Democratic strategist: Bennett bashing shows Likud insecure

* By GIL HOFFMAN

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu’s attacks on Bayit Yehudi leader Naftali Bennett demonstrate that he is not secure despite his massive lead in the polls, said David Eichenbaum, a Democratic strategist who was behind anti-Mitt Romney ads that helped US President Barack Obama successfully win reelection.

Eichenbaum, who is an outside consultant to the Kadima Party, spoke at an event Monday at the Interdisciplinary Center-Herzliya’s Arison School of Business titled “Is negative positive?” which dealt with negative campaigns in politics and business.

DAVID EICHENBAUM (Struble Eichenbaum Communications)

He said the Likud’s ads attacking Bennett could have the opposite effect of what the party intended.

“Why go negative if you are comfortable?” Eichenbaum said. “The Bennett ad was a little blatant and a little underhanded. It could boomerang with Likud voters on the Right who haven’t decided if they want to go a step further rightward to Bennett.

“Do the ads turn them off or reinforce why they were considering voting for Bennett in the first place? It’s a risk, and I don’t know if they will work or not,” he continued.

Eichenbaum gave better grades to an ad Likud released last week that featured puppets of politicians on the Center-Left. He said the ad appealed to the Likud’s base and played into stereotypes that exist about the Left, raising questions about the seriousness of the politicians on the Center-Left at a fateful time.

The strategist said the keys to successful negative advertising were to make the commercials fair, treat voters with respect and make the ads negative without seeming negative. He said that in last month’s US election, 75 percent of campaign ads were negative – and were proven effective.

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Asked whether Israel can learn from the ads in the US election, Eichenbaum said the danger of learning from a different political culture is that there are things that do not translate.

“You can copy tactics, but you can’t take Obama’s character and paste it onto someone else,” Eichenbaum said.

“Americans wanted to believe in Obama despite his flaws. Israelis don’t feel that way about Bibi [Netanyahu].

“There is a lot of disillusionment. They don’t think he cares about the average Israeli. The majority of Israelis don’t believe he’s authentic the way the majority of Americans believed about Obama. It’s his Achilles’ heel. Whether it can be taken advantage of remains to be seen.”

Eichenbaum said the political culture was different in the US, where parties are larger and more stable, and the lion’s share of a campaign’s resources is spent on buying television airtime. He also noted that in the US, anonymous campaign ads are forbidden and commercials must contain disclaimers from the candidates voicing their approval of the ad.

Speaking as an adviser to Kadima, Eichenbaum said the Likud could be making a mistake by perceiving its biggest threat as from the Right – and not the Left. He predicted Kadima could gain support from Likud voters.

“There is nothing like a good challenge in politics,” he said. “When [Kadima leader Shaul] Mofaz says what he stands for, where he comes from, and where his vision is, I think there will be some shifting going on.”