

How a Nation's Future is Determined

by Dan Ben-David

Each side in Israel's political system understands exactly what is at stake: the disengagement, if it goes through, highlights the beginning of a new era for the country. For each side, this is an existential issue. Only a decision that is widely viewed as having been legitimately reached via a serious democratic process can reduce the possibility of bloodshed between Jews. An issue that has been repressed for ages, rolled from one generation to the next, has reached our doorstep and has been thrust in our faces. The shekel must stop here – and now.

The disengagement issue is only one of the important questions that will have to be addressed on our generation's watch. We need to rebuild an educational system that is the worst in the western world, before it drowns our future generations by not providing them with the necessary tools that they will need for keeping afloat in a brutally competitive global economy. We have to radically change national priorities that have produced a steady, three decade, ascension to western peaks in areas of unemployment, poverty and income inequality.

In a centrifugal political system such as ours, blackmail is the norm and the national perspective is rarely able to penetrate through the overcast skies of personal interests – with the country relentlessly sinking into a social, economic and defense coma that is threatening to develop into a terminal condition.

The disengagement example says everything about the level of our elected officials and the rules of the game in Israel's political system. Every other issue on the current public agenda is dwarfed by the importance of this decision and the magnitude of its implications on the future of the country. In light of the fact that the prime minister is serious about evacuating settlements, then there can be no doubt that whoever supports the disengagement must enable the government to survive in order to carry out the move, while those who oppose it must do everything they can – within the confines of the law – in order to bring down the government. This is not a time for the typical low-end politicking, deal-making and shticks.

But the ultra-orthodox MKs are ready to sell their souls on the disengagement issue in return for roughly a third of a billion additional shekels for their institutions. Pay them off, buy their vote. Don't pay, they vote against. On what dark night did these self-proclaimed keepers of our faith become separated from the conscience and morals upon which Judaism is based?

Cabinet ministers Netanyahu, Shalom, Livnat, Naveh, Hangebi, Katz and company, among the leaders (?) of the ruling party certainly understand the enormity of the hour and the importance of the decision for the future of the nation. That is why they oppose, support, oppose, support with unequivocal resolve the position that ensures – their political future, and nothing else. These are, after all, the only true ideals that are deeply embedded in them.

Tommy Lapid and the Shinui party are also imbued with clear principles. For them, petty implications of disengagement or non-disengagement don't hold a candle against the sacred prevention of ultra-orthodox blackmail. They know exactly which issues warrant pulling out the ultimatum cannon.

And the Labor party? Arik Sharon co-opted a sizeable chunk of their platform – a fact that doesn't prevent them from introducing no-confidence motions in the Knesset in order to chuck him out of office. After all, their platform was annexed without any compensation in the form of cabinet seats with accompanying Volvos. No compensation, no support. There are important things in life, and then there are the truly important issues.

Individuals possessing superior personal ability, public integrity and a calibrated internal compass are in very short supply among our non-extremist elected officials. The existing political system makes it extremely difficult for such people to penetrate and it severely limits the ability of those already inside to lead the country toward clear and safe horizons.

It is a system in which the prime minister must appoint his primary political foes to the most important cabinet positions in order to survive – with all of the inherent implications that this has on his subsequent ability to govern. It is a system with built-in instability that serves as an incentive for internal and external blackmail and threats. It is a system that puts the elected officials at the mercy of their parties' central committees rather than making them accountable to the public that voted them into office. It is a system that is corrupting the very foundation of Israel's government and its society.

The disengagement debate does not only symbolize the extent of polarity within the nation. It foreshadows in an unmistakable manner the kind of destiny that we face if do not completely overhaul Israel's system of government and the manner in which our representatives are chosen.