

## **WILL AMERICAN JEWS VOTE WITH ARAFAT THIS YEAR?**

**By Don Feder**

In the mother of all ironies, a majority American Jews probably will end up voting for the presidential candidate Yasser Arafat wants to win.

But Jewish conservatives at least can take comfort in the possibility that Bush will do much better with the Jewish vote this year than he did in 2000.

According The American Jewish Committee's Annual Survey of Jewish Opinion (taken August 18-September 1, 2004), 69% of Jews will vote for Kerry this year, and only 24% for Bush.

Still, this is still an improvement over Bush's share of the Jewish vote in 2000 (19%). And Kerry isn't doing nearly as well with Jewish voters as Gore in 2000 (79%), Clinton in 1996 (78%) or Clinton in 1992 (80%).

Last April, Democratic pollster John Zogby observed, "If instead of 72 percent of the Jewish vote, Kerry were to get *69 percent*, it's not many votes, but it could have an impact in Pennsylvania, Florida, Arizona" – all won by narrow margins in the last election.

Matt Brooks, executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition, notes that there's a strong Jewish presence in all of the battleground states (except New Hampshire). So a modest shift in the Jewish vote could have a major impact.

Given the inveterate liberalism of American Jews (many believe Moses brought down the ACLU's charter from Sinai), a big Kerry vote is predictable. But their counterparts in Israel – whose lives are on the line – have a more realistic perspective.

In a poll in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz (published on October 16), 50% of Israelis said they wanted to see W. re-elected, compared to 24% who were rooting for Kerry.

It's an open secret that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is praying for a Bush victory. In July, Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told a group of prominent American Jews that he personally prefers Bush over Kerry.

For Israelis and their more discerning supporters in this country, it all comes down to terrorism and security.

When Clinton was president, the White House welcome mat was always out for Arafat. By contrast, Bush refuses to meet with him. Just months into his first term, the president decided that Arafat was a cunning killer who would never abandon violence.

In his 1997 book, "The New War," Kerry – who has the endorsements of both the Muslim American PAC and the Arab America PAC -- spoke glowingly of Arafat as a "statesman" and "role model." You bet. The PLO honcho is widely emulated in Tehran and Tora Bora.

In a November 17, 2003 speech to the Arab American Institute, Kerry called Israel's security barrier, "a barrier to peace." (It's a great inconvenience for suicide bombers.) When Jewish leaders complained, the Senator reversed himself.

Worse, from an Israeli perspective, are Kerry's Middle East advisors, -- veteran appeasers like former US Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk, who: 1) Helped devise the disastrous Oslo Accords, 2) Persuaded Clinton that Arafat was big teddy bear, 3) As ambassador, called all Israeli settlements "illegal" and 4) Wants to station US forces in the West Bank and Gaza to cover an Israeli withdrawal.

Little wonder Israeli journalist David Bedein writes, "The very mention of Indyk's name sends shudders down the spine of senior members of the Israel defense and foreign policy establishment."

Equally troubling is the Senator's passion for the United Nations. If the world body were composed of imams and mullahs, it could not be more anti-Israel. And John Kerry wants to put the UN in charge of the war on terrorism.

The foregoing is one reason why Bush is getting support from some surprising quarters. In a January 9<sup>th</sup> article in The Forward ("Bolting for

Bush”), former New York Mayor Ed Koch, a life-long Democrat, said he’s never voted for a Republican presidential candidate before, but he was voting for Bush this year. Koch wrote, “President Bush has earned my vote because he has shown the resolve necessary to wage the war against terrorism.”

On October 18, New Republic Editor Martin Peretz – a social liberal but a staunch Zionist – did a column whose title says it all – “A President Kerry Would Be A Disaster for Israel.”

Even Senator Joe Lieberman (D, Conn.) while he was campaigning for Kerry in Florida last week, frankly confessed, “We are dealing with a president who’s had a record of strong support for Israel. You can’t say otherwise.”

While most Jewish voters have missed this, it hasn’t escaped everyone’s notice.

Earlier this month, Nabil Shaath (“foreign minister” of the Palestinian Authority) said that while he thought Bush wanted to resume the so-called peace process, “with the staff that surrounds him and with his current opinions, it doesn’t look promising.”

However, in a Kerry presidency, Shaath gushed, “It would be likely that several staff members during the Clinton administration would return” and “that would be a good thing.” The PA longs for the halcyon days of Clintonian appeasement.

Israel’s chief of military intelligence, Major General Aharon Ze’evi says, “Arafat is now waiting for the month of November in the hope that President Bush will be defeated in the presidential election and turned out of office.”

In The American Jewish Committee survey, 75% of respondents said they felt “very close” or “fairly close” to Israel. Also, 74% said “Caring about Israel is a very important part of my being a Jew.”

Let’s hope more of them use their votes to demonstrate their commitment.

