

WHO WILL SAVE ISRAEL?

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THE BATTLE IS OVER. The dust has settled. A new government—partly ridiculous, partly terrifying—has been installed.

It is time to take stock.

The net result is that Israel has given up all pretense of desiring peace and that Israeli democracy has suffered a blow from which it may never recover.

ISRAELI GOVERNMENTS—with the possible exception of Yitzhak Rabin's—have never really desired peace. The peace that is possible.

Peace, of course, means accepting fixed borders. In the founding declaration of the state, which was read out by David Ben-Gurion on May 14, 1948 in Tel Aviv, any mention of borders was deliberately omitted. Ben Gurion was not ready to accept the borders fixed by the UN partition resolution, because they provided only for a tiny Jewish state. Ben-Gurion foresaw that the Arabs would start a war, and he was determined to use this for enlarging the territory of the state.

This indeed happened. When the war ended in early 1949 with armistice agreements based on the final battle lines, Ben-Gurion could have accepted them as final borders. He refused. Israel has remained a state without borders that it recognizes itself—perhaps the only one in the world.

This is one of the reasons for the fact that Israel has no peace agreement with the Palestinian nation. It did sign official peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, based on the internationally recognized borders between the former British government of Palestine and its neighbors. No such borders are accepted by the Israeli government between Israel and the undefined Palestinian entity. All Israeli governments have always refused even to indicate where such borders should run. The much-praised Oslo agreement was no exception. Rabin, too, refused to draw a final line.

This refusal remains government policy. On the eve of the recent elections, Binyamin Netanyahu unequivocally declared that during his term of office—which for him means until his demise—no Palestinian state would come into being. Thus, the occupied territories would remain under Israeli rule.

No peace agreement will ever be signed by this government.

NO PEACE means attempting to keep the territorial status quo frozen forever, except that settlements will continue to grow and multiply.

This is not the situation concerning democracy. It is not frozen.

Israel is famously “the Only Democracy in the Middle East”. That is practically its second official name.

It is debatable how a state that dominates another people, depriving it of all human rights, not to mention citizenship, can be called a democracy. But Jewish Israelis have been used to this for 48 years, and just ignore this fact.

Now the situation inside Israel proper is about to change drastically.

Two facts attest to this.

First of all, Ayelet Shaked has been appointed Minister of Justice. One of the most extreme right-wing Israelis, she has not made a secret of the fact that she wants to destroy the independence of the Supreme Court, the last bastion of human rights.

This court has managed, throughout the years, to become a major force in Israeli life. Since Israel has no written constitution, the Supreme Court has succeeded, under strong and determined leadership, in assuming the role of the guardian of human and civil rights, even annulling democratically adopted Knesset laws that contradict the imagined constitution.

Shaked has announced that she would put an end to this impertinence.

The court has survived many onslaughts because its composition cannot be easily changed. Contrary to the practice in the US, which looks scandalous to us, judges are appointed by a committee, in which politicians are held in check by incumbent judges. Shaked wants to change this practice, stuffing the committee with politicians loyal to the government.

The court is already cowed. Lately it has made a number of ignoble decisions, such as outlawing calls for boycotting the settlements. But this is still heaven compared to what is bound to happen in the near future.

PERHAPS WORSE is Netanyahu's decision to retain for himself the Ministry of Communication.

This ministry has always been disdained as a low-level office, reserved for political lightweights. Netanyahu's

dogged insistence on retaining it for himself is ominous. “statism”.

The communication Ministry controls all TV stations, and indirectly newspapers and other media. Since all Israeli media are in very bad shape financially, this control may become deadly.

Netanyahu's patron—some say owner—Sheldon Adelson, the would-be dictator of the US Republican party, already publishes a give-away newspaper in Israel, which has only one sole aim: to support Netanyahu personally against all enemies, including his competitors in his own Likud party. The paper—“Israel Hayom” (Israel Today)—is already Israel's widest-circulation newspaper, with the American casino king pouring into it untold millions.

Netanyahu is determined to break all opposition in the electronic and written media. Opposition commentators are well advised to look for jobs elsewhere. Channel 10, considered slightly more critical of Netanyahu than its two competitors, is due to be closed at the end of this month.

One cannot avoid an odious analogy. One of the key terms in the Nazi lexicon was the atrocious German word Gleichschaltung – meaning connecting all media to the same energy source. All newspapers and radio stations (TV did not yet exist) were staffed with Nazis. Every morning, a Propaganda Ministry official by the name of Dr. Dietrich convened the editors and told them what tomorrow's headlines, editorials etc. were to be.

Netanyahu has already dismissed the chief of the TV department. We don't yet know the name of our own Dr. Dietrich.

As a humorous counterpoint, Miri Regev has been appointment Minister of Culture. Regev is a loud-mouthed woman, whose vulgar style has become a national symbol. No one can even guess how she had become the army spokesperson. Her style, such as concluding every public utterance with the call “Applause!”, has become a joke.

THE MOST efficient instrument of de-democratization is the education ministry (which is not efficient in anything else.)

Israel has several education systems, all of them financed—and hence controlled—by the Education Ministry.

Two systems belong to the government outright: the general “state” system and the autonomous “religious state” system.

Then there are two orthodox systems, one Ashkenazi and one Oriental. In some of these, only religious subjects are taught—no languages, no mathematics, no non-Jewish history. This makes alumni unfit for any employment. They remain dependent on their religious community's handouts forever.

Before the state came into being, there was also a leftist system with socialist values, especially in the kibbutzim. This was abolished by David Ben-Gurion in the name of

The last government tried in a timid way to compel the orthodox to introduce “core studies” into their schools, such as arithmetic and English. This has been abandoned now, since the orthodox have become members of the government coalition.

The real battle, which is starting now, is about the “general” state schools, which have been free to some extent. My late wife, Rachel, was a teacher in such a school for almost 30 years, and did what she wanted, trying to instill in her pupils' minds humanist and liberal values.

Not any more. Israel's most extreme nationalist-religious leader, Naftali Bennett, has now been installed as Minister of Education. He has already announced that his main objective is to imbue the young with a nationalist-Zionist spirit, raising a generation of real Israeli patriots. No mention of humanism, liberalism, human rights, social values or any other such nonsense.

Netanyahu has also retained the Foreign Ministry in his own hands. Many of its functions have been dispersed between six other ministries. The pretext is that Netanyahu is keeping the prestigious ministry open for Labor Party leader Yitzhak Herzog, who he is pretending to invite into the government. Herzog has already loudly refused. (I suppose that the real owner of the government, Sheldon Adelson, would not allow him in anyway.)

Netanyahu's real aim is to prevent any potential competitor from gaining international and national prestige in this position. He does conduct foreign policy alone anyhow.

ALTOGETHER, A deeply troubling picture for anyone who loves Israel.

It is not so much that the balance of power in Israel has changed (it has not) but that the worst elements of the Right have taken over, pushing out almost all right-wing moderates. Until now, these extreme elements had been subdued, talking loudly but carrying a small stick. This has now changed. The extreme right has found its self-assurance, and is determined to use its power.

The Israeli Left (timidly calling itself “center-left”) has lost its spirit. Its only hope is “foreign pressure”. Especially from the White House. Barack Obama hates Netanyahu. Any time now, American pressure will be applied and save Israel from itself.

That's a comfortable thought. We don't have to do anything. Salvation will come from the outside, deus ex machina. Halleluja.

Unfortunately, I am a non-believer. What I see is the US increasing its support of the Netanyahu regime, offering huge new arms deliveries as “compensation” for the budding Iran nuclear deal. John Kerry, humiliated by Netanyahu and treated with open contempt, is groveling somewhere at our feet. Obama boasts that he has done

more for “Israel” (meaning the Israeli Right) than any other president.

Salvation will not come from that direction. God will remain in the machine.

THERE IS only one kind of salvation: the one we carry inside us.

Some hope for a catastrophe that will cause people to open their eyes. I don't wish for catastrophes.

I don't want Israel to become a replica of al-Sisi's Egypt, Erdogan's Turkey or Putin's Russia.

I believe we can save Israel—but only if we get up from the couch and play our part.