

The Litmus Test for Governmental Reform

by

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Until now, the public discourse on changing our system of government concentrated on issues such as stability, representation, and the quality of the elected officials. These are necessary, but insufficient, ingredients for a system of government whose primary *raison d'être* must be to ensure the continued existence of the State of Israel. Hence, the need to add another crucial dimension to the debate: a litmus test for governmental reform in Israel.

In the field that I come from, they are called “existence conditions”: the basic requirements for an equilibrium to exist. In the national context, this expression obviously has additional implications as well. When examined from a long-run perspective, two existence conditions emerge that, in their absence, Israel’s survival a number of generations from now will become increasingly difficult to guarantee. My intention is not to list here all that is necessary for Israel’s existence but rather to identify two specific existence conditions which together comprise the litmus test for changing the system.

For decades on end, we have witnessed a steady increase in the segment of Israel’s population that is not receiving a quality educational toolbox which could enable today’s children – tomorrow’s workers – to adequately compete in a competitive, modern and open economy. This is why the first existence condition requires (a) the formulation of a quality core curriculum from kindergarten through 12th grade, and (b) necessitates its full implementation in all parts of Israel’s educational system. While this does not imply the need for uniformity in sectoral curriculums, it does mandate the full institution of uniform core curriculums covering a large range of basic subjects that will enable all of the country’s children to realize their innate potential.

The second existence condition is related to Israel’s national path. The differing fertility rates among the various segments of the population have resulted in a situation in which about half of the children in first grade do not study in either the national or the religious-national educational systems but belong instead to the ultra-orthodox and Arab school systems. Soon, those segments of the population who are not interested in the existence of a Jewish-democratic State will become the majority in this land. The problem is that neither one of these sectors provides an alternative vision that will continue to keep here all those who currently shore up the country – and continue to remain here because of its present nature – in the economic and defense spheres.

Ironically, the Zionist vision of a Jewish and democratic country is also the primary viable alternative for these same non-Zionist Israeli sectors. This refers not only to the ultra-orthodox, who could not physically survive in this neighborhood without the protective shield provided by the Israel Defense Forces – currently based on the Zionist segment of the population that is steadily enroute to becoming a minority. Israeli Arabs, despite the unjustifiable discrimination that many face, nonetheless do not have another Middle-Eastern alternative that provides anything approaching what they receive here: full civil rights, complete freedom of expression and voting privileges, access to one of the best health systems in the world, personal security and a social welfare system.

That is why the second existence condition necessitates the immediate inclusion of these groups into the Israeli narrative which entails not only the rights to receive, but also the obligation to defend and serve this country in order to preserve those rights. Beyond the moral justification for widening the existing military draft to an obligatory conscription of *all* draft-age Israelis into military and civil service, there also exists here an important issue of instilling a sense of togetherness, of a shared destiny and of national pride.

These are the two existence conditions – literally – which must comprise the litmus test for any Israeli system of government. However, our current, centrifugal, form of government is incapable of implementing these conditions. Nor does it appear that the litmus test can be passed by most of the patchwork modifications to this system that are now being bandied about.

In my opinion, our only hope for passing the litmus test is the complete replacement of the current system with the type of presidential system that I proposed in my earlier articles. Of those who object, many do so for irrelevant reasons: an inability to consider any idea that even carries a trace of Americanism; a desire not to be affiliated with a system supported by politicians who are not “one of ours”; and the most common excuse – that in the current political environment, it is simply not possible to facilitate a move to the presidential system.

This last argument is extremely misleading. What is truly unrealistic is not the difficulty in convincing current law-makers to agree on the presidential system but rather the unfeasibility of adopting a system of government that will not be able to implement the existential conditions, with all that this inability implies. Every Israeli who wants his children and grandchildren to continue living here in the future must understand that what we do – or fail to do – in the coming months and years will determine the future character, and the actual existence, of the State of Israel.