

## You won! Now what?

### A note to Israel's ultra-Orthodox and settlers

by

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This past year has cemented several decades of evolution. To the ultra-Orthodox – the Haredim – and the settlers, it is now possible to say: You have won! So now what? What kind of an Israeli future will grow from the seeds that you are planting here?

Increased freedom of thought and expression have led to attainment of the highest living standards in the world's most developed countries. As long as Israel cannot produce all of its own needs by itself, we are dependent on good relations with these countries. So it doesn't really matter if you don't understand or agree that segregation of women and discrimination against Palestinians are forms of racism. What counts – other than the truth – is how the developed world interprets such behavior when deciding on the kind of relations that it wants with us.

It's no coincidence that these developed-world traits also characterize the secular and religious majority that built Israel's pathbreaking research universities and its hi-tech economic locomotive. When 90% of the country's entire income tax revenue comes from just 20% of Israel's population, you might want to hold off on disparaging those norms and realize that they characterize most of this 20%.

You may choose to ignore the majority of American Jews and search for support among Christian fundamentalists in the hope that they will control the United States forever. Good luck with your inability to distinguish between pendulum swings and the steady trajectory of heightened liberties and basic rights that the United States has been on for the past 150 years.

You may also hope that it is possible to replace the "sanctimonious" developed world with Russians and Chinese who understand, like you, the need to suppress dissent. Good luck with them, when supporters of Bashar Assad and Hezbollah are your friends, and when the Chinese tiger with megalomaniacal expansionist ambitions will have to decide between your desires and those of oil-producing countries that they are dependent on.

Honestly, which of these national options would you choose to live in had Israel not existed? After all, this is the choice you're making today regarding the country that we'll have once your dreams are realized. Not only will most of America's Jews abandon you, so will young educated Israelis – secular and religious – who believe in the importance of critical thinking, free speech and equal opportunities, those who currently carry on their shoulders most of the burden of maintaining a viable Israel.

So maybe consideration for others isn't a key attribute of the Haredim or the settlers, and maybe you belittle our values and beliefs. But understand that these are what make possible your physical existence in this region. Unless you have a plan for the day after, when you will be abandoned by the developed world and your Israeli counterparts, you need to internalize where your path is leading.

And a final note to the majority – still – in the Knesset, the one that prioritizes the existence and flourishing of our Zionist project. We have to switch diskettes while there is still time to do so. Israel is rapidly approaching the demographic-democratic point of no return after

which it will no longer be possible to change direction. If the fast-growing Haredi and settler populations insist on living in a fantasy world with the belief that everything will turn out fine no matter what, then we need to remove our own blinders and start working together.

It is possible to create Israeli governments without Haredim or settlers, and to begin protecting our future here. We have the capacity to stop funding schools that prevent children from realizing their basic right to a core education and to stop funding settlements in the midst of Palestinian areas that prevent the creation of sustainable borders. In their place, we need to divert resources toward comprehensive structural reforms in Israel's education, health and welfare systems that will enhance our present and ensure our future.

A world experiencing very rapid technological change already presents us with plenty of challenges in preparing for the future, even without the unsustainable overreach created by these two communities. As long as the Haredim and settlers are completely disconnected from reality, there is a need to completely disconnect them from the leadership of a country desiring life in the most violent and dangerous region on the face of the earth.