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## THE ISRAELI ELECTION AND THE ISLAMIC A-BOMB

Hirsh Goodman

**Labor May Do Better Than Expected / A National Unity Government? / Alternate Election Scenarios / Absorbing Soviet Jewish Immigration / The Sephardi Vote / Nuclearization of the Islamic World**

The upcoming Israeli election is a very serious one for Israel. The election is going to decide how Russian aliya is absorbed into the country, how Israel negotiates a settlement with the Palestinians, and how Israel structures its economy and social policy. It is going to decide the nation's priorities. There are forces at play that are not fully understood, and the way the next government comes about is going to impact on Israel's future for many years to come. The issues on Israel's agenda will be treated differently depending upon who takes charge, what type of coalition is put together, and who holds the balance of power.

### **Labor May Do Better Than Expected**

According to the current polls, Labor should do a bit better than some people suspect. With Rabin heading a list that includes some good young new faces and a few mayors from the de-

velopment towns, they could do fairly well.

On the left of Labor a new list has come together, Meretz, including the Citizens' Rights Movement led by Shulamit Aloni, Shinui led by Amnon Rubenstein, and Mapam led by Yair Tzaban — an attractive list for those who support their message vis-a-vis peace — that may do fairly well and should at least emerge with as many seats as they have now. Together they could act more as a counterweight in the Knesset to the ultra-Orthodox haredi parties. They will not take too many votes from Labor, however, because of what happens to many Labor voters in every election. They would really love to vote for Shulamit Aloni but will feel compelled to vote for Labor because this is such a serious election. However well they do, the banding together of the left could be quite significant in terms of how the coalition is put together after the elections.

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### **A National Unity Government?**

At the end of the game when the ballots are counted, there is probably not going to be a tremendous difference in the numbers from what we have now — a percentage point here or there but not something revolutionary. What could well happen, and what would be the best outcome, in my opinion, would be a national unity government with only the two big parties, Labor led by Rabin and the Likud led by Shamir, that would together command 60-70 percent of the Knesset.

Only such a government could block the aspirations of the small parties that are out there to get whatever they can. This country cannot afford to have Tehiya divert billions of dollars for roads to the West Bank because they want to make a point. They should not be allowed to jeopardize \$10 billion in loan guarantees to make a point. There are already 112,000 Jews living on 142 settlements in the West Bank; the point has been made. Such a government could also end the current massive subsidy of a yeshiva system which accepts anyone who wants to get out of the army, without criterion such as are required for acceptance into university, and which has resulted in the exemption of a total of 104,000 people from military service.

A coalition of only Likud and Labor could restructure the national economy and privatize billions of dollars of government assets. In terms of the peace process, Rabin wrote the Shamir plan and the two men are very similar in their thinking.

### **Alternate Election Scenarios**

A second possibility after the election is a government exactly like what Israel has now. But to get Agudat Israel and Tzomet and Moledet back into the coalition, Shamir is going to have to make even more concessions. Since Israel is now involved in a peace process with its neighbors, it will have to make some basic decisions about autonomy, and the three small parties on the right are going to do their best to make sure this matter is limited in the coalitionary agreements.

The third, much less likely, outcome is a Labor-led coalition with the new left-wing bloc, together with the religious parties. The result would be a left-wing government that did not enjoy the trust of the majority of the people. Every decision made by the prime minister of that government, even if

it were exactly what Shamir were going to decide, would be considered suspect and the government would not be able to move forward on the peace process. It might do better economically, except this is the time for Israel to privatize and not go back to a Labor government with Histadrut policies, centralization, giving money to the kibbutzim and to Koor — all those mistakes they made when they were in power.

### **Absorbing Soviet Jewish Immigration**

As long as Israel has a government that includes these little coalitionary parties that demand ministries, it will not be able to act to absorb the Soviet immigration. Israel's population has just gone up by 15 percent. What does this mean? How do we plan? How do we get the other million Jews here who are in jeopardy? Why are a million Jews who hold applications not coming? What are they coming to? There is a very real chance as the situation gets worse there that antisemitism is going to grow. Israel has the infrastructure in place to house them, but nowhere to employ them.

Soviet Jewish immigration has gone down to a trickle now, and may remain that way no matter how hungry they are in Russia. According to the experts, the Jews in Russia are in a relatively good situation. There is a lot of hope for change and the negative feedback coming from those already in Israel is taking its toll.

I have never been a fan of Ariel Sharon, but the man did his job. He may have overspent, but he undertook a national plan and he built the houses required. The plan was evolved during the time of Labor and included development towns, the Negev and the Galilee. Israel spent what was necessary and today there is no housing problem for the Soviet immigrants.

Commerce and Industry Minister Moshe Nissim and the other relevant authorities were authorized up to \$500 million in the state budget to create jobs. Yet hardly a cent has been spent because the approval of four ministries is required: Housing, Finance, Commerce and Industry, and Social Welfare. However, each of these ministries has its own agenda and they never come to any conclusions. The meetings of the Aliya Cabinet are devoted to such items as whether the vegetarian food on the flights carrying new immigrants to Israel is glatt

kosher. What Israel needs now is not a very nice articulate Moshe Nissim, but a real doer like Sharon, to create the infrastructure to keep the Russian Jews here. Fortunately, so far only 1 percent of the recent immigrants have left.

### **The Sephardi Vote**

Today the Sephardi vote is split. The new young generation that has come through the army is a different generation. It is not people in the 1960s who were bitter about the 1950s and not people in the 1970s who were bitter about the way their parents were treated in the 1960s. In the 1990s those of Sephardi parentage who are second and third generation, now appearing as first-time voters, will not necessarily be voting for Shas.

Until about six years ago there was no Sephardi yeshiva system per se. Then Shas saw the success of Agudat Israel and copied it. But the difference is that now every person who does not want to serve in the army goes into one of these Shas yeshivas and it has become a respectable, legitimate, honest and legal way of getting out of the army. Shas will continue to receive support because they have delivered to their constituency — they have delivered to yeshivas, they have delivered housing mortgages, and they have delivered funds channeled through the city governments.

The other dimension of the Sephardi vote involves the "neighborhoods," as the development towns and poorer sections of the big cities are known. There are a lot of unemployed people in Israel and a lot of people who have been hurt financially. Likud M.K. Yehoshua Matza spoke about the "neighborhoods" in the Knesset recently when answering Labor charges that money spent on settlements is at the expense of the "neighborhoods." Matza replied: "Who lives in the West Bank? People from the 'neighborhoods.' Maale Adumim and Ariel have given these people quality of life. The Labor party created the 'neighborhoods.' We have created villas."

### **Nuclearization of the Islamic World**

How Israel responds to security issues will also be decided in this crucial election. There used to be an Iron Curtain but today that curtain is gone. The world is now divided into Moslem and the rest, and Iran is going to try very hard to be the head of

that Islamic power.

The most dangerous phenomenon today with which the next Israeli government must deal is the nuclearization of the Islamic world. Israel's chief of staff has said that if things continue as they are now, within 5 to 7 years Iran will be a nuclear power with missiles capable of reaching Israel. He also believes that Iraq is still capable of putting together a nuclear device. The former Soviet Islamic republics are desperate for cash and are selling off everything. There are thousands of Soviet scientists for hire. There are some 25,000 Iranian students studying physics and math all over the world. Having some mullah in Iran with his finger on the button of a nuclear-tipped missile with a range of 3,000 kilometers is not healthy for the Jews.

War is not imminent since Syria will not take on Israel alone, but in the long term nuclear proliferation is a grave problem. U.S. Senator Phil Gramm has said there are 17,000 nuclear devices on the loose in the Soviet Union. Many of these are nuclear mines and smaller nuclear devices which could very easily be sold. They are selling off T-72 tanks for \$36,000 — less than the price of a new BMW. If Syria should acquire a few nuclear artillery shells, Israel will be living in a very different world.

Israel has the military power to maintain control of the West Bank and Gaza. It has the military strength to maintain the qualitative edge over its neighbors. But Israel's deterrent strength is absolutely reduced when it comes to nuclear weapons because mutual deterrence is based on the assumption that both sides have nothing to win and everything to lose. For the Arabs and Israel that is not the case, however. A nuclear strike against Israel will be total, devastating, and probably mean the end of this country. Israel's response, even if massive, will be relative since there are a billion Moslems in the world. Therefore, Israel has to concern itself with nuclear proliferation. It is very difficult, but possible and doable. Very few companies in the world deal with nuclear technology and they have to be watched very carefully. If the world, as represented in the Moscow talks, decides that this is a danger and if it puts its head to it, it can be done. It has to be done urgently, and it is in everyone's interest to do so.

There was once a little oil-rich country called Kuwait which was invaded by its nasty neighbor,

despite all the deterrence of the United States and the entire world. Israel had nothing to do with this war, does not even trade with Kuwait, yet Israel was attacked anyway. Now Israel must do everything possible to ensure that the next Scud attacks are not nuclear.

For making such defense decisions as the attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak, obviously one would prefer a Likud prime minister. Many people slurred Menachem Begin at the time for having bombed Osirak as an election stunt, but the real reason that Begin bombed Osirak when he did was that all the polls were showing that the Likud was going to lose the election and Begin knew that if he lost to Peres, Peres would never do it, so he felt he had to do it. Today there are no longer Osirak-type reactors and they are deep underground, very difficult to get at. In addition, it is one thing to attack Iraq, a pariah among nations; it is another to attack Iran, that last year had 42 international trade fairs on its soil, is putting a lot of resources into rebuilding its damaged infrastructure, and is going to become a major oil exporter. So a preemptive physical attack may no longer really be a feasible possibility. Yet Israel does what it can, for example, by sharing intelligence with America, or by informing German newspapers about German companies selling nuclear weapons components.

Other than the nuclear equation, however, time appears to be on Israel's side. It does not have to rush and can negotiate properly and find the right solutions that could turn the country into Switzerland, everybody with his own canton and a central government. However, there is an urgent need to put into place an international mechanism for seriously monitoring the traffic in nuclear technologies. Such a mechanism would have to encompass all countries, include surprise spot inspections by a mixed international team, and have the power to impose incredible penalties for those in contravention of it.

In any international arms control mechanism, Israel would be expected to open up its nuclear facil-

ities. It is not necessarily a bad thing for the Arabs to know what Israel has. Mordechai Vanunu, who gave the story of Israel's Dimona reactor to the world press, may well have been a plant.

In 1973 Israel lost 1,800 people in the war against Syria. Today a battalion commander has more firepower than a brigade commander had in 1973, and that a division commander had in 1967. In a simulation that was done based on the weapons now in the area, the minimum casualty rate in a similar type of war today would be around 6,000. The point is that the destructiveness of the weapons in the arena have to change one's thinking.

Therefore, Israel must hope for the success of the current peace talks. Israel and Syria have a treaty that has not been violated in the slightest way since 1973, so a broader agreement may eventually be possible.

What has been achieved to date is the establishment of a format for the talks. The delegations should now meet once a month and try to move forward in technical working groups dealing with water, environment, nuclear proliferation, economic cooperation, and defining basic guidelines for approaching the issue of autonomy. Regardless of the outcome of the elections, we must hope that the peace talks ultimately succeed, especially in those aspects such as control of nuclear weapons where the continued existence of the State of Israel may be at stake.

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