

## The Aftermath

Netanyahu's party receive 25% of the Knesset seats. Before they had 20%. So what is all the hoopla about? An important component is that the party primarily concerned with economic issues, but has not spoken on foreign policy, will receive perhaps 8% or 9% of the Knesset seats. Yet, liberals primarily in United States are furious. According to many pundits, the Obama administration will retaliate against all of Israel in some significant way. The outcome of the election was really a plebiscite. Netanyahu was asking people whether they have confidence in him or not and they would not provide a no-confidence vote. Essentially more people voted for Netanyahu than before, and by Israeli standards that was a landslide.

The real deal breaker is the Zionist Union, the so-called left-leaning Center. They are the party with the second largest number of seats in the Knesset. By declaring that they will not participate in a Unity government, it will push Israel to the right. If the right gets greedy, they will pull the government to the left. Prior to the election, it was clear that many Israelis and President Rivlin wanted and expected a Unity government to face the difficulties ahead. Unity governments have been very successful in Israel because the parliamentary system does not give any one party a majority. Parties as little as 4% of the vote will have representation.

In the United States it is simply winner takes all and to heck with everyone else.

The win of Netanyahu is more of a message that Israelis do not want interference with their national policies. After all the United States State Department spent \$350,000 between 2011 and 2013 trying to Israeli attitudes in a way that made the current administration in Washington happy. After that, Obama administration faithfuls spent untold and unknown amounts of money forming the V15 trying to unseat Netanyahu.

A cartoon in the Israeli paper put it perfectly; Obama was looking at picture of Netanyahu holding his number one glove and saying, "I can't believe I lost." To some extent this was a race between Obama and Netanyahu. One would have thought the U.S. President would have learned his lesson from the American elections in November of 14 but apparently thought he had a better chance in Israel.

Israelis also recognize that Israel has done well economically, although there are serious concerns about the cost of housing and other commodities. Netanyahu will have to address that.

In the meantime, Israel still has a strong and viable alternative set of parties. They are very close numerically to whatever coalition Netanyahu will be able to cobble together. Probably the difference between left and right parties in Israel, the equivalent of Democrats and Republicans, is much closer than currently in the U.S. Congress.

It seems vaguely hypocritical for people to criticize Netanyahu for speaking to the U.S. Congress on an invitation of Majority House Leader John Boehner, when the U.S. administration was quite blatant in its attempt to interfere in Israeli politics. The pique of the administration following Netanyahu's win has been palpable.

The facts on the ground is that Netanyahu has to worry about the very existence of his Nation. He has good reason to worry about it. The question is what his final coalition will look like from the point of view of domestic issues. The United States and other foreign powers have nothing to do with that. On the international scene, Prime Minister Netanyahu will have a lot to say, but he will be working with coalition partners who may see things a little differently and a very vigorous opposition.

It seems as though President Obama's calculated delay in picking up the phone to congratulate Netanyahu says it all. "I am mad at you, you have not been a good pawn in my international game, and I will punish you by not speaking to you." This may be fine behavior for a child, or an angry parent, but not for a world international leader. That is the reason that leaders in nations around the world find President Obama's international policy positions awkward, difficult to understand, inconsistent, and at times very self-defeating.

President Obama has been through enough bruising political wars himself to know that you may disagree with someone at this time and be their best of buddies during the next go around. Perhaps it is that lack of sophistication that has made it so difficult for President Obama to govern. He has friends and enemies but not many in-betweens. Further, he does not seem clearly how to make an enemy into a friend.

Life will go on in Israel, this successful, extraordinarily democratic nation.

One particular obscene issue is the criticism by the State Department, the New York Times and others that Netanyahu did something wrong by fearing the large Arab vote and calling for Jewish support of the state. This is a situation that no one in the United States could understand. We do not have parties or a significant portion of our electorate calling for the destruction of the United States or arguing for its incorporation into some other national group. We do not have a Hispanic-American party being the third largest voting block calling for succession from the Union and realignment with Mexico. If we did, then people would not be critical of Netanyahu for attempting to rally his supporters in the last day of the campaign. For the New York Times or Obama to call Netanyahu racist for trying to get elected would be like an Israeli calling Obama a bigot for organizing so heavily in African-American communities during his two election campaigns. Our Congress has the right under Article I, Section 5 to refuse to seat hostile legislator and we have used that power many times including specifically because of disapproval of religious views and practice of elected officials.

*Clifford A. Rieders, Esquire  
Rieders, Travis, Humphrey,  
Waters & Dohrmann  
161 West Third Street  
Williamsport, PA 17701  
(570) 323-8711 (telephone)  
(570) 323-4192 (facsimile)*

*Cliff Rieders, who practices law in Williamsport, is Past President of the Pennsylvania Trial Lawyers Association and a member of the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority. None of the opinions expressed necessarily represent the views of these organizations.*

CAR/mdb