

# Extreme, Extremes, Extremest

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**A**S IS WELL-KNOWN, Israel is a “Jewish and democratic state”.  
That is its official designation.  
Well...

AS FOR Jewish, it's a new kind of Jewishness, a mutation.

For 2000 years or so, Jews were known to be wise, clever, peace-loving, humane, progressive, liberal, even socialist.

Today, when you hear these attributes, the State of Israel is not the first name that springs to mind. Far from it.

As for “democratic”, that was more or less true from the foundation of the state in 1948 until the Six-day War of 1967, when Israel unfortunately conquered the West Bank, the Gaza strip, East Jerusalem and the Golan. And, of course, the Sinai peninsula which was later returned to Egypt.

(I say “more or less” democratic, because there is no completely democratic state anywhere in the world.)

Since 1967, Israel has been a hybrid creation—half democratic, half dictatorial. Like an egg that is half fresh, half rotten.

The occupied territories, we should be reminded, consist of at least four different categories:

1. East Jerusalem, which was annexed by Israel in 1967 and is now part of Israel's capital city. Its Palestinian inhabitants have not been accepted as nor applied to be Israeli citizens. They are mere “inhabitants”, devoid of any citizenship.
1. The Golan Heights, formerly a part of Syria, which was annexed by Israel. The few Arab-Druze inhabitants who remain there are reluctant citizens of Israel.
1. The Gaza Strip, which is completely cut off from the world by Israel and Egypt, acting in collusion. The Israeli navy cuts it off at sea. The minimum the inhabitants need to survive is allowed to come through Israel. The late Ariel Sharon removed the few Jewish settlements from this area, which is not claimed by Israel. Too many Arabs there.

1. The West Bank (of the Jordan river), which the Israeli government and right-wing Israelis call by their Biblical names “Judea and Samaria”, home of the largest part of the Palestinian people, probably some 3.5 million. It is there that the main battle is on.

FROM THE first day of the 1967 occupation, right-wing Israelis were intent on annexing the West Bank to Israel. Under the slogan “the Whole of Eretz Israel” they launched a campaign for annexing this entire territory, driving the Palestinian population out and setting up as many Jewish settlements as possible.

The extremists never hid their intent of “cleansing” this land entirely of non-Jews and establishing a Greater Israel from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River.

This is a very difficult aim to achieve. In 1948, during our so-called “War of Independence”, Israel conquered a far larger territory than allotted to it by the United Nations, but was forgiven. Half the Palestinian population of the country was driven out or fled. The fait accompli was more or less accepted by the world because it was achieved by military means in a war started by the Arab side, and because it happened soon after the Holocaust.

By 1967, the situation was quite different. The causes of the new war were disputed, David had turned into Goliath, a world-wide Cold War was on. Israel's conquests were not recognized, not even by its protector, the US.

In spite of several new Israeli-Arab wars, the end of the Cold War and many other changes, this situation has not changed.

Israel still calls itself a “Jewish and democratic state”. The population in “Greater Israel” is by now half Jewish and half Arab, with the Arabs gaining. Israel proper is still more or less democratic. In the occupied Palestinian territories, a dictatorial “military government” is in charge, with hundreds of thousands of Jewish settlers trying to push out the Palestinian Arab population by all means available, including fraudulent acquisition of land and terrorism (called “retaliation”).

In Israel proper, the government belongs to the extreme Right, with some elements that would be called “fascist” anywhere else. The Center and Left are impotent. The only real political fight is between the radical Right and the even more radical extreme Right.

THIS WEEK, a furious battle broke out between Binyamin Netanyahu together with his Minister of Defense, Bogie Ya'alon, both of the Likud Party, and the Education Minister, Naftali Bennett, the leader of the Jewish Home Party. Bennett, a wildly ambitious Rightist, makes no secret of his intention to replace Netanyahu as soon as possible.

The kind of language used by the two parties would be considered extreme even if used between the coalition and the opposition. Between partners of the coalition government it is, to put it mildly, rather unusual, even in Israel.

Compared to this, the language of the Leader of the Opposition, Yitzhak Herzog, is practically polite.

Bennett said that Netanyahu and Ya'alon hawk old and obsolete ideas and suffer from “mental paralysis”, thereby worsening Israel's already shaky standing in the world. Netanyahu and Ya'alon, a former Kibbutz member and army Chief of Staff, accused Bennett of stealing. According to them, whenever a good idea is aired in the cabinet, Bennett runs out of the room and proclaims it as his own. Ya'alon called Bennett “childish” and “reckless”.

Who is right? Unfortunately, all of them.

In between stands (or rather sits) the present army Chief of Staff, Gadi Eizenkot, son of immigrants from Morocco in spite of his German-sounding name. In Israel, curiously enough, the army chiefs are generally more moderate than the politicians.

The general proposed ameliorating the conditions of the Arab population in the occupied territories, such as allowing the people in Gaza to build a harbor and come into contact with the world at large. Amazing.

ALL THIS happened at a conference of so-called security experts where everybody had his or her say.

The leaders of the opposition parties also took part. Yitzhak Herzog of Labor, Yair Lapid of the centrist “There is a Future” party and others had their say, but their speeches were so tedious that they were reported only for fairness' sake. They grabbed some ideas from here and there, called it “my plan”—with peace, if mentioned at all, deferred to the very, very distant future.

Peace, one gathers, is something nice, the matter dreams are made of. Not something for serious politicians.

What remains is a furious fight between the Far Right and the Even Further Right.

Bennett, a former high-tech entrepreneur, wears a kip-

pah on his bald head (frankly, I always wonder what keeps it there, perhaps sheer willpower). He does not hide his conviction that he must replace the stagnant Netanyahu as soon as possible, for the good of the nation.

Bennett accused the incompetent political leadership of failing our brave soldiers and their commanders—an accusation straight out of Mein Kampf, which is about to appear in Hebrew.

Netanyahu's only possible successor within his Likud party is Ya'alon, a man devoid of any charisma or political talent. However, to succeed, Bennett and his Jewish Home party must overtake Likud at the ballot box—a very difficult thing to do. That's where the kippah comes in—Divine intervention may be called for.

Speaking about divine intervention: last week the Swedish Foreign Minister, Margot Wallstrom, criticized Israel's legal system for having different laws for Jews and Arabs. Netanyahu reacted sharply, and lo and behold—by sheer accident, a few days later the Swedish press was full of stories about the corruption of Wallstrom, who did pay less rent for her government apartment than she should have.

ALL THIS could be amusing, if it did not concern the future of Israel.

Peace is a dirty word. The end of the occupation is not in sight. The United (Arab) Party is not even in the picture. The same (almost) goes for Meretz.

On the left, despair is the synonym of laziness. There is a mild debate about the idea that only the outside world can save us from ourselves. This is now propagated by the respected former Director General of our Foreign Office, Alon Lyel, a very brave ex-official. I don't believe in this. The idea of running to the Goyim to save the Jews from themselves is not one to gain wide popularity.

Bennett is right on one point: stagnation, both mental and practical, is no solution. Things must move again. I fervently hope that the young generation will give birth to new forces and new ideas that will push aside Netanyahu, Bennett and their ilk.

As to our much-lauded democracy: it appears that a group financed by the government has for years paid a private detective, whose job was to rifle through the paper baskets of peace activists to obtain information on human rights and peace associations and personalities.

(Fortunately, I shred everything.)