

EZ – אקטואליה

Shake-up time

By Yoel Marcus

It is no secret that Ehud Olmert was looking forward to the acquittal of his friend and ally, Haim Ramon. Caught between public opinion, disappointed by the failures of the war, and the Winograd Committee, which could lay the blame at his door, Olmert was planning to do what any prime minister would do in his shoes: reshuffle the government deck.

But then, a day before his critical testimony was to be heard by the Winograd Committee, the harsh Ramon verdict descends on him. Olmert was not the only one who expressed his "profound sorrow" over the severity of the conviction. The "man in the street" also thought the court had overdone it. But as luck would have it, the kiss affair took place on the day when seven soldiers were killed and two were kidnapped by Hezbollah, and just a short time before the government voted to go to war. So amid expressions of sorrow over the judges coming down so hard on the public's darling, there was also some grumbling. On the eve of a war is that what Ramon had on his brain? French kisses?

In another twist of fate in the course of this jam-packed week - a day before the Ramon verdict and two days before Olmert's appearance before the Winograd panel - a letter signed by 54 retired generals, many with long years of derring-do behind them, landed on his desk, demanding that Ehud Barak be appointed defense minister. This letter, the brainchild of Major General (Res.) Menachem Meron, took pains to point out that it was not, by any means, an attempt to meddle in the Labor primaries. It was written after coming to the conclusion that Israel had reached the breaking point.

Several of the signatories I spoke to, regarding the reason for the letter and the choice of timing, said they were worried about the security situation and Amir Peretz's inability to prepare the defense system to deal with future threats. Appealing to the prime minister was not politically motivated, one of the signers told me. The letter was against the wrong man being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The signers of this letter insist that they have nothing personal against Peretz - apart from their belief that he is incapable of restoring Israel's military effectiveness, and that as he falls more and more in love with the job, it's time to start worrying.

Peretz is not to blame for the string of failures in Lebanon. He simply has no clue about the stuff. His whole political career has been light years away from defense. It is doubtful that the Winograd Committee will find him responsible for the bungles. At most, the panel will say he didn't understand or he didn't know - for example, what questions he should have asked the chief of staff before going to war. He is not guilty of negligence but of insufficient knowledge in a field that he was put in charge of for political reasons.

As things stand, Barak is the best we have for the defense portfolio. From the moment he settles into his seat, he will know what to do. He doesn't need a single day in the classroom. Some say that Israel's most decorated soldier was not necessarily Israel's best chief of staff. From a long-range perspective, however, there is no one who can top him at assessing future dangers. As chief of staff, he initiated a highly important project whose valuable strategic fruits we will be reaping for years to come.

Since the war, Olmert has been looking for a way to replace Peretz with Barak, and he sees this appointment as a critical one in the portfolio reshuffling he is planning. So how do you do it without Labor walking out of the government?

Either you give Peretz a plum job in social welfare, or Barak declares that Israel is in such mortal danger that he is throwing politics to the wind and withdrawing his Labor chairman candidacy for the sake of the defense portfolio. As defense minister, he can build a springboard for the next elections, and without any favors from Peretz.

VOCABULARY

acquittal - זיכוי, שחרור	bungle - כשלון
ally - בעל ברית	negligence - רשלנות, הזנחה
failure - כשלון	insufficient - לא מספיק
Committee - ועדה	portfolio - משרת שר
reshuffle - לשדד מערכות, לסדר מחדש	settles - להתיישב, לנחות
testimony - עדות	decorated - מעוט, בעל עיטורי גבורה
harsh - נוקשה, גס	assessing - להעריך, לאמוד
verdict - פסק דין	initiated - יזם
descends - לרדת, לעבור בירושה	valuable - בעל ערך
profound sorrow - צער עמוק	reaping - לקצור
severity - חומרה	appointment - מינוי (בהקשר אחר פגישה)
conviction - הרשעה	plum job - ביטוי- משרה טובה
overdone - להגזים, להפריז	welfare - רווחה
kidnapped - נחטפו	declares - להצהיר, להכריז
amid - בין	mortal danger - סכנת מוות, סכנת קיום
grumbling - רטינה, תלונה	withdrawing - לסגת, למשוך בחזרה
jam-packed - דחוס, מלא עד אפס מקום	chairman - יושב ראש, יו"ר
appearance - הופעה	candidacy - מועמדות
appointed - ממונה	springboard - קרש קפיצה
brainchild - יציר מוח, פרי מוחו	
took pains - ביטוי-עשה מאמצים	
meddle - להתערב, "לדחוף את האף"	
primaries - בחירות מקדימות, פריימריס	
breaking point - נקודת שבירה	
regarding - בנוגע ל, ביחס ל	
inability - אי יכולת	
politically motivated - ממניעים פוליטיים	
incapable - לא מסוגל, לא יכול	
effectiveness - יעילות	
string of failures - ביטוי- שרשרת כשלים	
doubtful - מפוקפק, מוטל בספק	