

Roadmap to Governance

by

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Even for a people as super-attuned and sensitive to national experiences as the Israelis, this is a unique period in terms of the breadth and depth of our collective sensory overload. There is a harsh sense of uneasiness and foreboding regarding our operational abilities in defense and civil areas, a very uncomfortable sense of governmental inaptitude on core issues of life and death, and a bitter sense of *deja-vu* from an international environment that once again permits uninhibited expressions of desire – not to mention the acquisition of means – to annihilate another 6 million Jews.

This is not just a dangerous period, it is also a time for delving deep into the Israeli psyche to uncover the inner truth of this people, to distill our common, national, sense of purpose – free from day-to-day politics and sectoral interests. This is one of those moments that shape history, an opportunity to put our collective destiny in our own hands to facilitate a sharp turn at the upcoming juncture, lest we continue our unabated roll toward the precipice that lies ahead.

In a country that is still home to some of the highest quality, most innovative and boldest minds in the world, this is neither the time nor the place for a descent into lethargy, but for original and clear thinking outside the conventional box. We need to pool together our abundant natural abilities and talents not only to change the national direction but also to ensure that our new route will be sustainable for generations.

The viability of such a change is dependent on the establishment of a system of government that can govern on the basis of orderly decision-making processes and built-in incentives that motivate accountability, efficiency and compassion among the elected and the civil service ranks.

The objective was specified in my column last week: comprehensive reform of our system of government together with a substantial upgrading in the operation of the ministries and other public authorities. A roadmap for achieving this objective is detailed here.

Those same fundamental problems that make the need for governmental reform so imperative are also those that severely impede the creation of a mechanism for implementing the change. These include inherent conflicts-of-interest at the highest levels of government between a prime minister and cabinet ministers who view themselves as natural alternatives to him; total incompatibility between the abilities and areas of interest of many ministers and their ministries' areas of responsibility for; nonexistent separation of powers between elected representatives in the executive branch and elected representatives in the legislative branch; and structural instability emanating from tenures that can abruptly end on a whim.

Systemic change will be attainable only if these problems can be defused for a specified and agreed-upon interim period extending until the next elections. The initiative that I have in mind merges proposals put forth in the past with some new ideas.

The governing coalition must be extensively enlarged around one main issue – changing the system of government. Rather than create the familiar emergency government with leaders of the coalition party becoming cabinet ministers, the idea is to have them serve as members of a

small “super board of directors” for the cabinet. Membership in this political board will be based on the number of MK’s in each party.

In contrast with this board, cabinet ministers will be non-MKs selected by the prime minister – and ratified by the Knesset – who will serve as his subordinates. The political board of directors comprising the political party heads will determine the government’s agenda and will supervise its operation.

The professional emergency cabinet will be responsible not only for creation of a new system of government but also for streamlining and establishing orderly decision-making processes in the public sector. This will make it possible to immediately begin dealing with critical deficiencies in civil and defense areas – and with a growing Iranian threat that is not waiting until we get our house in order before it crosses the non-reversible nuclear threshold.

In this stormy and dangerous period that Israel is entering, we will need our society’s most talented and experienced people. On their shoulders will be the responsibility for charting a new course for this country while safeguarding the security of its citizens. Those chosen for this unique civilian *miluim*, or “reserve service”, will come from a reservoir of our brightest minds, from individuals with military and political experience like Ehud Barak and Dan Meridor, to internationally-recognized experts in areas of management and law like Eli Hurwitz and Aharon Barak.

While these are not the only names that stand out from the rich Israeli talent pool, the ultimate objective must be creation of Israeli society’s dream team that will ensure the country’s safe navigation toward new long-run trajectories that will ensure its survival and prosperity for generations.