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DOMESTIC ISSUES—HAREDI DRAFT, HOUSING, COST OF LIVING —AT STAKE IN COMPLEX ISRAELI COALITION BUILDING; “PEACE PROCESS” LOW ON THE AGENDA

Contents:

(Please Note: articles may have been shortened in the interest of space. Please click link for the complete article – Ed.)

End the Haredi Chokehold: David M. Weinberg, *Israel Hayom*, Feb. 5, 2013—The haredi draft issue is proving to be the sticking point in the current coalition negotiations. Rightfully so, because focusing on this matter is the key to ending the chokehold that ultra-Orthodox parties have had on Israeli politics and matters of religion and state for the past 20 years.

Lapid: Don't Threaten Us With Civil War: Moran Azulay, *Ynet News*, Feb. 11, 2013—Yesh Atid Chairman Yair Lapid made his first Knesset speech on Sunday and said he sees his allegiance to the state as a life's mission. "We must not ignore the issue of equal share of the burden," he warned. "There will be no civil war. Ten percent of the population cannot threaten the remaining 90% with a civil war."

Benjamin Netanyahu vs Yair Lapid, the Psychology of Israeli Decision-making: Asaf Romirowsky, *Forbes*, Feb. 8, 2013—It is the makeup of Israeli political leaders that needs to be understood, especially the psychology behind their decisionmaking. This process compounds the Zionist roots that led to the creation of the modern State of Israel in addition to identifying the streams of Zionism that impact Israel's leaders today.

Understanding Israel's Politics and 2013 Election: Barry Rubin, *Ottawa Citizen*, January 24, 2013—It was clear before the balloting in Israel that the claims that the population was moving to the right, that radical extremists were about to take over (an argument curiously absent when the Muslim Brotherhood actually does gain power), and that democracy in Israel was imperilled, were flatly wrong. But the results amply demonstrated that fact.

On Topic Links

The Bitter Taste Of Victory: Andrew Friedman, *Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 6, 2013

How the Likud Can Win: Daniel Tauber, *Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 5, 2013

Lapid Eveing Foreign Ministry Post Despite Liberman's Dibs: Ilan Ben Zion, *Times of Israel*, Feb. 10, 2013

END THE HAREDI CHOKEHOLD

David M. Weinberg

[Israel Hayom](#), Feb. 5, 2013

The haredi draft issue is proving to be the sticking point in the current coalition negotiations. Rightfully so, because focusing on this matter is the key to ending the chokehold that ultra-Orthodox parties have had on Israeli politics and matters of religion and state for the past 20 years.

It's not that I believe that a new enlistment law will truly change the situation and facilitate the mass conscription of haredi yeshiva boys and kollel men into the IDF. It won't. Whatever new legislation is drafted will be a compromise measure that changes things only at the margins, and will, at best, accelerate pre-existing and hopeful trends already underway geared toward greater workforce participation and national service among haredim. In fact, the thing that could be far more influential than any enlistment law would be to change our national budget in a way that cuts stipends and discounts to the non-working haredi yeshiva society, in housing, taxes, health insurance, social benefits, education and so on — but that is another discussion.

The point is that by focusing on the draft issue — which makes it almost impossible for Shas and United Torah Judaism to join the coalition — Yair Lapid of Yesh Atid and Naftali Bennett of Habayit Hayehudi are attempting to strip the haredim of the inordinate political power they have held in Israeli politics for far too long. This explains the venom expressed in the press over the past two days by Shas toward Lapid and even more so toward Bennett. It also explains attempts by haredi rabbis to pressure Bennett into backing down by going over his head and appealing to a series of national-religious rabbis who straddle the haredi-religious Zionist divide, to the right of Bennett.

But these attempts to weaken Bennett and "save" the haredi community from facing reality mustn't be allowed to work. To begin with, the current appeal of haredi leaders to religious Zionist leaders to "save them" from the clutches of Yair Lapid is overwhelmingly hypocritical and worthy of complete rejection. These are the same haredi leaders, especially the ugly rabble-rousers of Shas, who just last month called the Habayit Hayehudi (The Jewish Home) party the "house of goyim," and who have worked assiduously for two decades to weed out any remaining, moderate influence of religious Zionist rabbis and politicians in national affairs.

Now, Shas is cynically demanding that Bennett come to their aid. Remember that according to Shas, religious Zionist rabbis and politicians are the rabbis of "Kochavit Giyur" ("Dial-a-Conversion") reform-minded, weak-kneed, liberal destroyers of Torah tradition who are bastardizing conversion standards and letting thousands of Russian non-Jews into Israel's Jewish community.

Now, Shas has the chutzpah to demand that the National Religious community save it. More substantially, Bennett must not give in to the pressure to back off the haredi draft effort or his alliance with Lapid because rolling back haredi influence on matters of religion and state is critical to the health and unity of this country. It's time, once again, for the face of Torah and Jewish religion in public life to be one that is not ambivalent toward the Zionist enterprise, that does not scorn the rule of law and democratic institutions, that does not evince utter rejection of modernity, and that does not disparage and denigrate the secular public.

Let's remember that since the political Left in Israel unfortunately handed the keys to Israel's Jewish character over to the ultra-Orthodox in the 1990s (to purchase haredi support for Oslo I and II, the disengagement from Gaza and more), ultra-Orthodox parties and their rabbis have conducted a slow but inexorable conquest of the rabbinate and religious courts, conversion courts, municipal religious councils, kashrut agencies, and more.

The deleterious results are clear: City rabbis who demand extreme gender separation requirements at municipal public events and in public spaces, burial societies that institute strictures in funeral proceedings (especially in regard to women), courts that apply stringencies in matters of marriage and divorce and especially conversion, and haredi politicians (some also claiming the title rabbi) sounding off with xenophobic, anti-Zionist, anti-modern and anti-nationalist statements on public matters several times per week.

In addition, Shas leaders have created a rapidly growing network of party-affiliated schools that entrenches and glorifies ethnic resentments, teaches absolute religious condescension toward all others and disdain for the modern world, and which prepares its graduates to do nothing in the working world. In short, a retrogressive Torah education, not a wholesome, productive and broad religious education.

I also refuse to forgive and forget haredi leaders and rabbis who have described religious Zionists as "fools who believe anything," leftist politicians as "Amalek," and Supreme Court justices as "niddah rapists" (breakers of the laws of ritual purity). Former Shas MK Rabbi Moshe Maya even called Supreme Court justice Dr. Elyakim Rubinstein, who is a religious Zionist, "an anti-God blasphemer who should be excommunicated."

And let's not forget all those week-kneed, too-liberal religious Zionist rabbis who are bastardizing conversion standards, dial-a-conversion-style. The same rabbis to whom Shas is now appealing to in efforts to save the haredim from Bennett. The insufferable overflow of self-righteousness, and the hostility toward broader Israeli society, evident in haredi political behavior needs to be curbed. The haredi political juggernaut needs to be rolled back. Instead, it is time for moderate religious Zionism to reassert its place in matters of religion and state and public policy. Bennett should not back down.

[Top of Page](#)

UNDERSTANDING ISRAEL'S POLITICS AND 2013 ELECTION

Barry Rubin

[Ottawa Citizen](#), January 24, 2013

Once in an Irish pub I spotted a pair of drawings on the wall. One, labeled "the Irishman," depicted a sturdy peasant. The other, entitled, "the Irishman seen by others [or perhaps, by the British]" showed a drunken, loutish fool. Watching Western coverage of the Israeli election reminds me of those sketches.

It was clear before the balloting in Israel that the claims that the population was moving to the right, that radical extremists were about to take over (an argument curiously absent when the Muslim Brotherhood actually does gain power), and that democracy in Israel was imperilled, were flatly wrong. But the results amply demonstrated that fact.

To be generous, at best the external view of Israeli politics is two decades out of date. Elections are not between left and right ideological blocs, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not a hardliner or right-winger, and the "peace process"—which most Israelis believe no longer actually exists—is not the prime issue at all.

Roughly, as the 2013 election results confirm, the Israeli electorate does include three blocs which each gain about 10 percent of the vote: the Arab-controlled parties (Communists, Arab nationalists, and Islamist) which never cooperate; Jewish religious parties ("European-origin" and "Middle Eastern" origin, to put it simply) which represent two distinct constituencies; and far right, whose vote count remains roughly the same over many years. Another five percent comprise a left-wing Zionist party.

The remaining two-thirds of the electorate votes roughly in a spectrum that coincides with that of Canada, and it is their choices that provide the main governing parties. They constitute five parties ranging from the center-right Likud of Netanyahu, through three center-center parties, to the moderate left Labour party.

All of these voters are skeptical about Palestinian intentions. They support a two-state solution but doubt that either the Palestinian Authority which rules the West Bank and now says that Palestine is an independent state that doesn't need to negotiate with Israel or, Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip and openly calls for genocide of the Jews, is likely to provide a stable, reliable peace.

Given this consensus, the lessons of Palestinian rejectionism in the 1990s' peace process, and the lack of current opportunity, the election simply did not focus on these issues. It revolved mainly about domestic issues. In economic terms, Israel has done well in recent years, especially compared to Europe and the United States. Now, however, the budget has gotten too big in relations to income, while high prices—especially for housing--have stirred lots of complaints.

The three center-center parties—Yesh Atid (There's a Future) of Yair Lapid; Hatnua (The Movement) of former foreign minister Tsipi Livni; and Kadima (Forward) of former army chief of staff Shaul Mofaz—all appeal to those looking for moderation, attention to domestic issues, and promised good government. These three parties received about one-quarter of the seats.

Lapid did the best. A well-liked television personality who turned to politics, he followed in the footsteps of his father who did precisely the same thing. His success was due to being a fresh face and assembling an impressive team of people from the public sphere none of whom had ever been in parliament before.

Netanyahu gained another one-quarter of the vote, slightly disappointing for him but enough to win. One reason for the slump is that many voted for Lapid with the intention that the two men form a coalition in which Lapid could press Netanyahu on economic reforms and more social spending, among other issues. Aside from those specific issues, the policies of the next government are likely to be pretty much the same as during Netanyahu's previous term....

There was no turn to the right. Indeed, the two leftist Jewish parties received double the vote of the far right party, which united that portion of the spectrum and had a dynamic new leader but got the usual portion of the vote for that standpoint. Nor is there any enhanced hardline stance. Netanyahu accepted a two-state solution in 1996 and is dealing with a situation in which the Palestinian Authority refused to hold serious talks throughout his entire term, despite favorable concessions and encouragement offered to it by President Barack Obama....

Netanyahu, whose personal relations with the right-wing leader Naftali Bennett are quite strained, though it is possible he would join the government in a position of weakness. Netanyahu would prefer, however, to make a deal with Lapid and the small Kadima Party, which would bring him to 52 of the 61, bridging that gap with a religious party. Both Labour and Livni refuse to join a coalition with him. The process of assembling a coalition is going to be messy and full of rumours. The bottom line, though, is that Israel has just held a thoroughly democratic election with remarkably little rancor, extremism, or ideology in the midst of the world's longest conflict and in the world's most turbulent region. That is the kind of signal achievement the world should be accurately understanding and appreciating.

[Top of Page](#)

LAPID: DON'T THREATEN US WITH CIVIL WAR

Moran Azulay

[Ynet News](#), Feb. 11, 2013

Yesh Atid Chairman Yair Lapid made his first Knesset speech on Sunday and said he sees his allegiance to the state as a life's mission. "We must not ignore the issue of equal share of the burden," he warned. "There will be no civil war. Ten percent of the population cannot threaten the remaining 90% with a civil war." The Yesh Atid leader warned that Israel is in the midst of a crisis, adding "the sooner we recognize it, the sooner we can fix it." He said that the crisis is not just economic or social, "it's to do with the state's ability to exercise its sovereignty vis-à-vis the groups that make it up."

He further added, "We need to carefully guard that which unites us. Such a union cannot exist if one fails to recognize a basic tenet of democracy and that is the state's right to act according to the desire of the majority."

Lapid stated that the public expects its leaders "to rise above fears, to bring real solutions to problems that are tearing at Israeli society. "We have not come here to drive a wedge, but to unite. The rift is already here, we're being torn apart from each other in schools, in the army, in the work force. It's time to admit there's a gaping wound in the heart of Israel's society and now is the time for healing."

Lapid further stated that his vision is to restore state sovereignty. "Our job is to jointly imagine what Israel should look like. Would it be too far fetched to imagine a state where every haredi child can speak English and every secular child knows how to read a page of Talmud? "Would it be too far fetched to imagine a state that is a world leader; that remembers it's her job to help orphans and widows and foreigners? Would it be too far fetched to imagine a state not driven by xenophobia but by the love of man? I believe it would not. I believe in the State of Israel and our ability to create a model society we can take pride in."...

Earlier on Monday, Lapid commented on the coalition negotiations noting that "99.9% of what you read in the paper has no bearing on reality. "He said he is open to considering the Likud-Beiteinu's draft plan and noted that he "gets along" with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Lapid estimated that the negotiations will take another two to three weeks or maybe even longer.

[Top of Page](#)

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU VS YAIR LAPID, THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ISRAELI DECISION-MAKING

Asaf Romirowsky

Forbes, February 8, 2013

It is the makeup of Israeli political leaders that needs to be understood, especially the psychology behind their decision making. This process compounds the Zionist roots that led to the creation of the modern State of Israel in addition to identifying the streams of Zionism that impact Israel's leaders today. Such historical nuances, between men and ideas, and powerful men and their equally impressive fathers, are critical but poorly understood by outside observers. The relationships between Benjamin Netanyahu and Yair Lapid and their fathers are therefore key to appreciating the latest results of Israel's general elections and understanding Zionism today.

Both fathers, Benzion Netanyahu and Tommy Lapid – were larger than life figures who grew up in a world before there was a State of Israel, and who navigated through the turbulence of its creation and early years. Their sons are now trying to keep the Zionist dream alive and relevant, triangulating their fathers' respective legacies and the realities of the 21st century. The direction they choose will impact the Zionism of 2013.

Benzion Netanyahu who recently passed away at 102, was a renowned expert on the history of the Jews in Spain and a member of Vladimir Jabotinsky's revisionist party. Benjamin Netanyahu in turn, has been a loyal son and prime minister who has followed his father's doctrine, as illustrated by the countless public

addresses that reflect his father's worldview. For example, in a speech on Holocaust Remembrance Day, Netanyahu correctly described the threat posed by Iran as a new Holocaust, comparing those who dislike the analogy to the "Jewish intellectuals" in Warsaw who "ridiculed Jabotinsky." In his address to the annual AIPAC meeting in Washington he equated today's leaders in Iran with the scoundrel of the Book of Esther, "a Persian anti-Semite [who] tried to annihilate the Jewish people." Such views and rhetoric reflect his father's understanding of history as well as his passion.

In contrast, Yair Lapid's father, the late Joseph, better known as 'Tommy,' was a Hungarian Holocaust survivor who died in 2008. He foreshadowed his son's recent political sensation with the *Yesh Atid* party when he formed the liberal-secular *Shinui* party in 2003. Tommy achieved a comparable breakthrough when he won 15 seats in the 2003 elections before entering a coalition with prime minister Ariel Sharon.

Tommy Lapid was the correspondent for the Israeli newspaper, *Maariv*, in London in the 1960s and later the head of the Israel Broadcasting Authority. Yair Lapid captured the essence of his father in his bestselling book, *Memories After My Death: The Story Of Joseph "Tommy" Lapid*. There he describes his father's professional exploits, including pushing through crowds at a Buckingham Palace diplomatic reception to shake hands with the Queen and attending Winston Churchill's funeral. Lapid was well-known for his confrontational style on television and radio, as well as for his secularist views.

Politically, Netanyahu and Lapid are at odds given the contrast in their Zionist makeup. This will likely impact the direction of Israel's foreign policy with regard to a potential peace process with the Palestinians. Some have argued that Netanyahu's 2009 Bar Ilan University speech, where he spoke of a "demilitarized" Palestinian state, signalled movement away from Benzion's ideology. It was Netanyahu who accepted a two-state solution and then enforced, upon American demands, a 10-month moratorium on settlement building, which was also an attempt to reach out to the center left.

But centrist parties like *Shinui* and *Yesh Atid* in Israel have had a longevity problem, something that was also seen with the Kadima experiment that faded after Ariel Sharon. For the moment, Yair Lapid and his *Yesh Atid* (There Is a Future) party, bring unique street credibility to the Knesset. Many Israelis see Lapid as the voice of the recent "Cottage Cheese Revolution" over economic inequality. Lapid's Zionist view, oriented towards fairer domestic economic and social arrangements, is different than that of Netanyahu's 'old school' security-centric approach. But both are required to lead the Israel of today.

While the threats to Israel have only mushroomed as a result of the rise of Islamist regimes, Iran, and the ongoing challenges with the Palestinians, Lapid's surge symbolizes an attempt to find a new balance or "normality" within the Israeli middle class. The challenge is that while the domestic social problems are real, external security threats still challenge Israel's very existence. The nature of these threats, and Israel's responses, are something that most Israelis of the Left, Right or Center all agree upon. It is here where both Netanyahu and Lapid should remember their fathers' messages.

[Top of Page](#)

ON TOPIC

The Bitter Taste Of Victory: [Andrew Friedman, *Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 6, 2013](#)—Anyone unfamiliar with Israel's election campaign would have had a hard time believing that the Likud Party gathering at the Tel Aviv Exhibition Grounds on January 22 was the victory celebration of the winning party.

How the Likud Can Win: [Daniel Tauber, *Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 5, 2013](#)—Though Binyamin Netanyahu will continue as Israel's prime minister, the recent election results constituted a serious blow to his party, the Likud. It's not just that Likud did so much more poorly than expected, but that it is now practically a mid-size party, comprising only 20 Knesset seats. It shrunk by seven seats (a little over 25 percent), whereas just a few months ago, polls predicted it would grow.

Lapid Eyeing Foreign Ministry Post Despite Liberman's Dibs: [Ilan Ben Zion, *Times of Israel*, Feb. 10, 2013](#)—Yesh Atid

leader Yair Lapid will reportedly continue to push for the Foreign Ministry post, despite the ruling alliance's insistence that the coveted ministerial portfolio will remain with Avigdor Liberman's Yisrael Beytenu party.

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