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## **LAPID AND SECULARS VS. *HAREDIM*, LIKUD RIGHT PRO-MORE SETTLEMENTS, PAL. JOURNALISTS SHUN ISRAELIS — SNAFU (“SITUATION NORMAL, ALL FOULED UP”)**

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## **LAPID AND THE HAREDIM**

***Susan Hattis Rolef***

*[Jerusalem Post](#), Apr. 29, 2013*

On Monday, April 22, Finance Minister Yair Lapid delivered his maiden speech in the Knesset plenum, answering three of the six motions of no-confidence in the government presented by the Opposition. The speech turned into a direct confrontation between himself and the Ashkenazi haredi MKs – in particular MKs Meir Porush, Moshe Gafni and Yisrael Eichler.

I must admit that I was impressed by Lapid’s speech. First, there was the fact that Lapid, who is used to speaking with a teleprompter, had to do without this technological gadget, and did very well, speaking clearly and coherently, without letting the haredi MKs, who were constantly heckling him, budge him from his narrative. Furthermore, even though what he said was extremely provocative (from a haredi point of view), his language remained polite, and his tone calm and non-tempestuous, though every once in a while his intonation was surprisingly similar to that of his father, Tommy Lapid, who as we may recall was frequently impolite and tempestuous.

Secondly, Lapid expressed in the clearest and most direct form several basic principles most secular Israelis firmly believe in but only rarely express for fear of upsetting the haredim. The first is the principle that every person is responsible for providing for the children he brings to the world – or at least should do his best to provide for them, and not expect the state to do so. The issue came up when MK Meir Porush accused Lapid of “starving children” due to his proposal to drastically cut social security child support.

I was raised on the principle that it is the duty of parents to provide for their children. Where I came from, turning into a financial burden on the state was considered something to be ashamed of, and to be avoided at any cost. Inter alia, this means one should do one’s utmost not to bring more children into the world than one can provide for both in material and educational terms.

In the haredi world (at least in Israel) this principle is scorned. The number of children is a function of the fertility of their parents, and avoiding gainful employment for the purpose of religious studies (with or without a wink), is the bon ton. I remember feeling truly sorry for a haredi colleague in the Knesset Research and Information Center, who told me that none of his neighbors knew what he was doing for a living, because if they found out he would have difficulties finding decent matches for his children.

Another principle that Lapid reiterated (in response to an interruption by MK Gafni) was that it was none of the haredi MKs’ business to tell him whether it is OK to write Facebook posts on Saturday. There is no earthly reason why a secular Jew in Israel, including a finance minister, should have to apologize for not preserving the Sabbath, any more than a religious Jew should have to apologize for preserving the Sabbath.

Israel is not a state governed by halacha, Jewish law, it is a Jewish state in that it is the state of all the Jews who wish to live in it, and the only restriction on how they live is the law of the land, as legislated by the Knesset – not halacha. Nevertheless, no one stops people from living according to halacha, as long as this is not in breach of the law of the land – something that unfortunately many haredim in Israel have difficulty accepting.

Most observers agreed that in the Knesset debate on April 22 Lapid won a knockout victory over the Ashkenazi haredim, who should have known better than to get involved in this superfluous verbal battle (which also caused Lapid to decide henceforth to deliver important economic speeches outside the Knesset, without constant interruptions by the haredi MKs).

However, the main problem was the haredi reaction. During the debate MK Meir Porush accused Lapid of hating the haredim, while part of the haredi media accused him of anti-Semitism. MK Eli Yishai went so far as to say that if a politician in Europe dared to say about the Jews what the leaders of Yesh Atid say about the haredim, Israel would be up in arms to protest against the abominable manifestation of anti-Semitism.

This is pure demagoguery. If the Jewish citizens in any European country dared act the way the haredim act in Israel – i.e. refuse on principle, and en masse, to uphold obligations shared by every citizen or to go out and work, and at the same time demand full social security benefits – the politicians in that country would be perfectly justified to use harsh language to describe the phenomenon. But the Jewish citizens of other states do not act in this manner – not even the haredim.

The problem really is that even though most of the haredim participate in Israel’s democracy, they do not really accept the basic principles on which it is based. Back in the mid 1980s, MK Menachem Porush – father of Meir Porush – fought against the introduction of provisions into Israeli law that prevent lists that reject Israel as a Jewish and democratic state running in the elections, because he feared that the fact that the haredi parties openly advocate Israel turning into a halachic state would be interpreted to mean that they reject Israel as a democratic state.

The provision nevertheless became law, and the lenient approach of the High Court of Justice on the issue has enabled the haredi parties (and the Arab parties, for that matter) to get away with some of their ideological positions, as long as they do not take concrete action to realize them.

Nevertheless, the situation we confront today is a direct consequence of this anomaly, which for too many years has been swept under the carpet. The problem is not hatred of the haredim, but the unwillingness of the public Yair Lapid represents to continue to let them make a mockery of some of the basic obligations of citizens toward the state of which they are citizens. Put in other words, the social contract between the democratic state and its citizens is not something that any major population group can pooh-pooh.

*The writer is a retired Knesset employee..*

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## ISRAELI DEPUTY DEFENSE MINISTER WANTS TO ACCELERATE SETTLEMENTS

*Mazal Mualem*

[Al-Monitor Israel Pulse](#), April 28, 2013

*Deputy Defense Minister Danny Danon in an interview with Mazal Mualem.*

Deputy Defense Minister Danny Danon is busy these days dealing with the problem of the cemetery in Ariel settlement in Judea and Samaria. There are only four remaining burial plots and he is trying to expand the cemetery.

At his office at the IDF headquarters in Tel Aviv, Danon is still getting used to his new job. Nonetheless, one thing has been clear to him since his first day in office: he intends to help the settlements in Judea and Samaria, those he feels were harassed by former Defense Minister Ehud Barak.

Defense ministers are in charge of approving construction in the settlements and Danon hopes the Ariel cemetery problem will soon be solved given that unlike Barak, his successor Moshe (Bogie) Ya'alon is committed to the settlement enterprise. In an interview with *Al-Monitor*, Danon promises to advance the approval of all the building plans which he claims were held up by Barak.

Danon, 42, came in fifth in the Likud primaries held last year (Nov. 26, 2012), ahead of senior government ministers, among them Ya'alon himself, his boss at the defense ministry who came in 7th. This achievement is the result of his activism in the political and media arenas and his support for the far right-wing Likud membership in Judea and Samaria. This is what landed him his current job. But anyone who knows Danon knows, too, that he is not there simply to warm his chair at the defense ministry.

Danon belongs to the group of young Likud Knesset members, along with others like Deputy Minister of Transportation Tzipi Hotovely and Deputy Foreign Minister Zeev Elkin, who form the hard core of the right wing. Like him, they, too, were elected to top slots in the Likud primaries and were upgraded by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to positions of deputy ministers. As previously mentioned here, Netanyahu gave them cushy jobs to buy himself peace and quiet on the diplomatic front from this strong group that during his previous term caused him many headaches from within the Likud.

For now, Netanyahu's political conduct appears to be sound. President Barack Obama's visit came and went quietly, as did the visits of Secretary of State John Kerry and Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel.

**As a Knesset member for the Likud you fought against previous Defense Minister Ehud Barak throughout his term. You claimed he was harming the settlement enterprise for ideological reasons. Now that you're at the defense ministry, have you found proof of this?**

“Certainly. Barak delayed construction. The main problem is that all those involved in the settlement enterprise have gotten used to operating according to the winds blowing from the top. The new challenge

is to convey the message that there are new winds blowing at the IDF headquarters in Tel Aviv, both from the direction of Defense Minister Ya'alon and from mine. I regard the settlers as a boon, not a burden. We need to do as much as possible to strengthen the settlements — all by the book, of course.”

**What exactly did he delay?**

“At every settlement I visit people come up to me and tell of plans that were approved but were held up by Barak. This was the case with the Ariel College, as it was called at the time. Barak was forced to give his approval to the college becoming a university only under heavy pressure. And there are other such cases. I was amazed to discover that, as of the end of the week, there are only four remaining burial plots at the cemetery in Ariel. It's a big place and some of the population is not young, and it's really a distressing problem. Expansion of the cemetery was approved a long time ago, but Barak refused to sign the building plans. You have to understand — we're not talking about illegal construction, but about providing basic civic services in the main settlement blocs. There's also a neighborhood in the settlement of Elkana that has been approved but delayed by Barak, and many additional plans.

**Construction in the West Bank could create tensions with the US just as the relationship has started to improve.**

“I don't think so. We're talking about places that are not considered diplomatically sensitive. We respect the democracy in the United States and they have to respect our democracy and our commitment to our citizens. The Likud, as well as the HaBayit HaYehudi party, and even Finance Minister Yair Lapid, who launched his election campaign in Ariel, support the continued existence of the settlement blocks. The new government is a more national one, and the reason is that Barak is not a member of it.”

**How will you react if it turns out that Netanyahu is leading a diplomatic move?**

“I don't see it happening right now. If it's going on, it's probably happening underground. Right now everyone is busy with Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. My assessment is that as far as the ruling coalition is concerned, there will be differences between words and deeds vis-à-vis a diplomatic move. In other words, as long as Netanyahu conducts negotiations, he won't have a domestic problem, but if he decides on another settlement freeze, that's already a different story. That will be a problem for HaBayit HaYehudi, as well. But for now we haven't seen additional American pressure or any activity on the part of the prime minister.”

On another front, in recent days Danon has been leading a move within the Likud-Beiteinu Knesset faction to legislate compulsory national service for the Israeli-Arab citizens. The law would complement a proposed bill to draft the country's ultra-Orthodox Jews, scheduled to come up for Knesset approval at the beginning of May. Danon, who will present his demand at the weekly Likud-Beiteinu meeting on Monday (April 29), is trying to enlist the support of additional Knesset members for the move, which is likely to stir a heated political and public debate. This is a loaded, explosive issue. Danon claims that the Likud, as a national democratic movement, cannot condone such an asymmetrical situation.

The demand to draft Israeli-Arabs into the army, along with drafting the ultra-Orthodox, was raised in the past by former Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman. That's the reason his representatives torpedoed the deliberations of the Plesner Committee, established in May 2012 to formulate recommendations on the draft issue.

**The Plesner Committee determined that one could not deal with the draft of the ultra-Orthodox with the same level of seriousness as that of the Arabs, that each requires totally different preparations.**

“It's possible, and how. I think it's wrong to focus only on the ultra-Orthodox. We have a government that is changing the order of things, heading for big moves. It is not earth-shattering if we deal with this issue, too.” And Danon adds: “I don't like the language and the style being used toward the ultra-Orthodox,

while ignoring the fact that some 20% of Israel's population, that do not contribute, are Arabs. This serves an agenda. I'm not saying the Arabs should be forced to join the Golani Brigade or the border police, but they should definitely do national service in hospitals, senior homes and public institutions."

### **Whose agenda does this serve?**

"Certainly not the Likud's. We're coming at this issue with an approach of real equality and not hatred of the religious. The minute you sever the link between the two things and threaten the ultra-Orthodox with imprisonment if they don't enlist, and at the same time 'display sensitivity' toward the Arabs – that's a problem. I'd like for the left-wingers who have become active in Yesh Atid party to display the same kind of ambition they display toward drafting the ultra-Orthodox also toward drafting the Arabs."

*Mazal Mualem started her journalistic career during her military service, where she was assigned to the Bamachane army weekly newspaper.*

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## **PALESTINIAN JOURNALISTS DECLARE WAR ON ISRAELI COLLEAGUES**

*Khaled Abu Toameh*

*[Gatestone Institute](#), April 26, 2013*

Palestinian journalists have declared an intifada against their Israeli colleagues. In recent weeks, Israeli journalists who cover Palestinian affairs have been facing increased threats from Palestinian reporters. On a number of occasions, the threats included acts of violence against the Israeli journalists, particularly in Ramallah.

Human rights organizations and groups claiming to defend freedom of media have failed to condemn the campaign of intimidation waged by Palestinian journalists against their Israeli fellow-journalists. It is one thing when governments and dictators go after journalists, but a completely different thing when journalists start targeting their counterparts.

An Israeli journalist had his microphone damaged during an assault, while another was thrown out of a press conference. Behind the two incidents were Palestinian journalists, angered by the presence of Israelis in Ramallah and other Palestinian cities. The threats and harassment came as more than 200 Palestinian journalists signed a petition, for the first time ever, calling on the Palestinian Authority to ban Israeli correspondents from operating in its territories "without permission."

The Palestinian Authority, for its part, has complied, issuing instructions requiring Israeli journalists to obtain permission from its Ministry of Information before entering Palestinian cities. Palestinian Authority officials and journalists later explained that the ban does not apply to some journalists working for the Israeli daily Ha'aretz and who report on "Palestinian suffering."

The Palestinian journalists campaigning against their Israeli colleagues have justified their action by saying that Israeli authorities do not allow them to work freely inside Israel. They also accuse the Israeli authorities of refusing to issue them with [Israeli] government press cards.

If anything, these claims represent a hypocritical approach. In recent years, Palestinian journalists have been strongly opposed to "normalization" with Israelis, including meetings with Israeli colleagues. Some Palestinian journalists who violated the ban and met with Israeli counterparts were denounced as traitors and expelled from the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate.

So while Palestinian journalists are opposed to "normalization" with Israel, they are at the same time demanding that Israeli authorities grant them permission to work inside Israel. Even more, the Palestinian journalists are demanding that Israel provide them with press cards issued by none other than the Israeli government.

Won't the Palestinian journalists be violating their own rules and ideology once they accept press cards issued by the Israeli government? And if they enter Israel and meet with Israelis, won't they also be acting against their own boycott campaign? What is disturbing is that foreign journalists based in Israel have not come out against the campaign of intimidation against their Israeli colleagues. Could it be because these foreign journalists have also been facing threats and want to stay on good terms with Palestinian reporters, and will also agree to report only on "Palestinian suffering"?

Gone are the days when Israeli and Palestinian journalists used to work together and exchange information on a daily basis, in the days before the peace process started. Today, there is a new generation of Palestinian journalists who have evidently been radicalized to a point where any meeting with an Israeli is being viewed as a "crime." This is the result of anti-Israel incitement by the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, especially over the past two decades.

Aware of the growing radicalism of Palestinian journalists, the Palestinian Authority, together with the American security detail, banned a large number of Palestinian journalists from covering the visit of US President Barack Obama to Ramallah last month. The biggest fear was that a Palestinian journalist would either throw a shoe at Obama or engage in a rhetorical attack against him and US policies.

If Palestinian journalists have been so radicalized that some are even willing to resort to threats and violence against colleagues, what must one say about the rest of the Palestinians who, for the past two decades, have also been exposed to messages of hate by their leaders? How can anyone talk about resuming the peace process when Palestinians are being told by their leaders, on a daily basis, how bad and evil Israel is? If Israel is so bad and evil, then how can any leader go to his people and say that he is negotiating with them?

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## ON TOPIC

**Haredim See Lapid as a Force Majeur:** Avishai Ben Haim, *Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 29, 2013—Finance Minister Yair Lapid's "we've finished taking orders from the haredim" speech in the Knesset will go down in the annals of Israel's relationship with its haredi population. Something like this had never happened before, and it is simply impossible to downplay its importance.

**Netanyahu, Liberman Spar Over Peace-Deal Referendum:** Aaron Kalman, *Times of Israel*, Apr. 29, 2013—Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday defended the idea of a national referendum on any peace agreement with the Palestinian Authority, fending off challenges from within his faction.

**Israel: The Olmert-Lapid Reckoning:** Mazal Mualem, *Al-Monitor Israel Pulse*, Apr. 26, 2013—The announcement by former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that he plans to run for office in the next elections should be taken seriously. This is an opening strategic move designed to position himself, as early as the next few months, as an alternative leadership candidate before the Israeli public and the world.

**For Israel, Tranquil Days:** David Ignatius, *Real Clear Politics*, April 28, 2013—It's a measure of the relatively quiet time for Israel these days that the sharpest argument at a big national security conference here was between an ultra-Orthodox rabbi who wanted "autonomy" for his fellow believers and secular Israelis in the audience who shouted out denunciations of what one called his "apartheid" plan.

**Jew Hatred at UN Schools:** Dan Calic, *Ynet News*, Apr. 26, 2013—Created in 1949 specifically to deal with the "Palestinian refugees," UNRWA spends roughly \$500 million each year on schools. It utilizes text books produced by the Palestinian Authority. The UN itself does not finance UNRWA. Primary financial support comes from US and European taxpayers.