

Unpredictable Politics

I realize someone has to run a country. I just wish there was another viable alternative to current politics. Politicians are concerned with gaining power and holding on to it. Most of their decisions are determined by what will get them re-elected or hang on to power. But where a country is divided into fundamentally different viewpoints or dogmas, on religion, economics, and foreign affairs, you will inevitably have winners and losers, and ill feelings. We have seen two elections in Israel and the USA. Two very different countries, with their histories, populations, and challenges. Two different outcomes.

Many issues are similar. The gap between the wealthy and the poor, the choice over what kind of economic system one prefers, religious versus secular, and the way one deals with bitter racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. But there is one crucial difference and that is the existential one. The challenge that Israel faces is a threat to its existence. No rockets have rained down on the USA. In the USA the threat to Jews comes from deranged or primitive anti-Semites on the left and the right. In Israel, the challenge is between those who want to change the integrity and defensibility of a Jewish State and those who want to preserve it. Those who want to try to negotiate and those who prefer to bully. And two conflicting views as to how to rectify, resolve or accommodate the current Palestinian situation.

Israel faces another problem in that many Jews and non-Jews living outside, try to impose their politics and cultures on it. Most non-religious Jews outside Israel and in the USA do not identify with religious extremism or the association of State and religion. Most Israelis even secular ones, tend to be more traditional. And when it comes to nationalism, in Israel, a much larger proportion of both religious and non-religious, care very deeply about their security and survival. And this recent election was won precisely because the ongoing threat of terror, regardless of who is to blame, strengthens those who feel that the only protection comes from a strong defense rather than trying to appease others.

I believe that politicians have exacerbated the situation. In Israel and outside. The Obama foreign policies everywhere were predicated on appeasement and under Biden have returned. One of the reasons that Trump became so popular amongst Israelis and pro-Israel Americans was because during his administration he was willing to try different approaches. If the definition of lunacy is to keep on repeating failed policies when it comes to the Middle East the world is crazy because it persists in trying to impose unrealistic solutions. Sadly, the Trump alternatives did not help change the Palestinian situation. But they certainly did change the dynamics of the Middle East by drawing several Arab states closer to Israel. Despite the insistence of the State Department and the embittered John Kerry that this could never happen until the intractable Palestinian problem was solved.

I am not a Trump supporter and I think he is to blame for the poor showing of the Republicans. Not that I like Republicans any more than any other party.

And I also think his running again for the Presidency will only ensure that there is no credible opposition for a very long time. But this is politics writ large.

In both Israel and the USA some anomalies show how naïve and dangerous it is both to generalize and to predict. In the end, it is self-interest, not dogma that wins. Conventional wisdom has it that Orthodox American Jewry now supports the Republicans because of Israel, despite those republicans who are anti-Israel. And anti-Democrat because its growing left-wing is even more so. But for years the most extreme Orthodox group of Jews in the USA, the *Satmar Hasidim* have consistently voted Democrat in New York Democrats control the money pot in New York and they rely heavily both on welfare and city planners to help them with accommodation, subsidies, and real estate development. A recent book "A Fortress in Brooklyn: Race, Real Estate, and the Making of Hasidic Williamsburg" by Jewish studies Professor Nathaniel Deutsch and historian Michael Casper, published by Yale University Press, illustrates in detail the way the community has learned to make use of the political system to survive and grow against all odds.

In this latest election for New York Governorship Kathy Hochul, the sitting governor was challenged by the Republican, Jewish, Lee Zeldin. Zeldin pitched himself as the Law-and-Order Candidate, ready to fight against anti-Semitism and supportive of Israel and the Jewish community. He did far better than previous Republican candidates. But as expected, he did not win. Meanwhile, one of the Rebbes of the *Satmar* Chassidim came out forcefully and publicly against Zeldin and for Hochul.

"Trumpism became entangled in the Jewish camp," Rabbi Aaron Teitlebaum, the grand rebbe of one the *Satmar* Hasidic sects, said in a speech, Wednesday, at his yeshiva in Kiryas Joel, north of New York City. "This Trumpism twisted the minds of so many Biden supporters. It brainwashed people – and that's so painful." Teitelbaum critiqued Orthodox voters' who exhorted voters to "punish" Democratic incumbent Kathy Hochul alluding to many Orthodox groups' backing of Rep. Lee Zeldin, the Republican gubernatorial nominee.

Hasidic rabbi assails Trumpism rampant among the Orthodox

As with non-Jewish politics, anti-Zionism too has many different aspects. *Satmar* is strongly anti-Zionist and would rather live under a Palestinian state than a Jewish one. And like the left-wing Quad of the Democrats, plays two games, dogma, and benjamins.

Politics is a divisive game of self-interest and survival. And yet in a democracy, it is the voice of the majority of the people, whether one likes it or not, that counts. And if Biden or the assimilated wing of American Jewry claims to want democracy to survive, they too must allow democracies, including Israel, to make their own democratic decisions whether like them or not instead of crying wolf, proclaiming the end of the world, and trying to

force their world view on others. And by the same token, if Netanyahu wants to be accorded the respect he desires, he will not appoint a convicted felon to run the treasury or a racist to run ministries that have to deal with minorities.

Uncertainty and unpredictability are built into the DNA of human life. There's nothing much we can do about that. Other than to make sure that we, as individuals, are as good, caring, and sensitive to others as possible and make our voices heard, even when they are ignored by almost everyone else.