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Opinions

The Danger Is Not Civil War, but That the State Will Cease to Be a Shared Home



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The discourse about civil war in Israel no longer sounds like rhetorical exaggeration. Over the past decade, it has provided a reasonable interpretive framework for understanding the dangerous processes arising from internal polarization: the struggle over the character of the regime, the attempt to change its nature, the deepening of control over the territories, the erosion of social cohesion, the politicization of the security bodies, the deterioration of Israel's standing in the world, and the growing distancing of parts of world Jewry from Israel. The question is not whether street battles between organized camps will break out here tomorrow morning, but whether we are in a situation in which political violence, mass civil disobedience, the collapse of trust in institutions, and the replacement of democratic decision-making with coercion become part of routine life.

The root of the crisis does not lie in the current Netanyahu government, though it has accelerated it dramatically. A decade ago I wrote about this danger as the result of the continuing flight from a decision between two states and one state. I assessed that Israel would slide into "features of governmental anarchy... violence at the personal and daily level, in the absence of police enforcement, the collapse of the status of the High Court of Justice and armed organizations" ("Haaretz", May 24, 2016). Reality has indeed deteriorated. The status quo disintegrated from within: Israel deepened its control over the Palestinians, expanded de facto annexation, without assuming full civil responsibility, and left the space between the Jordan River and the sea in a state of permanent temporariness. In other words, it continues with the same political fiction for which states pay compound interest.

The present stage in the internal fracture became possible when the coalition linked the idea of Greater Israel to changing the rules of the democratic game - a connection that has not yet penetrated the consciousness and activity of the leaders of the protest against the regime coup. That is the core of the matter: in the eyes of the messianic camp, territorial compromise does not express an ordinary policy dispute but heresy against a historical-religious course; in the eyes of the democratic Zionist camp, continued control over the Palestinians and the destruction of democratic checks and balances are a threat to Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state. And when the two camps no longer share a common vision, the terms "right" and "left" become too meager to understand the gaps. The dispute is not over the education budget, but over the source of sovereignty: the citizens of the state, or those who see themselves as interpreters of God's will.

To this is added the Haredi struggle, which has turned from a budgetary and social dispute into an issue of basic civic

equality. The High Court ruling of June 2024 held that, in the absence of a legal basis for an exemption from military service, the state must enlist yeshiva students, and ordered it to stop funding yeshivas whose students do not enlist. Since then the confrontation has sharpened: in April 2026 the High Court ordered economic sanctions to be imposed on Haredi draft evaders, and since then broad and violent Haredi demonstrations against conscription have taken place.

The danger intensifies as the elections approach. The coalition will try to frame any possible election loss as theft by the "civil service," the attorney general, the High Court, the media, or the elites. The opposition will see another victory by the coalition as a mandate to complete the regime coup and annexation, and will intensify its struggle.

The parties must present the choices: democracy or Jewish supremacy; a state, nonpartisan army or political militias; the rule of law or personal loyalty

The senior appointments now being made at an accelerated pace are also not a technical matter. There is nothing inherently wrong with a prime minister appointing senior officeholders, but there is something wrong with a sequence of appointments taking place during a severe crisis of trust, being made by someone facing criminal charges and bearing responsibility for the October 7 massacre, while waging a struggle against the judicial system and in the shadow of elections in which the independence of these institutions is being challenged.

The discourse on social networks reflects the radicalization. Annexation has returned to the lead, accounting for

38.51% of the discourse about solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with support from 84.3% of those mentioning it. The two-state solution appeared in only 21.37% of the posts, and 82.8% of its mentions were by its opponents. In other words, the public expressing itself online is not moving toward compromise, but is entrenching itself in opposing ideological conceptions.

Civil wars arise from a collision between ideologies and opposing views of the regime, society, religious faith and the essence of shared life - views that split the public into camps. When each camp sees a threat in the other camp's vision, any compromise in favor of coexistence is perceived as betrayal. The Haredim seek to entrench separatism, exemption and benefits; the messianic camp seeks to entrench Jewish supremacy, control and sovereignty throughout the land; democratic Zionists seek to save the state framework that enables a Jewish majority, equality, separation of powers and international recognition. The three camps no longer fit under the same rickety constitutional roof.

Migration from Israel is also a warning sign. A report by the Knesset Research and Information Center published this month shows that in 2022-2024 Israel had a negative migration balance of Israelis, and about 140,000 people were subtracted from the total population. According to reports based on Central Bureau of Statistics data, in 2025 more than 69,000 Israelis left Israel, and the number of immigrants to Israel fell to about 24,600. Migration reflects damage to citizens' trust in the state. When Israelis with financial and human capital transfer their lives, future, children and capital to other countries, they are expressing distrust in the state's ability to guarantee them stability, security and freedom.

Therefore the danger is not that a "civil war" will break out in the sense of armed forces standing opposite one another. The danger is a creeping process in which the state loses its ability to be a shared home: the rule of law becomes partisan; politicians suspect the security establishment; the court is portrayed as the enemy of the people; the Haredim reject the principle of equality in shouldering the burden; the messianics reject the principle of the border; and democratic Zionists believe that a government that seeks to dismantle the rules that allowed it to be elected is illegitimate.

To emerge from the danger, a decision is required instead of continuing to manage the conflict among the camps. Party leaders must present the voter with clear alternatives that enable a decision: a democratic state with a Jewish majority within recognized borders that is a member of the family of nations, or a regime of Jewish supremacy in a binational space; a state, nonpartisan army or political militias; the rule of law or personal loyalty; civic partnership or sectoral coalitions that extort the state.

Civil war is not fate, but a state cannot prevent it merely by declarations in the style of "together we will win." It can be saved from it only if it decides what the "together" is, who is included in it, and what must not be done, even for the sake of the victory of one camp or another.

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