defense Minister Amir Peretz unveiled a diplomatic initiative to the Labor Knesset faction, sparking accusations from his rivals in the race that the plan is no more than a political survival tactic.

Peretz formulated the plan over the past few weeks together with Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh.

But unlike with previous initiatives, this time Peretz avoided giving Prime Minister Ehud Olmert reason to criticize him: He phoned Olmert to inform him of the plan's details before the premier left for China. He also briefed Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni about it.

The plan, which Peretz wants to bring to a vote before the Labor Party's institutions, combines the Saudi initiative and the road map. It consists of three phases: (1) creating and stabilizing a new security and economic situation, the release of kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit and dismantling illegal outposts (six months); (2) negotiations over a final-status agreement and the extension of Palestinian sovereignty (six months); (3) negotiations on details of the final-status agreement and its implementation (18 months).

It is apparently meant both to counter party rivals who are considered defense experts, including Barak and MKs Ami Ayalon and Danny Yatom, and to show that Peretz intends to continue as defense minister despite calls for his replacement.

### **Overshadowed by leadership campaign**

But despite its presentation, complete with sophisticated graphics, to the faction and the press, it was overshadowed by the campaign for the party chair.

Ayalon said that the plan was "not a good one," adding: "The phased plan has already been proven a failure, and the foreign minister has presented the outlines of a plan that I like better."

MK Ophir Pines-Paz, who is also running for Labor chair, told Peretz: "Before you present a new plan, maybe you should implement the old ones. You and I appeared in press conferences during the elections and promised to dismantle the outposts. Not only did we not evacuate them, but 20 new houses have gone up in Amona.

"Who's going to believe us when we don't keep our promises? The plan is old and conservative and doesn't take into consideration the dramatic changes caused by the Iranian threat, the second Lebanon war and the Palestinian complications."

Peretz responded: "We promised to evacuate the outposts in a year; a year hasn't gone by yet," to which Pines-Paz retorted: "You have four more months."

Yatom called the Peretz plan a "virtual plan and not realistic," with a goal that was "strictly political."

He said that as long as the Palestinian Authority has two heads, it will be impossible to reach an agreement on the principles of a permanent settlement.

### **Support from Barak allies**

Surprisingly, however, support for Peretz's plan came from Ehud Barak's allies, ministers Shalom Simhon and Isaac Herzog.

Herzog even said that the plan could serve as a basis for discussions on Labor's diplomatic platform.

Opposition lawmakers also attacked Peretz's plan as an exercise in political survival. MK Danny Naveh (Likud) said that when "every minister presents his own plan," this "proves again that this government has no path and no real plan to extricate Israel from its troubles."