

Knesset Centrifuges

by

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Last week, there was another head-on collision between Israel's two largest public failures. Barreling down from one side was a public education system that is rapidly destroying the future prospects of our next generation. Plummeting down from the other direction was a system of government that has been rudderless for years.

The collision became inevitable when a small minority of Knesset members (39 MKs, representing just one-third of the Knesset, voted in favor, and this was enough; six voted against, while 75 MKs, a vast majority of the Knesset, simply evaporated) decide to legalize – against all social, economic and moral logic – the ability of a large and rapidly growing segment of the population to prevent its children from receiving a basic educational toolbox that would enable them to function in a competitive economy and a modern democracy.

With this act, Israel relinquished its sovereignty from the ultra-orthodox schools and officially announced that they are not required to teach core curriculum subjects, which account for over 90% of the instruction time in western countries with whom the children of Israel will have to compete when they become adults. Until now, the government had preferred to turn a blind eye toward the unsanctioned curricula. From now, they are official and will continue to be funded by our tax money.

Not only in Iran are centrifuges operating. They have been spinning at full speed for quite a while in Israel's Knesset – with similar implications for the nation's future. Instead of coming together in the face of growing threats, our representatives are pulling farther and farther apart.

Between this coming September – with the election of a new head by the country's ruling party – and the officially scheduled elections in about two years, Israel will enter an interim period. The heads of the three largest parties, with a total number of MKs equaling just 50 percent of the entire Knesset, are requested to elevate themselves beyond the trees and see the forest that is burning. They must put aside their lethal and destructive rhetoric, restrain their personal ambitions, and cooperate with one another in formulating and implementing policies that will save the country's future: significant and widespread electoral and educational reforms together with an educated decision on what is or isn't possible to do within a nuclear Iranian hourglass that will empty in a few months.

The year is 1948, plus 60. Decisions that will be made today by the country's leadership will determine the strength and character of a country that needs to be reborn and must redefine for itself the kind of a future that it wants for the next 60 years – if it intends on reaching its 120th birthday.

Among the necessary changes that must be implemented: beginning with the next elections, MKs must be elected directly and personally by their constituencies on election day, as must the president who will lead the country. These should be elections to fixed terms of office that will enable vision, planning and implementation of strategies that extend over the immediate horizon. The president must be able to choose cabinet ministers whose claim to fame is not as representatives of political parties but as professionals in their respective ministries who report

directly to the president. The time has come to stop the centrifugal political forces, to fortify and stabilize the pillars of governance, and to enact norms of personal public accountability among the country's elected representatives.

In the area of education, a true reform mandates far-reaching changes in the way that teachers are chosen, trained and compensated, changes in the managerial realm (from the way that the entire system is run and down to the level of managing individual schools), institutionalization of uniform and egalitarian principles for determining educational content and school budgets. This country is home to many heterogeneous lifestyles, but there is only one economic market for all and it requires a common minimum toolbox of basic skills for survival. Just as no parent is allowed to use religious beliefs as an excuse to deprive their child of life-saving medication, no child may be deprived of his or her's innate right to a basic educational toolbox.

These are the central issues that will determine the ability of the country to confront the huge challenges still ahead of us, issues that must be seriously dealt with in a systemic and thorough manner within the window of opportunity that is still open. This is one of the final hours of strength that the still-existent Zionist majority has to unite and save the country through democratic means.

These are also the final months for deciding what can or can't be done about those other centrifuges – the real ones. In order to save our parents' dream and our children's future, get your act together.