

COMMENTARY

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Likud's Victory is Israel's Defeat

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Those of us who regularly observe and try to make sense of the madness sweeping the Middle East often find ourselves, perhaps out of desperation, engaging in wishful thinking, hoping that in the end, reason will prevail over lunacy. We analyze unfolding events, dissect patent facts, reassess our assumptions, and try to discern where we were right and where we erred, but we often find ourselves exactly where we began.

Nevertheless, this self-agonizing search for reason and understanding still reveals another dimension to our human frailty. We choose to live in the cocoon we have grown accustomed to out of fear or complacency, however stifling or even deadly it may be, rather than break out and seek new horizons, regardless of how necessary and promising they could be.

I lament the results of the Israeli elections, not because I disrespect and distrust Netanyahu, but because a relative majority of Israelis choose to continue living in the bubble, fearful of changing the status quo even though it will inevitably burst.

The damning consequences Netanyahu's new government will inflict on the country are as certain as night following day. Israel, which has been led astray by Netanyahu for so long, is fast approaching a new precipice unlike any other it has faced in years past.

Following the wrath he brought upon his head for his earlier statement that there will be no Palestinian state under his watch, Netanyahu once again changed his mind only two days following the elections, stating in an interview on MSNBC that he wanted "a sustainable, peaceful two-state solution."

This reversal of his true position is tactical, designed to play for time, and is just another cheap political stunt.

The Europeans, Americans, and Palestinians, who have had extensive experience with him throughout the peace process, fully recognize his duplicity. He has lost every grain of credibility and no one will trust that he will negotiate in good faith in the future.

Moreover, his coalition government, which is in the making, will certainly include his natural partner, the right-of-center political parties, who oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state under any circumstances and will not join his government for one day if they believe his reversal is genuine.

What does Netanyahu think the Palestinians will do now that he has revealed his bigotry? What choice did he leave them with but to resort to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), demanding the recognition of a Palestinian state while seeking retribution against Israel in the International Criminal Court?

Having been misled, lied to, and humiliated by Netanyahu, President Obama, who spent precious time, resources, and political capital in the peace process, is left with no choice but to seek a UNSC resolution that calls for a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.

Although such a measure is the most positive the US can take to safeguard Israel's future as a democratic and Jewish state, it is a crushing defeat for Netanyahu, who desperately sought to obstruct the rise of a Palestinian state by relying on the US to shield his perverted scheme.

The European Union, who has long viewed the Israeli settlements as illegal, will now be fully convinced that Netanyahu has no intention of ending the occupation. Encouraged by Obama's change of position, they will initiate Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israeli products made in the Palestinian territories.

Furthermore, many European countries will follow Sweden and recognize the Palestinian state, labelling Israel as an occupying power of a sovereign nation and subjecting it to increasing political pressure and, potentially, economic sanctions.

The Arab states, especially Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia—who find themselves thrust into regional upheaval in the wake of the civil war in Syria, the rise of ISIS and the Iranian threat—view an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement as central to regional stability.

They have been working behind the scenes to restrain the Palestinians from rising violently against Israel. They now feel at a loss, unable to control the potential eruption of a third Intifada, as the Palestinians are now more determined than ever to rid themselves of the bondage of occupation.

Finally, throughout the past six years, and especially during the election campaign, Netanyahu repeatedly crossed the line of political civility. He demonstrated his racism when he implored his followers to come out and vote to neutralize the influx of Israeli Arab voters.

Although he recently apologized for his chauvinistic statement, his apology cannot be accepted, as he knew exactly what he was saying and meant it. Netanyahu reminds me of Aristophanes: “You won’t persuade me even if you convince me.”

Moreover, he polarized the Israeli public while alienating a large segment of American Jews and the Democratic Party by making a mockery of US-Israeli relations.

Where will all this lead to? Will Netanyahu, at age 65, begin to think of his legacy? What kind of Israel does he want to leave behind?

I believe that Netanyahu will remain true to his ideological upbringing and prevent the creation of a Palestinian state, believing that it will rob the Jews of their historic/biblical right to the “entire land of Israel,” stretching from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River.

He will expropriate yet more Palestinian land, expand the settlements, and play for time believing that he will outlast Obama, and hoping that the next President will be a conservative Republican who will let him rampage what is left of the West Bank.

The tens of thousands of Israelis who demonstrated a few days before the election, led by Meir Dagan and other top former security officials, cannot allow this to happen by giving Netanyahu free reign. They and hundreds of thousands more Israelis must now persistently engage in demonstrations and civil disobedience, forcing him to either change his policies and seek genuine peace, or step down.

Only the public *en masse* coupled with outside (especially American) pressure can make Netanyahu realize that Israel’s destiny is intertwined with an independent Palestinian state and that neither can live in peace and security without the other.

But as a deep ideologue, he discards the facts and chooses to cling to his wishful thinking, especially because Israel has been successful in beating the odds, presumably justifying his chosen path.

Netanyahu, however, ignores the evidence that times have changed, and regardless of how successful he was, it should not blind him from grasping that Israel’s future wellbeing depends on a two-state solution. But as T. S. Eliot once observed, “Human kind cannot bear very much reality.” And for Netanyahu, a Palestinian state is simply too much reality to bear.

Having flip-flopped in the past, perhaps he will soon be struck with a spasm of lucidity, change his mind again, and recognize that *peace with the Palestinian provides Israel with the ultimate security*.

If Netanyahu really cares about Israel's future security, peace should be *the* legacy he would want to leave behind.

Note: This article is published in collaboration with Prof. Ben-Meir's web portal. Web Link: <http://www.alonben-meir.com/article/likuds-victory-is-israels-defeat/>

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