In the run-up to the Israeli parliamentary elections on October 27, FokusIsrael.ch is profiling the Jewish state's most prominent political leaders. This week, the spotlight is on the leaders of the newly formed party alliance "The Reservists," "New Economic Party," and "Strength": Yoaz Hendel, Yaron Zelekha, and Einat Wilf.

By Jan Kapusnak

What initially looked like just another last-minute alliance has now become a significant factor in the election. Several recent polls predict that the newly formed three-party alliance will clear the 3.25 percent electoral threshold and win four seats in the elections to the Israeli parliament (Knesset). This is despite the three partners focusing on different issues.

## Yoaz Hendel: The independent right-winger with ties to many parties

Yoaz Hendel comes from Israel's national right-wing. Born in 1975 and raised in Elkana in Samaria, he served in the Shayetet 13 naval commando unit, later commanded the reserve unit, and earned a doctorate in military history. He worked as a journalist and headed the Institute for Zionist Strategies before entering politics. Hendel worked for Benjamin Netanyahu and headed the National Information Directorate in the Prime Minister's Office from 2011 to 2012. In 2019, Hendel was elected to the Knesset as part of the "Blue and White" alliance. In 2020, he split from the alliance to found his own party, "Derech Eretz," and then joined Gideon Sa'ar's "New Hope" party in 2021. Hendel served twice as Minister of Communications, first in 2020 and again from 2021 to 2022.

The rapid succession of his shifting party affiliations masks a relatively consistent political identity. Hendel is security-oriented and, under current conditions, opposes a Palestinian state. He also rejects the way coalition governments have been formed in the past: by granting exemptions, funding, and other concessions to religious parties—in exchange for their support of a government.

## Mandatory military service for the ultra-Orthodox

## as a key demand

After October 7, this credo became the foundation of his new party. Hendel returned to reserve duty and made universal military or national service his central demand. He argues that the old system, in which a shrinking portion of the population bears the military burden while large groups are granted exemptions, is no longer tenable.

This puts him on a collision course with Netanyahu, who is dependent on the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) parties. Hendel says he will not provide votes for any coalition that continues to exempt the ultra-Orthodox from military service. At the same time, he also rejects a government that is dependent on Arab parties. His preferred formula is “a broad Zionist government” based on the major Jewish parties.

## Yaron Zelekha: Focus on the cost of living and greater competition

Hendel’s coalition partner, Yaron Zelekha, comes to the coalition from a completely different background. Born in 1970, he trained as an economist and accountant, headed the economic team in Netanyahu’s office in the 1990s, and served as Israel’s Accountant General from 2003 to 2007. He later became a faculty member at Ono Academic College and a prominent economic commentator.

Zelekha’s political message is simple: Israelis pay too much because too many markets are dominated by monopolies, cartels, exclusive importers, and other concentrations of power. He advocates for greater competition, fewer import barriers, and lower taxes, and presents himself as a defender of consumers and small businesses.

Zelekha founded the “New Economic Party” ahead of the 2021 election and ran again in 2022, though on both occasions he failed to reach the 3.25 percent voter share required to enter the Knesset. Nevertheless, he remained a visible figure in the public debate, particularly on the issues of inflation, housing, and the cost of living.

His alliance with Hendel is therefore less of an ideological merger than a division of labor. Hendel brings a security profile, reservists, and the push for universal

conscription to the alliance. Zelekha brings an economic agenda aimed at voters frustrated by high prices and market monopolies.

## Einat Wilf: the most prominent Zionist voice abroad

The third person on the list adds an extra dimension to the alliance: Einat Wilf served as a member of the Knesset from 2010 to 2013, first with the Labor Party and later with Ehud Barak's Independence faction. She chaired the Education Committee, served on the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committees, and had previously worked as a foreign policy advisor to Shimon Peres.

Yet her public identity has been largely shaped over the past decade by her international advocacy for Israel. Long before October 7, Einat Wilf had become one of the most visible English-speaking Israeli voices defending Zionism to foreign audiences. Through books, lectures, university appearances, interviews, and debates, she focused not only on defending specific Israeli policies but also on emphasizing the fundamental legitimacy of Jewish national self-determination.

This is central to her worldview. Wilf argues that Israel's international problem cannot be solved simply through better public relations. In her view, a large part of the anti-Israel campaigns are directed against Zionism per se and therefore require a fundamental ideological response. Wilf's books, such as **Winning the War of Words** and **We Should All Be Zionists**, stem from this effort to convey Israeli and Zionist arguments to skeptical audiences.

## Prominent Critic of UNRWA

Einat Wilf is perhaps best known for her work on the Palestinian refugee issue. Together with Adi Schwartz, she wrote **The War of Return** *and* argued that the demand for a "right of return" for millions of descendants of Palestinian refugees is incompatible with a genuine two-state solution. In her view, peace requires that the Palestinians first accept that Israel will remain the nation-state of the Jewish people. This argument has also made her a longtime critic of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

## No Exceptions for the Ultra-Orthodox—or the Revocation of Their Civil Rights

After October 7, Wilf officially returned to party politics by founding the “Oz” party (“Strength”), which is officially registered as “Oz for Equality in Service”—meaning it advocates for the equality of all citizens and opposes exemptions granted to ultra-Orthodox Jews. In an interview with FokusIsrael.ch in 2025, Einat Wilf stated: “If the ultra-Orthodox do not want to perform military service, then they should not have the right to vote or any other rights enjoyed by the other citizens of the state.”

Overall, Wilf’s party combines the call for peace—based on Arab and Palestinian acceptance of Zionism—universal military or civilian service, a clearer separation of religion and state, greater representation of women in high public office, and “independent Jewish sovereignty” instead of an “exile mentality.”

## From Going It Alone to Partnership

Originally, Einat Wilf intended to run for the Knesset on her own with “Oz.” But as the deadline for submitting candidate lists approached, she announced that she would seek an alliance that could give her ideas parliamentary influence. She later stated that Hendel’s “Reservists” and Zelekha’s “New Economic Party” were the only partners she would consider. On the one hand, because she shares their positions on universal conscription and the high cost of living. On the other hand, because such an alliance would allow her to continue focusing on the “cognitive war” over Israel’s right to exist.

Einat Wilf’s political evolution is therefore more complex than a simple shift from the left to the right. Wilf continues to portray peace as a legitimate goal, but argues that territorial compromises cannot succeed without Palestinian acceptance of Jewish sovereignty. October 7 reinforced this conviction. Since the massacre, she has intensified her international advocacy for Israel and increasingly describes Israel’s struggle as both military and ideological.

## No commitment to either of the existing blocs

Hendel, Zelekha, and Wilf are not united by a comprehensive ideology. What binds

them is the belief that the state should demand more responsibility from its citizens while at the same time protecting them from entrenched political and economic interests. The stance of the three Alliance partners toward Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu deliberately differs from that of the current governing coalition and the opposition.

Hendel criticizes Netanyahu, saying he bears responsibility for the failure on October 7 and should step down. However, he says he could participate in a “broad Zionist government” with Netanyahu and Likud, provided it is not dependent on Haredi parties.

Zelekha also says he is not boycotting Netanyahu and is willing to join a government led by him if it accepts his party’s demands for universal conscription, lower costs of living, and business-friendly reforms.

Wilf has also sharply criticized Netanyahu and his governments in the past. She sees the new alliance as an opportunity to end the “toxic” polarization between the previous governing coalition on one side and the opposition on the other.

## If successful: decisive influence on the formation of the government

If the alliance of “Reservists,” “New Economic Party,” and “Strength”—as predicted by the latest election polls—wins four seats in the Knesset elections, then Wilf’s wish could come true. For in what is expected to be a highly fragmented parliament, the alliance could exert significant influence on the composition and priorities of the next government even with just a few seats. But to do so, it must first translate three very different political backgrounds into enough shared votes to successfully navigate election day.

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