

Israeli Election Results Shatter Illusion About the Possibility of a Two Party State

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The new Israeli government led by an enemy of peace is more right-wing, more reactionary, more nationalistically populist, and more religious than any previous government in Israeli history.

I had the good fortune during the last week of October and the first week of November to be in Israel to cover the Israeli election, its fifth if the last four years. I call this "good fortune" because it was a wakeup call for me and for any other American who still hangs on to that quaint, but utterly failed notion of a two-party state. But I'm getting ahead of myself. I'm going to begin on November 3, my next-to-last day in Jerusalem.

I was in Israel at the request of *Sputnik News*. The network wanted somebody to go from polling place to polling place to talk to Israelis of all political persuasions, as well as the handful of Israeli Muslims eligible to vote. I did that all around East and West Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Tel Aviv. By Thursday, I had done pretty much all the interviews I needed to do, leaving me with about five free hours to see the sites in Jerusalem that I hadn't yet seen.

I climbed the Mount of Olives, visited the Garden of Gethsemane, stopped in at the Tomb of the Virgin Mary and a handful of other spots. I even took a look at former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin's humble grave. I was pretty much done after three hours, so I decided to stop by a Palestinian pottery cooperative and buy something to take home with me. Google Maps told me to go all the way down from the Mount of Olives into the Kidron Valley, then up the back of the Temple Mount to the Iron Gate, the entrance to Jerusalem's Old City that is closest to the Dome of the Rock, the third holiest site in Islam.



The Dome of the Rock. [Source: neshamah.net]

I'm 58 years old and 30 pounds overweight. So when I reached the Iron Gate, I decided to take a breather on a bench there. A woman from Brooklyn was also there and we chatted about the things we had seen in Jerusalem. The Iron Gate was busy, with mostly Palestinians going about their business, carrying fruits, vegetables, and other recently-purchased goods into the Old City. But there was one young Palestinian man, holding a small box, standing in the gate. Three Israeli police officers, standing about 10 feet away, approached him to ask what he was doing. The woman from Brooklyn and I were about 25 feet away.

As soon as the police officers reached the young man, he pulled a knife out of the box and in what seemed like one easy, fluid move, stabbed all three of them in the stomach, just under their bulletproof vests. Two fell to the ground, while a third pushed the Palestinian to the ground. Once he was down, the police officer drew his gun and shot the man in the head, killing him instantly. The woman from Brooklyn turned to me and said calmly, "My brain can't process what my eyes just saw." I responded, "Let's get the hell out of here." I dashed across the walkway onto the grounds of the Rockefeller Museum of Archeology, coming out on the other side and returning to my hotel.

Later, the Israeli media reported that the attack was one of four coordinated attacks in East Jerusalem, all of which were carried out at the same time. The three police officers in the attack I witnessed were only lightly wounded. The Palestinian I saw was the only person killed. Interestingly, on the Israeli news, only other Israelis were interviewed. There were no Palestinians. One witness said dramatically of Palestinians in general, "They hate us more than they love life itself."

That witness, I believe, utterly missed the point of what happened. It's not an issue of who hates whom more, or of who loves life less. It's an issue of an oppressed people beaten so down over so many generations that many of them would rather be dead than to live under the yoke of Israeli occupation. It really is as simple as that. And the most recent example of

the fallout from this occupation is the result of Israel's November 1 national election.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog during the second week of November [invited Benjamin Netanyahu](#) to form a new Israeli government. This wasn't a surprise. The Israeli election came down to two questions: Do you love Bibi or do you hate him? More people loved him than hated him.

Netanyahu has a reputation as being a superior politician, and he is highly skilled at forging alliances with other Israeli political parties, particularly far-right, racist, and Zionist parties. It's that success that has put Palestinians in a hopeless position.

Netanyahu, of course, is well-known for his hatred of Palestinians. One only needs to look at the number of military actions against Gaza during his tenure. It has been Netanyahu who has overseen an unprecedented increase in the number of Jewish settlements on occupied Palestinians land. And it was Netanyahu who, during the Obama Administration, chose to turn against his Democratic supporters for even hinting that they preferred to see peace talks with the Palestinians.



Jewish settlements in the West Bank. [Source: [newsmax.com](#)]

That's all in the past now. But the present and near future will be even worse. Several of Netanyahu's rumored cabinet choices so far for his new government are positively alarming, and the appointments portend violence to come from both sides.

Perhaps the worst is Itamar Ben-Gvir, the leader of the ultra-nationalistic Religious Zionist Party and the new Minister of Security. Ben-Gvir's party won 16 seats in the new 120-seat Knesset and now has the body's third-largest presence. Ben-Gvir will be a disaster for peace, justice, and equality. I fear a marked increase in violence because I expect Ben-Gvir to provoke it.

This is the kind of person that he is: Ben-Gvir has been arrested literally [dozens of times](#) in the past decade for hate speech and hate crimes, for pulling a gun on unarmed Palestinians, and for physically attacking Palestinians. He bragged that he kept a [framed photo](#) of terrorist Baruch Goldstein on his living room wall. Goldstein massacred 29 Palestinians in a 1994 attack that became known as the Cave of the Patriarchs Massacre.

And in 1995, after Israel and the Palestinians signed the Oslo Accords, Ben-Gvir [stole the hood ornament](#) from Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's Cadillac and told the media, "We got to his car, and we'll get to him too." Rabin was assassinated by another Jewish extremist two weeks later.

On election night, November 1, Ben-Gvir [told supporters](#), "We have won. The time has come for us to return to being the landlords of our country. It belongs to us."

He also called for the [forcible deportation](#) of all Palestinians from Israel, including Palestinian Christians, and of all Jews who support peace or rapprochement with the Palestinians. And just one week ago, Ben-Gvir and Netanyahu announced jointly that Israel would [legalize a West Bank settlement](#) that had been abandoned in 2005 as part of a "disengagement law" associated with the peace process. Israeli settlers are now free to repopulate the settlement, which has been built on stolen Palestinian land.

There is no good news for peace between Israelis and Palestinians as Netanyahu puts his new government together. It will be more right-wing, more reactionary, more nationalistically populist, and more religious than any previous government in Israeli history.

Netanyahu proved long ago that he was an enemy of peace. Now he'll be pushed even farther to the right by governmental partners who think he's dangerously liberal. It's going to be a rough ride for the rest of us.

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John Kiriakou was a CIA analyst and case officer from 1990 to 2004. In December 2007, John was the first U.S. government official to confirm that waterboarding was used to interrogate al-Qaeda prisoners, a practice he described as torture. Kiriakou was a former senior investigator for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a former counter-terrorism consultant. While employed with the CIA, he was involved in critical counter-terrorism missions following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, but refused to be trained in so-called "enhanced interrogation techniques," nor did he ever authorize or engage in such crimes. After leaving the CIA, Kiriakou appeared on ABC News in an interview with Brian Ross, during which he became the first former CIA officer to confirm the existence of the CIA's torture program. Kiriakou's interview revealed that this practice was not just the result of a few rogue agents, but was official U.S. policy approved at the highest levels of the government. Kiriakou is the sole CIA agent to go to jail in connection with the U.S. torture program, despite the fact that he never tortured anyone. Rather, he blew the whistle on this horrific wrongdoing. John can be reached at: jkiriakou@mac.com.

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