Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself. ~ Tolstoy

The clock is ticking away on the temporary Prime Minister marriage between Netanyahu and Benny Gantz, which has not turned out to be a honeymoon for Mr. Gantz. Netanyahu, the well-seasoned politician who can think several moves ahead in political chess maneuvered Gantz into the second rotation slot which was a road to nowhere.

Bibi outfoxed Gantz by adding a condition to the formation of their joint governance that it would fail if a budget could not be jointly approved. The government fell, and Bibi planned his next campaign to run on beating the coronavirus and not having Gantz around anymore. The general is polling right now below the threshold for his Blue and White party to qualify as a viable political party.

But Netanyahu wants to cripple Gantz even more. Gantz is scrambling to be appointed permanent Justice minister, which would make it harder for Bibi to block the criminal cases he faces, which has been his number one goal for the coming election day.

If Bibi wins, it is predicted he is going to take political revenge on all those in law enforcement, courts, and Justice ministers, packing those ministries and positions with his own people so he never has to worry about any more investigations. He seems to prefer the Saudi bin Salman method for dealing with opponents, not just eliminating them, but making an example to others.

Gantz, despite his party’s desertions, is forging ahead. In January he stated: “If I do not cross the electoral threshold needed to enter the Knesset, and there is a transitional government headed by Netanyahu, the very next day
Netanyahu will fire all the Blue and White ministers, appoint [Likud’s] Ohana as justice minister, fire Mandelblit, not extend the appointment of state prosecutor Amit Aisman, and turn this place into a monarchy.” He added, “There will be a fundamental change of the structure of the [governing] regime in Israel right in front of our eyes.”

I agree with the Gantz’s prediction. Netanyahu wants to be Prime Minister for life. Once he has the reins of power again, he will make sure no one can depose him.

**It’s election roulette time again in Israel**

When the Gantz-Netanyahu joint government broke up, it triggered a number of government party defections, which set off a new game of musical chairs, as those holding minister positions had to vacate them. These are competitive slots, not only for the steady pay, but to continue being in the public eye in a country where everybody wants to run the show and politicians live or die on media coverage.

With such high turnover in leadership, one wonders how the country can function, but somehow it does despite brutal political infighting.

Israel is about the size of major city, a bit over nine million with just under seven million being Jews, plus its Palestinian natives, who are prisoners in what was once their country. Control over the population is maintained by a carefully stoked fear of outside bogeyman threats. So far it has worked flawlessly.

**Hard ball Israeli politics**

Bibi’s Likud Party is polling at 29 seats, followed by the Yesh Atid party, led by Yair Lapid with 20. The Yamina and the New Hope factions are polling in the 11 to 14 range.

The main election battle will revolve around the smaller parties juggling to get themselves into a coalition that can help win the 60+ seats needed to form a government. Ambitious MPs search for a good opportunity to change party allegiance at a critical moment, where they can be rewarded with a high visibility minister position.

Abraham Lincoln once joked, after enduring endless government office seekers waiting to see him to plead for a position, that if he were to open a US Post Office at the North Pole, there would be a waiting line outside his door all the way to the Capitol.

The anti-Netanyahu opposition has about 58 seats, just below the magic 60 number, so they face another close race. This gives some of the small parties the chance to become ‘kingmakers’ by joining one of the two major coalitions. Choice ministries are traditionally used by both major coalitions as bait to draw members of these parties to cross over.

The Meretz party, led by Nitzan Horowitz, has been courted to combine with another, but Horowitz has stated he will run alone, confident of passing the four seat threshold. The old Labor Party, led by Merav Michael, which ran Israel in its early years, is polling in the 6 to 7 seat range. It has advised Gantz to drop out of the race because “he no longer represents anything,” because he defected to the Likuds in the last election, having fallen for the trick of the mythical rotating Prime Minister position.

The estimates are that 10% of voters are still undecided, and past history has shown that winners can emerge from the slimmest of margins. After the last Israeli election, it took days to count and recount the votes to certify a winner.

**The dispute of ‘who is a jew’ surfaces just in time for the election**

There is another wild card at play in this election among the religious factions over the controversy of the Israeli courts having ruled who now decides ‘Who is a Jew’.

The Ultra Orthodox Jews have long claimed to be the only ones to have authority over conversions. Fighting between them and the Reform and Conservative Jewish factions has simmered for years, forcing Israel’s High Court to finally step in to rule that non-Orthodox conversions to Judaism can be done for Israeli citizenship purposes, for example between and Israeli and a foreign non-Jew.

The Ultra Orthodox have now declared a Jewish jihad against the court ruling. The United Torah Judaism party chief, Moshe Gafni, threatened that the party would not join any coalition unless it can reverse the High Court ruling.

The debate has gotten nastier with claims of Israelis wanting to bring Gentile wives to Israel and make them instant
Jews through intermarriage. The Haredi party was even worse, adding that without action to reverse the ruling, the non-Orthodox would soon be putting kippahs on their dogs.

Such overt racism in Israel has always been swept under the rug by international media, but it is a brawl inside Israel. The Hebrew media prints ghastly name calling that never sees the light of day in English media, fearful of being labeled ‘anti-Israeli’.

Jews are nothing if not passionate about their religion. But Israeli Jews are not alone in the world on their traditions of not ‘mixing’. I checked in with a Neturei Karta Orthodox rabbi friend in New York City, and he confirmed that intermarriage outside of the bloodlines was considered blasphemous.

Another example is the infamous Emory professor Deborah Lipstadt, of David Irving controversy fame. A Palestinian friend of mine in Atlanta attended one of her Jewish college student lectures, where she stated that ‘intermarriage’ was the New Holocaust of the Jews. Not a word of this outrageous claim made the Atlanta news.

The ICC has entered into the Israeli election fray with its investigation of Israeli war crimes against the Palestinians. The left wing Meretz party dealt with the issue in plain language. Its chairman, Nitzon Horowitz, stated that “there were grounds for the [ICC] decision” ...People tell us, ‘You want Israel to be brought before the Hague.’ I don’t want this...but Israel also has responsibility.”

Horowitz was referencing that Israel had continued to build settlements in occupied territory “like there was no tomorrow”... “I don’t want Israel to face this situation...but Israel has to ask itself what it needs to do to prevent that”.

I was quite surprised to see any political figure in Israel take such a stand. Horowitz was quickly denounced by all the right wing and religious parties.

The US is getting a good dose of its own intolerance problem now, with the Trumpers who make no compromises about their claim that the election was stolen from them, despite over fifty court rulings that disagree.

General Honore’s investigation team gave its report to Congress on March 8 on the January 6 insurrection. It seems we will have rotating, but permanently stationed, National Guard troops on duty, protecting the Capitol complex from future violent incidents.

Without mentioning the Pentagon directly, it was clear that it no longer would be in a position to refuse or even delay the use of troops when they are quickly needed in DC. Earlier testimony had revealed that disgraced General Michael Flynn has a brother, also a general, whose name has been withheld by the Pentagon, as one of those deciding to hold back badly needed troops for over three hours. This could trigger a scandalous investigation to see if the Pentagon was involved in the plot to overthrow the Biden election certification.

That will have prosecutors looking into Pentagon support of the insurrection attempt, by giving it lots of time to do its work, while the generals and the President watched the drama unfold there. That story is far from over, as is Israel’s election drama.

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