

Israel: another fundamentalist state in the Middle East?

by Thierry Lalevée

The possibility, or rather, nightmare of Israel becoming the Middle East's next fundamentalist state, ruled by rabbis as firmly as Iran by ayatollahs, has now become a very concrete issue, and has sent shivers down the spines of the majority of secular Israelis and mainstream Jewish communities abroad.

Of course, the four religious parties that together now have 18 seats in the Knesset, are hardly united on all issues. For example, both Rabbi Eliezer Schach of the Degel Torah, which has two seats, and Rabbi Ovadia Joseph, a former chief rabbi who is the spiritual mentor of the Sephardic party Shas, which has six seats, have at times expressed dovish views regarding the Occupied Territories and the issue of territorial compromise.

These views are quite different than those of Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem Schneerson of the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Israel, with five seats, and of those of the traditional National Religious Party, also with five seats.

Yet, those divergences matter little when it comes to Israel's daily life. As writer David Krivine put it in the Nov. 4 edition of the *Jerusalem Post*, "One feared a Likud victory. What has happened is worse, a victory for the religious bloc. Not a victory for religion . . . but for narrow religious sectarianism."

Commenting in the same issue, East Jerusalem-based Palestinian editor Othman Halak wrote, "As a Palestinian observer . . . I wish to start by welcoming Israel to the Middle East. . . . The religious fever that took over Iran with the Islamic Revolution has gripped the entire Middle East. It affects the entire Arab world, and is now being felt in Israel. . . . It is bad enough that the Palestinian-Israeli struggle has expressed itself so far as a clash between two nationalities. . . . But as the days go by, it is becoming more and more a clash between Judaism and Islam. . . . If the struggle becomes a religious clash, then we are all doomed."

Religious or political manipulation?

Most immediately, the fundamentalist transformation of Israel's politics is expected to be felt at two levels; the settlements in the West Bank and the question of Jerusalem. The final results of the elections had not yet been made public

when the activists of the Gush Emunim extremist settlers movement began staging mass demonstrations in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem urging that settlers be allowed to build new settlements in the West Bank, after more than four years during which, as part of the terms of the Labor-Likud national unity coalition government, all new settlements had been forbidden.

Similarly, the cult issue of Solomon's Temple, which allegedly sat atop Temple Mount in Jerusalem, on the site of what is now the second holiest site in Islam, the Dome of the Rock containing the Al Aqsa mosque, is expected to become a hot political issue under pressure from those who think that the time of the Messiah has come. They insist that the mosque be destroyed and Solomon's Temple rebuilt—a *casus belli* for the entire Arab world.

With both issues, the way Israel's elections have been manipulated from the outside, come to the fore. While many have begun talking about the "orientalization" of Israeli society, it should be recalled that Agudat Israel's leader, Rebbe Schneerson, came to Israel fresh from the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, New York to lead the electoral campaign. And there was nearly as much of an outburst of Jewish fundamentalist joy at the Israeli election results in Brooklyn as there was in Israel itself. Flatbush Hassidim announced that the "days of exile are over, the time of the Messiah has come."

Israel's crazy-quilt of Jewish fundamentalist cults is in fact an American-based fundamentalist movement, not Israeli at all. It had earlier found its expression in Meir Kahane's Jewish Defense League, Israel's Kach movement, which became so extreme it was banned from the electoral campaign, and yet it spearheaded the victory of the religious parties.

Kahane is not his own man. Some questions may be worth asking about the lenient policy of the U.S. State Department toward Kahane, who, although he had renounced his U.S. citizenship to participate in the Knesset elections last summer, was allowed by the State Department to travel to the United States on an out-of-date passport, after he claimed that he had renounced his citizenship under duress.

A no-less-significant consideration is the tempo of relig-

ious exchanges between the New York Hassidic Lubavitchers and the Soviet Union, with Moscow inviting large delegations for visits over the last year.

A predictable result of this potential nightmare of cults taking over Israel, is that the most extreme among the secular parties, like the Likud, may begin to look moderate. That has not been lost on the likes of Gen. Ariel Sharon, or Gen. Rehovam Ze'evi of the Moledet (Homeland) party, which advocates the total expulsion of the Palestinian people from the Occupied Territories.

Political crisis ahead?

At the same time, however, these events have thoroughly shocked the mainstream of the Israeli people, as indicated by violent anti-Orthodox commentaries which have appeared in the Israeli news media. Israeli intelligence sources predict months of political crisis, with no government coalition being stable enough to rule the country.

Likud's attempt to form a coalition alone with the religious nuts is now being challenged by desperate negotiations between Labor and some of the smaller secular parties to form a minority government.

At the same time, within the established parties, there have been public outbursts of anger from the secondary leadership against the primary leadership. Inside Labor, Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin have been at each other's throats, with Rabin talking quite openly of the possibility that he will join the Likud coalition. But both Rabin and Peres, the former now Defense Minister and once Prime Minister, the latter now Foreign Minister and once Prime Minister, have come under strong attacks from younger politicians for the utter failure of their electoral campaigns.

The same is occurring inside the Likud, where younger leadership, although belonging to a seemingly victorious party, is challenging the position of luminaries like Ariel Sharon.

A potential reshuffle of Israel's political leadership could have two results. Within months, a national unity coalition may have to be formed. One of its main tasks would be to change Israel's election laws. It will also have to face once again the unresolved issue of what kind of constitution Israel should have. Inability to resolve those issues will only encourage the trend toward disintegration of the established parties, and the emergence of new political coalitions.

Israel is not expected to have much time to quietly face such issues. Israel's elections have not resolved the Palestinian uprising in the Occupied Territories, the so-called *Intifada*. By the end of November, it will have to face whatever challenge is mounted by the Nov. 15 Palestine National Council meeting.

The easiest, and most dangerous, way to suppress the leading issues is for the Israeli hardliners to lead the country into a new Middle East war. Doubtless, were that to come to pass, it would set into motion a process of religious fanaticism which could become irreversible, and doom the region to perpetual bloodshed and chaos.

Runcie drops his mask, claims Nazis were Christians

The pro-Russian head of the Church of England, Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie, declared Nov. 9 that Christianity, in and of itself, is "guilty" of having caused the Nazis' Holocaust against the Jews.

"Christians are guilty," Runcie declared at a meeting called in London to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Nazis' anti-Jewish *Kristallnacht* pogroms of 1938.

"Many Jews knew that it was Christians who pushed them into the gas chambers," Runcie said. "It is no good saying they were not real Christians any more than we should say that those who did not go regularly to synagogues were not real Jews. . . . The travesty of *Kristallnacht* and all that followed is that so much was perpetrated in Christ's name."

Runcie, a confirmed gnostic who accepts the Russian Orthodox Church's doctrinal views on Christian theology, is lying willfully. The Nazi leadership, to a man, was pagan and satanic in belief.

The Nazis hated the person of Christ, and they did what they did to defile "Christ's name." Had Hitler not been defeated on the battlefield, he would have begun to do to Roman Catholics generally, what he did to the Jews. Hitler and company regarded Jews and Christians as inextricably linked in a "Judeo-Christian" cultural-philosophical matrix, which they bitterly hated.

Runcie was speaking at a *Kristallnacht* commemoration in London, where he was sharing a podium with Cardinal Hume, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster and head of the British Catholics, and British Chief Rabbi Lord Jacobovitz.

This "Christians as Christians are guilty for the Holocaust" theme first surfaced in Britain in a major publicized way this fall, when the Soviet-linked Robert Maxwell financed a conference at Oxford University on the Holocaust, at which speaker after speaker stated what Runcie said on Nov. 9.

Interestingly, the one important dissenter then, was the British chief rabbi, who warned that Judaism cannot base itself on the Holocaust as the central reality of Jewish belief, since that would only undermine the Jewish religion, which has a long and rich tradition.