

## It's Not Personal, It's Governmental

by

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I read the newspapers, hear and see the public debate in the electronic media, and feel as though everyone has witnessed a different movie than me this past summer. The question of whether a state or public commission of inquiry needs to investigate who is guilty, the question of whether it should investigate only what transpired this summer or focus on the past few years in order to include additional people – these are important questions, but they focus on the trappings rather than on the primary problem: the lack of governance in Israel.

The glitches uncovered during the summer of 2006 suggest far more than the malfunctioning of any given individuals. They are the natural outcome of a dysfunctional system in which good and talented people work alongside those who lack talent and/or integrity. The source of the problem is the deficient system of personal – not necessarily economic – organizational and managerial incentives at both the micro and macro levels.

This is a country with huge budgets that has been dysfunctional for many years. If, until recently, most of the evidence for this lay in civil areas – like education, welfare, health and infrastructure – today it is quite apparent that this grim list also needs to include defense. If, until today, it was possible to deceive ourselves into thinking that our public sector's wasteful and deficient performance would harm us primarily in the distant future, the addition of defense to the overall picture makes this an immediate and existential problem.

This is a country that excels in creating commissions of inquiry and in reaching conclusions – from the big surprise and the empty supply depots at the start of the Yom Kippur War through the crumpling bridge in the Maccabiah Games, the collapse of the Versailles Halls, to the steady multi-decade increase in poverty and inequality. Is there anything left here that still has not been investigated? So our commissions reach conclusions, put the writing on the wall – and we are nonetheless surprised again the next time around. Beheadings cannot be considered a viable alternative for governance.

Rather than focusing on who is guilty and how he failed, the time has come to channel existing public pressure for the creation of an investigative commission into the formation of a formal state commission that will focus on the two main areas of governance. The first area, at the micro level: changing the structure and functioning of government institutions – including defense. The objective of such institutions is to provide needed services efficiently, quickly, fairly and in the most transparent manner possible while meticulously safeguarding the rights of those who receive and provide the services. The second area, at the macro level: changing the system of government in Israel. The commission's letter of appointment must address the root issues in these areas rather than the customary focus on the subsequent outcomes of a fundamentally flawed system.

At the macro level, I believe that the country must adopt a presidential form of government – similar to, though not identical to, the American model – in which the president chooses professionals as ministers subordinate to him instead of his main political rivals to key cabinet positions (in our current system, with its inherent conflicts of interest at the highest levels of government, it is no wonder that a normal decision-making process is not even a part of our lexicon). We need a system in which the president and each of the MKs is personally elected

directly by the voters, a system in which both the president and the MKs are elected to fixed terms of office in order to enable long-term planning and budgeting, a system that provides state-of-the-art checks and balances between the executive and legislative branches of government.

Whether or not these will be the commission's conclusions at the macro level, it is vitally important that a commission focusing on investigating the entire scope of governance at the national level be created immediately and reach its conclusions in no more than a year. In addition to the legal and academic experts, who will provide a dimension of depth to the commission, it is crucial that the commission include senior people with proven managerial skills and experience. Israel's private sector has some of the leading managers in the world, serious people who were born and raised here, are familiar with the Israeli mentality and know how to get the best out of it. In addition, there are quite a number of gifted individuals that have passed through the public service – but are no longer dependent upon it – who well understand the unique aspects of the public sector, are familiar with its problems and can identify its systemic failings.

At this critical juncture, and in light of the external and internal dangers that we face, decisions will soon be made that will determine the future of this country, or if there will even be a future for this country. The creation of a state commission on the entire governance issue – and the complete implementation of its findings – can be Ehud Olmert's legacy for future generations.