

The Day After

by

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We have learned quite a bit over the past few years. About a western world that has succeeded, during only six decades since the Holocaust, in word-laundering latent anti-semitism into the more politically correct "anti-Zionism" and "anti-Israel." About neighbors who once again do not have any qualms about publicly stating the kind of future that they plan for us – while simultaneously arming for it without any constraints. And about ourselves, our limitations and about the secret of our existence.

The dangers facing the Third Temple are external as well as internal. A country that finds it difficult to stop missiles fired by those who seek to destroy it does not need a wild imagination to understand what will happen when Kassams becomes Katyushas, when the size of warheads burgeons from 20 to 600 kilos, and from 600 kilos to chemical and biological warheads – and with Ahmadinajad working rapidly to complete the rest of the picture.

The internal danger emanates from living standards that are steadily falling farther and farther behind the most developed countries since the 70s, from poverty and income gaps that have steadily grown for decades to western pinnacles, and from a situation in which the needy population is growing at a much faster rate than the population that is footing the bill. On both the external and internal fronts, the writing is on the wall – unless we immediately get our act together.

It is simple to criticize what has transpired here over decades and during the past several weeks, but it is much more important to look ahead, to the day after. In the international arena, we have the ultimate friend at our side – though sometimes it seems that while this support is a mile wide, it is only an inch deep – and that is it. At the end of the day, our destiny is in our hands. We have entered the final stretch, and perhaps the most dangerous one, of Israel's war of independence.

In the face of grave threats with such existential implications, there are several significant rays of hope: a firm civilian steadfastness, a shared sense of destiny and a proven national ability to adapt, adjust and find real time outside-the-box creative solutions. One of the first signals indicating an important change in our modus operandi came from the side of workers, employers and the government – whose incessant quarrels over the years had paralyzed the country. A few days ago, an agreement was signed between the Histadrut headed by Ofer Eini, the manufacturers headed by Shraga Brosh, and the government headed by Ehud Olmert with Finance Minister Avraham Hirschson, who showed that it is possible to quickly and quietly reach an consensus providing urgent economic support for the citizens of northern Israel.

This is a unique opportunity for leveraging the ability of the three sides to work together in order to move the country and the economy to new, healthier, socio-economic trajectories. We have known for quite a while what needs to be implemented – a comprehensive plan that supplies the tools and provides the conditions – and now a window of opportunity has opened that we cannot afford to miss.

The time has also come for establishing a new agenda in the ministry of defense. It must redetermine its overall objectives and derive from these the subsequent budget priorities while ignoring the sacred budget cows of the past. The time has come for the ministry of defense to terminate its social and politically-related activities as well as its involvement in areas that are redundant with civilian institutions – and to clearly redefine the concept of national security that will enable the country to successfully deal with the dangers lurking around the corner. In light of the military capabilities displayed thus far, we need to improve our ability to deal with missiles, to penetrate and destroy bunkers, to concentrate greater firepower more accurately far beyond the country's borders, and to upgrade our intelligence capabilities. Amir Peretz's dovish and socialist background enables the defense minister to institute the necessary changes without raising fears that his motives are driven by military adventurism or by insensitivity to workers within the system.

This is also a propitious period to deal with what is possibly the most urgent order of business. Over the course of the past month, a widespread national consensus has emerged. It is important to channel this consensus into the creation of a new political structure that will replace the existing centrifugal system which has been increasingly unable to run the country. We do not have the luxury of letting Israel's limited resources continue slipping through our fingers, nor to misuse the time remaining on the national hourglass for dealing with the existential threats. We are in vital need of a stable government that will finally be able to operate on the basis of national interests and long-range perspective.

Supporters for such electoral reform can be found in each of the large political parties. This is the time to set aside both the existing frameworks and norms that have divided us and the narrow personal and political accounts that weakened us. It is time to bring into the coalition all those who see this as H-hour, and to put in place – by the end of this Knesset's term – a new system of government.