

Opinion & Comment

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The right choice for AG

The process of selecting a new attorney general is not yet finished. After the selection committee failed to settle on a candidate, Justice Minister Yaakov Neeman's recommendation that Yehuda Weinstein be appointed was far from satisfactory. Weinstein, a respected lawyer in private practice, has specialized in criminal law, which is not central to the attorney general's work. Neeman's involvement in concealing his personal ties with one of the other candidates, Yedidia Stern, who has since withdrawn his candidacy, doesn't bolster Neeman's recommendation. Likewise, the justice minister's candidate would have to recuse himself from dealing with a series of cases against public figures with whom he has had personal ties.

The post of attorney general must be filled by someone with a spotless reputation who has expertise first and foremost in public law. Most of the attorney general's work involves administering legal advice to the government on questions that don't actually involve criminal law. The fact that State Prosecutor Moshe Lador is a criminal-law expert reinforces the need for an attorney general with a background in public law.

Four of the candidates for attorney general garnered the support of three members of the selection committee, among them Daphne Barak-Erez, whose integrity and expertise in public law is unassailable. She has been a candidate for years as a Supreme Court justice; this is one of the best tests of her suitability as attorney general. Many High Court rulings have cited her legal scholarship, which has dealt with such issues as the law of war, fundamental rights, religion and state, gender and privatization. And the government gains a distinct advantage in being represented in court by someone the judges highly esteem.

The need to increase the number of women in senior positions and to break the "glass ceiling" in official posts that have hitherto been filled only by men should also be noted. The executive and legislative branches still suffer from a serious and outrageous underrepresentation regarding everything related to women. Barak-Erez should be chosen as the next attorney general. Her expertise, knowledge and the high esteem for her in the judicial system and academia should guide the cabinet, as should the importance of appointing women to senior positions. It's not too late. At the next cabinet meeting, when the ministers choose the next attorney general, the cabinet should reject Neeman's recommendation and vote for Barak-Erez.



Aluf Benn

Fear scale

Why did Benjamin Netanyahu alter his stance and agree to a Palestinian state and the freezing of settlement construction? Was he only giving in to pressure from Barack Obama, or were there domestic reasons? Did his assessment of the situation alter since he returned to power, or is this that "same old Bibi," who simply got hold of a new list of slogans?

More than previous premiers, Netanyahu considers himself a leader and an intellectual. It is important to him that his policy rely on an extensive worldview, and he has written books presenting his political and economic viewpoints. It is, therefore, worthwhile listening to what Netanyahu has been saying in recent weeks in a series of speeches revealing his strategic outlook; they express deep fear of the threats facing Israel and introduce preferences for countering them.

This is Netanyahu's fear scale: "First, Iran must be prevented from developing a military nuclear capability. Second, we need to find an appropriate solution to the missile and rocket threat. And third, we must reinforce the right of Israel to defend itself."

What to do? Netanyahu wants the international community to rally and impose strict sanctions on Iran and undertake actions to undermine the regime. He is proposing a peace agreement with the Palestinians, based on territorial compromise in the territories and the establishment of "secure and recognized borders" for Israel. Central to the agreement would be security arrangements and disarmament aimed at blocking the smuggling

of rockets and missiles into the West Bank. This is the main problem, from the prime minister's point of view, and it will not be resolved by agreeing on a peaceful border. The defense solution must combine effective means for securing the border and intercepting arms shipments into the territories, as well as the development of missile defense systems. Israel will also request international guarantees that "bypass Goldstone" and will be based on Israel's right to defend itself against terrorism.

Netanyahu estimates the security requirements will cost tens of billions of dollars, and for Israel not to collapse economically, it will need to retain annual growth of 4.5 percent. He thinks the money can be found in bureaucratic efficiency, privatization of state lands and incentives for high-tech industries and entrepreneurs. But economic reforms will not be enough. Netanyahu's security model relies on broadening Israel's dependency on the United States. The prime minister wants America to neutralize Iran, back it up in its effort to curb the smuggling of rockets, assist in the development of missile defense and take action to shelve the Goldstone report.

It is worthwhile paying attention to what is missing here: Netanyahu does not consider the settlements a component in the security of Israel. It is important for him to block the border against rockets, and maybe this will require the presence of a military force in the Jordan Valley. But the fact that Jewish settlements exist on the hills offers nothing. In his view, Elon Moreh does not protect Tel Aviv. This

does not mean that he has decided to remove Itamar or Yitzhar, only that Obama's support is more important to him.

Netanyahu was not nurtured by the Yesha Council, and it is hard to recall his tours of settlements beyond the separation fence. He stopped at Ma'aleh Adumim and Ariel. The harsh criticism of him from the settler leaders, as a result of the building freeze, is not affecting his supporters the way it did Ariel Sharon. Netanyahu did not climb the hills with bulldozers like Sharon did, and did not sit with Zambish (Ze'ev Hever) to discuss maps and plans, but fought for the rights of Israel in television studios and at the United Nations and considers international support a lot more important than a few prefabricated houses. His support for settlers, in the argument with Obama over the freeze, centered on the call to allow them to have a normal life, not more growth.

During his speech at the Eilat journalism conference on Sunday, Netanyahu said: "The people in Israel and the Palestinians are tired of long-lasting war and want to reach a peace agreement." Like Menachem Begin, who went from "not a single inch" to "no more war," and like Yitzhak Rabin, who was shocked by the pathetic show of resolve among Tel Aviv residents during the Gulf War and opted for a compromise with the Palestinians, Netanyahu, too, understands that the majority of the Israeli public wants quiet and considers the settlers a nuisance. And this means the decision to freeze settlement construction for 10 months is just the first taste of domestic confrontation.

Avirama Golan

Messiah in the neighborhood

At noon last Friday, two young men in black suits, long beards and determined faces stood opposite the gates of the Alliance school in Ramat Aviv and urged the 13- and 14-year-old boys to put on tefillin (phylacteries). But actually, not really – because the ceremony they proposed bore only vague resemblance to the original religious commandment. They were wrapping the tefillin straps around the boys' heads and arms simultaneously, in the middle of the day and the middle of the street, and murmuring the Shema Yisrael ("Hear O Israel") prayer along with the phrase "May our lord, master and teacher, the King Messiah, live forever." And the two young men, faces aglow, cried ecstatically, "Jews, the Messiah is already here!"

Not for nothing, an observer might conclude, did noted teachers of Jewish law define the messianist segment of those who seek to bring Jews back to religion as "Christian missionaries." Yet secular Jews appear to see nothing harmful about this game. The fact is that the boys stood in line to see the "rebbe" – a young man who himself "got religion" not long ago. And aside from a few members of a neighborhood committee formed to battle the messianists, there was no sign of worried parents or teachers demanding the immediate dismantling of their tefillin stand.

Ramat Aviv has recently been the scene of well-publicized clashes that are often erroneously described as a cultural and communal struggle between secular and Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jews. These clashes have prompted claims that the secular are simply being racist: Why are they so afraid their children might become religious? Do they fear that someone will offer their children better values? Others argue that Chabad Hasidim – the ones behind the tefillin stand – are nice: After all, everyone celebrates Pesach at Chabad houses in Thailand and Nepal, and besides, what's wrong with a little yiddishkeit?

The other side's arguments are also nothing to write home about, with the most off-putting being the argument that Haredi families lower the value of veteran residents' houses. Nor is the effort to catch Tzvaot Hashem, the Chabad outreach group, in minor building violations convincing.

Despite all this, the question of whether Ramat Aviv residents are rabid Haredi-haters is of marginal importance. What is crucial to understand is that the new residents of this neighborhood – a neighborhood whose overall character is secular even if religious people also live there – are not just Haredim who happen to have moved house. Rather, they are an organized group with a declared, aggressive goal, and one whose connection to religion in general, and to Judaism in particular, is dangerous quackery.

Students at the Tomchei Temimim Yeshiva, who moved into the building that was once a cinema and then a journalism school, were sent to colonize a neighborhood they define as "hedonistic" and "very influential." Rabbi Yossi Ginzburg, the head of the yeshiva, is the son of Rabbi Yitzhak Ginzburg – the author of the book "Baruch Hagever," which praises Baruch Goldstein (who massacred 29 Muslims at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron in 1994), and a man known for his fanatic sermons.

All the yeshiva's students are people who themselves "returned" to religion and have come to Ramat Aviv to save other Jewish souls, as they do in every other alleged site of debauchery and sin in the world. Their goal is to bring the ultimate redemption right now. After they return from a pilgrimage to the Lubavitcher rebbe's house at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn ("because the rebbe needs me personally," as one said), they must risk their own souls in this neighborhood to save its residents.

At their nursery schools, which secular toddlers also attend, the male teachers (women are mere caregivers, not teachers) teach the children to sing "Who are we? The armies of the Lord [Tzvaot Hashem]. What is our role? To fight. Against whom and what? The evil inclination."

One can of course argue that they don't force anyone to attend. But given the shortage of nursery schools (and certainly at the tempting price their schools charge), and the fact that they benefit from millions of shekels in donations from businessmen such as Michael Mitelman of Starkist Food O'or and others, this argument is shaky. Yet all this pales beside the support they receive from public figures, politicians and celebrities.

The yeshiva's public relations material features pictures of businessmen attending its "weekly lecture." How is it that of all the different ways one could study Judaism, only the fanatic Messianic approach speaks to them? And while one could argue that Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Effi Eitam, Eli Yatzpan and Arie Shumer as members of its "friends' circle," why are Matan Vilnai, Zeev Bielski, Ephraim Halevy and many others pictured at various events embracing these merchants of redemption, who preach racism, hatred of non-Jews and messianic delusions, and thumb their noses at any principle related to the needs of the state?

This is not a local, secular Ramat Aviv issue. This is a war over the nature of Israeli society. The people to blame for the retreat of humanism, culture and knowledge in the face of ignorance and idol worship are not the ignorant, but the public figures who fawn over them, betray their own values and leave our children alone at the front.

Yitzhak Laor

Ivan the Miserable

From its very beginnings, West Germany never enjoyed remembering, and its first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, built his political career, and indeed his country's power, on defying the outside world's accusations, making out that the Germans were only victims. So who was guilty? Hitler and his gang, of course, and they had vanished a few years before. So that's all there was to the matter.

That Germany, ruled by the Christian Democrats, did everything it could to avoid legal proceedings against the Nazis who had escaped prosecution during the Allied occupation immediately after the war. The reparation and compensation agreements were a wise move, and Germany entered the international community by way of financial atonement. But the money did not go to all the countries that were devastated and whose people were slaughtered by the German military, but almost only to the Jews and Israel.

The most outstanding example of the way Israel repaid that Germany, with its scant memories, was the order David Ben-Gurion gave to the prosecutor in the Adolf Eichmann trial, Gideon Hausner. When describing the events that led to the destruction of the Jews, he was to omit one detail – the name of Adenauer's top aide in the postwar West German government, Hans Globke. Before the war, Globke served on the team that drew up the Nuremberg Laws, but he was not only spared prosecution, he became an important leader of the Christian Democratic Party.

As the years went by, the politics of German remembrance underwent a transformation. A generation passed and a truly new generation replaced it, one whose memory consists of islands of knowledge and ignorance. Either way, Germany waited until 1996 before marking the Holocaust, and even now it does so using a very selective memory. The other atrocities

have never been memorialized. This selective memory jibed well with the Israeli memory that crystallized gradually over the same years. The horrors of World War II and the crimes by the German military on the various fronts are slipping slowly into oblivion, both here and there, whereas the Holocaust is singled out as a unique phenomenon, almost detached from all the other monstrous acts.

All the above provides a backdrop to the farce surrounding the trial of John (Ivan) Demjanjuk. In this last trial of its kind on German soil, a non-German has been accused of crimes against humanity; the proceedings will end, at best, with the moral that there were also wicked Slavs. Listeners to a German radio station or viewers of German television on Monday might have believed that Josef Mengele was going on trial, or that a criminal who regrettably wasn't hanged at Nuremberg after the war had finally been caught. But the man in the wheelchair who was rolled into court, with hundreds of reporters and photographers looking on, was merely one of tens of thousands of Nazi collaborators the United States admitted after the war.

Israeli schoolchildren are not taken to march around Bergen-Belsen in northern Germany (the German government wouldn't allow such parades on its home turf), but to Poland, without learning what the Poles underwent during the Nazi occupation. Similarly, the last chapter in Germany's legal proceedings against Nazi criminals will be the trial of Ivan the Miserable. Heinrich Himmler thought that mass murder was not a simple matter for German refinement to handle, as he explained at length in his speech at Posen in October 1943. So he assigned the Slavs to do the dirty work in the death camps. He could have chuckled over this trial and said that the Slavs really did the job. The German judicial system would have done better to refrain from this self-debasement.

Natasha Mozgovaya

Obama's not the problem



We should admit that Barack Obama is neither the problem nor the solution, not until at least one of the sides takes responsibility for establishing a dialogue with the other – not with Washington.

President Barack Obama isn't short of critics. He bowed to the emperor of Japan? How humiliating for Americans. He appeases the Chinese? A sure sign he doesn't care at all about human rights. The national debt has risen? He's a spendthrift. The jobless rate didn't stall at 8.5 percent? His economic plan's a flop. He plays basketball with guys? He's a male chauvinist unworthy of female support. He's deploying more troops in Afghanistan? He's a "war president" unworthy of his Nobel Peace Prize.

Obama also has plenty of critics in the Middle East. A week ago, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said Obama wasn't doing anything to get talks going with Israel. The Washington Post detailed the string of times Obama has disappointed the Arabs, and a New York Times editorial accused him of not thinking more than one step ahead. Meanwhile, members of Benjamin Netanyahu's government have expressed abhorrence over pressure from Washington, and Israel's ambassador to the United States had to explain to reporters that the freeze in settlement construction was above all a gesture to the American president.

"It is Obama and his team that have created this situation," said an Israeli source involved in efforts to get talks going, in all seriousness, making it sound as if it weren't for Obama the two sides would long ago have broken bread and shared a plate of hummus. True, the administration has made some mistakes in handling the Middle East; for instance, the way it pushed Abbas into a corner over the Palestinian response to the Goldstone report. Another example is its lack of regard for Israeli public opinion. But blaming the current deadlock on Obama is unfair, and attempts to dictate terms for American participation are impertinent.

With all the problems he is facing, perhaps Obama should not have even involved himself in the Mideast dispute. Instead, he quickly took advantage of the momentum created by his great popularity. He honestly believed that both sides wanted to ensure their children a better future, not

at the expense of those living on the other side of the fence. Perhaps he hoped that the Israelis would not quickly forget that the eight years of George W. Bush's support brought the end of the dispute no closer.

It's true that the open squabble between Jerusalem and Washington was carried on in a warped manner that made the Palestinians dig in their heels. Instead of negotiations without preconditions, the construction freeze became a precondition – and its abridged version was not enough to create the "positive atmosphere" necessary to get talks going. But the idea itself is not new, and it could have been used as a lever for a serious discussion on Israel's future and borders if efforts hadn't been used to make Obama seem like some

kind of a pharaoh, with Israel's main task being to withstand the pressure until the end of his term.

Making out that Obama is "bad for Israel" may have helped Netanyahu mobilize some support, but in the long term a responsible Israeli leadership should try to keep the president's status from eroding and take advantage of his efforts to improve relations with the Islamic world, instead of jealously measuring who is getting more attention. There's no sense in trying to extort declarations of love from an administration that speaks in terms of interests. It makes sense to try to speak its language. But it would be even more helpful to admit that Obama is neither the problem nor the solution, not until at least one of the sides takes responsibility for establishing a dialogue with the other, not with Washington.