

Israel holds itself at gunpoint

Muriel Mirak reports on the choice facing the country after the July 23 elections: tribalism or nationhood.

In the wake of the July 23 national elections, Israel finds itself a nation held hostage. This time, however, no one can claim it is the proverbial "Palestinian terrorists" with their fingers on the trigger. Rather, it is the election results themselves which have tied up the nation's political process in an ostensibly inextricable knot. Only a true display of that rare quality called statesmanship can unloose the knot for the benefit of the country and its people.

While the main question posed in the elections was whether the ruling Likud coalition would renew its mandate or be outpolled by the opposition Labor Alignment, the answer was that both lost. Prime Minister Shamir's slate obtained 42 seats, signaling a loss of 4 compared to the 1981 elections, and Labor, though it totaled 45 seats, also lost 4. Thus neither of the two major party blocs is in a position to shape a coalition representing minimally 61 seats of the Knesset's 120 total.

To garner the necessary seats, either Shamir or Labor leader Peres, if given the mandate by President Herzog to form a coalition, would have to ally with extremist minority parties, whose politics would alienate the mainstream of either larger party. Thus the Likud would need an alliance with the Tehiya (Renaissance) Party of Yuval Ne'eman, or the Kach party of extremist Meir Kahane, as well as the labile Tami, the small North African Sephardic party whose defection precipitated the crisis leading to elections, and a collection of ultra-religious parties linked in various ways to the conspiracy to blow up Muslim shrines on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Possible coalition parties for Labor also include the Tami, as well as the leftist Shinui, the Soviet-puppet Communist Party, and the Judeo-Arab Progressive List. Former Defense Minister Ezer Weizman's one-man show known as the Yahad Party, is up for grabs by both sides.

Thus it is that a plethora of 13 tiny parties, 7 of whom are in the Knesset for the first time with only 1 or 2 seats, which represent a tiny minority of the voting population, have been catapulted into the position of swing factors determining the shape of the next government.

Swing factors and fringe groups

Although the political process calls for a numerical majority, far more than simple arithmetic is involved in the business of pulling together a coalition. For the swing factor

parties in this case, far from representing *bona fide* political constituencies, are essentially tribal or ethnic political action committees, poised on the fringe of responsible politics. Meir Kahane, the leader of the Kach party, for instance, is a man who up to last year was not allowed to speak in Israel, so repulsive was his outright promotion of anti-Arab terrorism. Now, with about 25,000 votes behind him, including a full 3% in the battle-ground of religious fanaticism which is Jerusalem, Kahane is promising to continue what he calls an "American-style" campaign, of mass rallies, like the one he organized the day after elections at Jerusalem's Wall.

In a press conference, Kahane promised he would "drive this country crazy. . . . Every newspaper will have to report that a melée broke out in the Knesset when I presented a bill to move the Arabs out of here. . . . In my first speech, I am going to raise the issue of throwing out the Arabs so that it will become on the next day a national debate. . . . We will make this country Jewish again." Kahane founded his appeal to oust the Arabs on a rabidly barbaric claim "to preserve the purity of Judaism which has been perverted by Western values," and illustrated his contempt for "Western values" by pledging that "if Judaism does not go together with democracy, then I am against democracy."

Yuval Ne'eman proved to be a precious ideological ally of Kahane in an interview released to the French daily *Le Matin*; he openly embraced terrorist murder of Arabs. "In another country, it would be called vendetta," he said. "Today the Jewish students are no longer those of the ghettos. When they are attacked, they answer in kind. . . . Sometimes, we may look like Corsica or Ireland. But that is not a catastrophe. However, we are no angels. Perhaps, some would like to impose on us a morality which is not Jewish. We are told to accept the blows, but that is Christian morality, not Jewish. One of us already, Christ, who was born a Jew, sacrificed himself for mankind. That's enough. We have no reason to add to that the sacrifice of the whole Jewish population."

What is significant in the ravings of both Ne'eman and Kahane is their explicit rejection of values which they identify as "Western" or, in the former's outrageous formulation, as "Christian." Add to these outbursts the tribalist Sephardic-versus-Ashkenazi polarization of other small parties and the fundamentalist positions of the ultra-rightist, pro-terrorist religious groupings, and you have an emerging political spec-

trum mirroring not Ireland or Corsica, but the tribally-divided Lebanon.

What the proliferation of such anachronistic entities in the Knesset signals is a shattering of political parties based on national, constituency machines and their threatened replacement by tribal, ethnic, or fundamentalist bands, whose worldview and policies are explicitly inimical to the Judeo-Christian tradition upon which Western civilization, emphatically including Israel, has been founded. The danger inherent in the post-electoral status is therefore not only short-term parliamentary instability bordering on ungovernability "a la italiana," but a Weimar-style process of disintegration of those viable, national institutions which joined to establish a nation dedicated to furthering the sacrosanct "Western" values of the modern industrial republic.

Soviets must approve

It is no wonder that the election results should cause old, grey heads to nod in approval in Moscow. From the Soviets' strategic standpoint, the elections could not have gone better had the KGB rigged them. Not only is virtually every terrorist and pro-terrorist "party" recently elected an asset of the international destabilization apparatus headquartered in Moscow, but the current deadlock plays perfectly into Soviet hands. A pre-election attack by the Soviet government newspaper *Izvestia* against the Labor Party signaled the U.S.S.R. would much prefer a relatively stronger Likud coalition to anything that Peres's party might pull together, so as to prevent Labor from seeking solutions to the Palestinian problem, and thereby keep the Palestinians under Syrian blackmail pressure. In addition, the Soviets may now reckon that they can play the various Kahanes and Ne'emans *politically*, in the same way they regularly deploy gun-toting terrorists militarily.

Regardless of the amount of wheeling and dealing that inevitably contributed to the election disaster, with Moscow feeding one assortment of splinter groups and Kissinger's friends in the United States fueling another, a large share of the responsibility for the election disaster must be laid at the doorstep of both Likud and Labor. Instead of fighting through the vital issues concerning Israel's future well-being, beginning with programs for massive industrial, agricultural, and infrastructural development to save the country from economic collapse, neither party faced them head on.

Rational proposals for satisfying Palestinian aspirations to citizenship (whether within Jordan or a Palestinian state), which many Labor Party spokesmen have drawn up, in the context of joint Israeli-Arab economic development of the area, were not thrust into the forefront of the debate. And, most indicative of behind-the-scenes compromises was the mysterious veil of silence that was abruptly drawn over the debate around fanatical religious terrorism, when, early in the election campaign, the explosive, and politically crucial revelations around the terrorist gang of Gush Emunim sect-leader Rabbi Moshe Levinger were hushed up. Had the issues

been thrashed out responsibly and the investigations into the conspiracy to blow up the Temple Mount been rigorously followed through, Meir Kahane—and many others—would not be sitting in the Knesset today.

New elections?

It is a basic principle of political justice that one (whether an individual or a state) does not negotiate with terrorists with a pistol pointed at one's temple. It may well be, therefore, that the wisest course to follow would be new elections,

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which some political commentators have already mooted, provided that the errors of the past campaign were ruthlessly avoided, and a viable choice set before the public.

Otherwise, to side-step the adverse economic and social effects of prolonged political uncertainty, it would be reasonable to consider the proposal launched by former Prime Minister Begin. Just days after the election, the former leader emerged from months of inactivity to assert that under no conditions must the Likud accept a deal with Kahane, and that a "grand coalition" of national unity between Likud and Labor were preferable. Provided such a coalition government were founded on a principled commitment to place the urgent needs of the nation above party or factional strife, it is conceivable that the tottering economy could be salvaged, through energetic, dirigistically managed development projects based on cooperation with Israel's Arab neighbors.

The question is and remains: Does Israel have responsible leaders capable of rising above the current tug-of-war and seeking solutions in the national interest?

The author has traveled to Israel twice this year, and co-authored two cover features in EIR reporting her observations ("Will the United States let Israel Survive?" Vol. 11, No. 4, Jan. 31, 1984; and "EIR in Israel: Can the 'great projects' vision return?" Vol. 11, No. 24, June 19, 1984).