

Israël: Lieberman to power

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Peace-seekers should support the move to bring Avigdor Lieberman into the government. It is impossible to understand the opposition of several Labor party ministers to having Yisrael Beitenu join the government after all, just what precisely are they afraid will happen? That Israel will embark on an unnecessary war? That the settlement enterprise will be reinforced? That the government will reject Syria's peace proposal? That racism toward Arab citizens of Israel will increase, or that the occupation army will be cruel to the Palestinians?

Indeed, the government in its current constellation is already providing all of this, abundantly, and Lieberman's participation would only remove its camouflage. An extreme right-wing government with Lieberman and without camouflage is preferable to a government without Lieberman that masquerades as center-left. As with the ridiculous struggle against the "illegal" outposts, which in effect legitimizes all of the other "legal" settlements, the struggle against bringing Lieberman into the government is also designed solely to accord a semblance of enlightenment to an extreme right-wing government and to legitimize Labor's participation in it. The opposition of Amir Peretz and some of his colleagues to Lieberman's joining the government is thus tainted with self-righteousness: They are already today members of a government that embarked on a worthless war, that says no to Syria, that is cruel to the Palestinians and fortifies the settlements.

Lieberman says what many people think. His racism and extreme nationalism are already out of the closet, while among many others, those qualities are still concealed deep within, even though they operate according to their spirit. They have no moral advantage over Lieberman. An openly racist and extreme nationalist is preferable to a closet racist and extreme nationalist.

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Lieberman also has a well-thought-out plan for the future, as opposed to Ehud Olmert, Benjamin Netanyahu or Shimon Peres, of whom no one (including they themselves, apparently) has a clue about what they want to do tomorrow morning. Lieberman might sound extremist to innocent ears or to those feigning innocence, but on many issues he is saying precisely what Israel is doing.

Back in 2001, Lieberman, as minister of national infrastructure, publicized his canton plan. He suggested then the division of the West Bank into four cantons, without a central Palestinian government or possibility of traveling between them. This is precisely what Israel is doing in practice, crushing the fabric of life in the territories through a cruel physical separation between each region. Even without Lieberman, a resident of Nablus who wants to visit his son in Hebron encounters almost impenetrable obstacles and of visiting his son in Gaza, he can only dream. When Lieberman put forward his proposal, there were those who became enraged; when the IDF implements these things, almost no one says a word. Could it be that a Lieberman who speaks the truth is better than an Olmert government that misleads?

Lieberman also explains how to reach a “military decision” vis-a-vis the Palestinians: “Within 48 hours, we can enter all of the command posts, all of the tunnels, all of the weapons depots, and then we can proceed to the cantons plan,” he told Haaretz in 2001. And what has Israel tried to do since then, albeit without success? Liquidate, kill, destroy - precisely according to the spirit of Lieberman’s hallucinatory “military decision.”

Bringing Lieberman into the government would also remove its mask in relation to the world. After the prime minister’s retreat from his convergence idea, he has nothing left to suggest on the political-diplomatic front anyway. Lieberman will show the Palestinians, the Arab states and the rest of the world the direction in which the current government is really headed. The world and the Arabs will understand very clearly that an extreme nationalist government is in power in Jerusalem, and that it is not looking for peace.

A survey published on Friday in Yedioth Ahronoth predicted 20 Knesset seats going to Yisrael Beiteinu. (The survey showed only the Likud receiving more seats.) The survey also reveals the true face of public opinion in Israel: more right-wing and extremist than ever before. It is also best that we know this. What a long road we have traveled from the time Meir Kahane was ostracized in the Knesset by most of its factions, to the point where Avigdor Lieberman has become a legitimate candidate for a “security minister.”

In the next elections, Lieberman will no longer be considered a leader of a marginal group. Perhaps he will even become prime minister one day. It is logical to think that an extreme right-wing government headed by Lieberman would precipitate an international boycott of Israel, just like the one imposed on the Hamas government. Perhaps this type of frightening extremism would stir the world to finally intervene with determination to bring this long and dangerous conflict to an end.

It is not difficult to guess how Israel would react if a person like Lieberman were to join one of the governments in Europe. When the racist Joerg Haider joined the Austrian government in February 2000, Israel recalled its ambassador and cut off all contact with representatives of the Austrian government. But what is forbidden to Austria is permitted to us, and the world has not blinked so far.

It is understandable and correct that the natural instinct of peace-seekers in Israel is to fiercely oppose a person who calls for the transfer of entire communities; for the moving of their residents without their consent, to a different sovereignty, simply because of their national origin; for the expulsion of any citizen who is not “loyal” to the state; a man who aspires to a state “clean” of Arabs, and who only recognizes the language of force. The appointment of a minister with a fascist worldview entails severe educational and social damage. The fact that Lieberman substantially influences the views of about a million immigrants from the former Soviet Union is also bad news for Israeli society. And despite all this, Lieberman, the declared racist, is preferable to the self-righteous and hypocritical ones who may speak of peace but wage war. Lieberman to power? He has already been there a long time.

P.S.

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