

“Just not Bibi” is not an action plan for taking advantage of the final opportunity for a national pivot

by

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After significantly reducing the external existential threat facing Israel, the time has come to remove the internal existential threat. Given the exponential pace of demographic changes within Israel, the current government has provided us with a glimpse of the future that our demography is quickly leading toward. In doing so, it has generated not only unprecedented public awareness that Israel must fundamentally change course, but also the best – and likely the last – opportunity that we’ll have to reshape the national agenda.

We’ve seen this movie before. After the Yom Kippur War, the Democratic Movement for Change (Dash) emerged, featuring superstars from military, business, and legal spheres. However, the slogan “Enough with the Crooks” did not constitute an actual plan, just as their personal integrity and success in other fields was not a replacement for an indispensable deep understanding of the core issues, nor a substitute for the ability to distinguish between superficial and core solutions. The naivety and arrogance of Dash’s leadership did indeed end up contributing to a massive national shift – the 1977 elections (referred to in Hebrew as the *Mahapach*, or “the upheaval”) led by the predecessors of those currently in power, which flipped Israel’s national agenda and led directly to our current reality.

Likewise, “Just not Bibi” is not an action plan. It’s a necessary condition for achieving the goal, but it is not the goal itself. We need leaders who understand the gravity of the moment, who rise above the usual political games – who allies with whom, and who can expand their share of the opposition at the expense of the others. Instead of fighting among themselves, we need leaders that can provide a serious action plan, persons capable of jointly confronting corrupt, messianic thugs obsessed with power, money, and prestige.

One of Israel’s core issues: the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) community is doubling its share in the population every 25 years – every generation. Today, the Haredim constitute 6% of grandparents aged 50-54, but they are already 26% of Israel’s grandchildren aged 0-4. Tomorrow, they will attend school, and the day after, they will provide for their families and defend them against external threats – or they won’t. If not, who will be Israel’s doctors, engineers, and soldiers in the future? What will happen to the only home that enables us to collectively face enemies who hate Jews?

The slogans “Serve in the army” and “Get a job” are also not action plans. What tools do the Haredim have to work and independently cope in the modern world? Encouraging higher birth rates among non-Haredi citizens is also a losing proposition, as Israel will already become the OECD’s most densely populated country within a decade and among the ten most congested worldwide within 40 years. Dividing Israel into cantons solves nothing when those who value liberal democracy live alongside those who exploit it to sustain themselves at others’ expense without providing their children tools for alternative options.

As Israel has the worst education system in the developed world (even without the Haredim, Israeli achievements in core subjects lag behind all developed countries), the first cornerstone of the required Israel 2.0 framework – indeed, the key to a national pivot – is an

overhaul of the education system. Not just another “reform,” but a significant upgrade of the core curricula for all children, alongside the requirement that this core (which is just a part of the entire curriculum) be identical and mandatory for all children.

The second cornerstone, the hammer enabling the educational overhaul, is an overhaul in budgetary priorities. With tens (perhaps hundreds) of billions of shekels required to rebuild the north, the south, the army, and the shattered lives, it’s much easier today to publicly justify the immediate and complete closing of the financial funnel to schools not fully teaching the upgraded core curriculum and funding lifestyles of non-work and non-compliance with the compulsory military draft.

The goal of the third cornerstone is to ensure that future Israeli governments will not be dominated by extremist minorities. Fundamental reform in Israel’s system of government is required – changing how leaders are elected, restoring checks and balances among the branches of government, and enforcing high professional standards for career civil servants.

The fourth and final cornerstone of the Israel 2.0 framework is a constitution that permanently anchors these changes in bedrock, providing time for the education system to do its job so that in a generation or two, there won’t be a majority wanting to return Israel to the nightmare that we’re currently experiencing.

This framework bridges right and left, religious and secular, Jews and Arabs – because it addresses root problems rather than daily disputes over the arrangement of chairs on the Titanic. This is a framework capable of changing the entire ship’s course, allowing our children and grandchildren to live in the safe haven that only a liberal democracy can provide and defend.

Now is the time for out-of-the-box thinking and action, for leaders able to identify the root problems threatening Israel’s future, and willing to present a concrete plan reflecting this understanding – a plan that will not only be backed by opposition voters, but also by many current Likud supporters and Haredim who desire a sustainable future for their children.

Now is the time to temporarily establish an umbrella political party encompassing all opposition parties, with the simple platform comprised only of the framework’s four cornerstones – educational overhaul, budgetary overhaul, a change in our system of government, and a constitution. Opposition leaders should – jointly, before the upcoming elections – create professional teams solely focused on these four cornerstones, developing a unified platform offering both core solutions and hope that the Jewish people’s only national home can be saved. This party should implement the framework during its first year after winning the elections – and immediately afterwards, dissolve the Knesset and proceed, each leader in their respective way, to new elections under the new system.

Just as we unite to confront external existential threats, this is the path for civilian unity against the internal existential threat. The demographic-democratic window of opportunity is closing at an exponential pace. This is the time for leaders who demonstrate that they grasp the gravity of this moment and what is required of them at the crossroads that we’ve now reached.