

ISRAELI KNESSET VOTES

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well known, the speeches by both men underlined the sharp divergence between them.

Begin declared in his address to the Knesset that it was "obvious" that "any proposal, in a future peace negotiation, that Jewish settlements be removed or withdrawn will be rejected." He said this was "obvious" in terms of his government's overall political platform which is to "raise Israel's claim and right to sovereignty over Judaea, Samaria and Gaza" after the five year transition period of autonomy called for by the Camp David accords.

Quoting from his government's "basic policy guidelines" formulated when the present Cabinet took office last August, Begin noted that "when the day comes that our state sovereignty will apply to Judaea, Samaria and Gaza, we will keep and maintain full autonomy... as agreed at Camp David and is to be implemented through negotiations, which, I assume, will shortly be resumed."

Peres, who spoke directly after Begin, criticized the settlement statement as "untimely" and as a dangerous distortion of political realities. He said that a Labor-led government would place settlements only in security areas, around Jerusalem, in the Jordan valley, the Etzion block, southern Gaza and the Golan Heights. The Likud policy has been to plant settlements in the most heavily Arab populated regions of the West Bank.

Peres stressed that in any peace talks in which a Labor government was involved it would strive to keep existing Jewish settlements intact while the question of ultimate sovereignty was resolved "in negotiations without pre-conditions." Peres charged that Begin's statement on the settlements reflected his "bad conscience" over the evacuation of Yamit in Sinai. He recalled explicit pledges by Begin during his first administration in 1977 and 1978 that the Yamit settlement would never be removed. "Where are those promises now?" Peres asked.

Defending his position, Begin said that Labor was applying a "double standard" to settlements. Labor is opposed to Jewish settlements in heavily Arab populated areas. Begin claimed that there

was no difference between the 38 Jewish settlements his government has established on the West Bank and the Labor Kibbutz Hanita established in the 1940's when that region was predominantly Arab. (The Knesset vote also approved the Cabinet decision just days earlier that El Al, Israel's national airline, will cease Sabbath flights within three months.)

Meanwhile, Egypt issued strong criticism of the Knesset approval of the policy statement. Egypt's Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Kamal Hassan Ali said the Knesset's approval had no validity for Egypt and indeed both Egypt and the U.S. regarded the Israeli settlements as illegal. Ali maintained that at Camp David, Israel had undertaken to freeze new building of settlements, a claim that Begin has consistently denied.

President Hosni Mubarak's top political aid, Osama El Baz, also reacting to Begin's Knesset speech said Egypt continued to object to Jerusalem as a venue for the autonomy talks because it regarded the Arab part of the city as an integral part of the West Bank and thus part of the subject matter of the talks themselves.

Israeli officials, responding in a low-key manner, said "Israel would prefer if these issues and disputes were discussed at the negotiating table and not in public statements." The officials said that as for the venue of the autonomy talks, it was practice throughout the world that international negotiations are held in the parties' capitals and "We cannot agree that through Egypt's refusal, Israel is boycotted in this way."

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