

# Some good news for Obama from Israel "Tea Party"



By Douglas Hamilton

Mon Nov 1, 2:00 am ET

TEL AVIV (Reuters) – A "Say No to Obama" event in Israel drew only 100 supporters on Sunday to the launch of an Israeli version of the Tea Party movement that is challenging the U.S. President in Tuesday's mid-term elections.

There were no security police outside and parking was easy in the notoriously clogged center of Tel Aviv, as former Knesset deputy Michael Kleiner, a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud bloc, inaugurated the movement.

"This is a message to the United States president that in relations between democracies you do not force people to do things they did not vote for," Kleiner told reporters.

The Israel Tea Party launch did not mark the start of a breakaway right-wing party, he said. It was meant to help Netanyahu reject Obama's pressure to bend to Palestinian conditions for the revival of flagging peace talks.

"Obama will use the next two or three months not to bend Netanyahu's arm but to break it," Kleiner warned.

Like the rest of Likud, his supporters back Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank and reject U.S. calls for a continuation of the partial freeze Netanyahu ordered last November to open the door to direct talks. It ended a month ago.

For the moment, Israel's Tea Party is simply a grassroots movement intended to back up Netanyahu, Kleiner said, but it is also ready to break with him if he yields to American pressure.

## BALLOONS

Obama is not popular with many Israelis who believe he sympathizes with the Palestinians, polls show.

Launching their movement in a modest auditorium decked with red and black balloons and seating for 130, however, organizers clearly did not expect a massive turnout to the "Say No" event.

But it was early days, said Tea Party member Boaz Arad, of the Jerusalem Institute for Market Studies (JIMS).

Obama's drive for a Middle East peace agreement that would create a state for the Palestinians living alongside Israel was the target of the launch, he said. But there were further goals.

"Our perspective is much wider. Israel needs a capitalistic movement to free the economy from its burden of high taxes, high government spending and a bloated administration," he said, in a message American Tea Party supporters would recognize.

An index calculated by the institute shows that after annual taxes are paid Israelis "start working for themselves only after June 22 this year," said Arad, a research fellow at JIMS.

"We need this movement, to remind government that they are here to serve the people and not the other way around."

Polls in the United States indicate this same sentiment among Americans could deliver bad results for Obama's Democratic party in Tuesday's mid-term elections for the House of Representatives and one third of the U.S. Senate.

Netanyahu said on Sunday he would meet U.S. Vice President Joe Biden after the results are known next week, at the November 5-9 General Assembly of The Jewish Federations of North America. He said he would discuss how to revive stalled peace negotiations.

A new round of direct talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians got under way in Washington on September 2 only to stop a few weeks later when his government refused to extend the curb on West Bank settlement building he had imposed for 10 months.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas wants a construction freeze before going any further.

(Editing by Ralph Boulton)