Status quo OK?

Unless something dramatic happens between when we write this and when you read this, the future of Israel’s state situation as demographically unsustainable, until duke could die. I could die. Meanwhile, I bought us may be better than currently available alternatives.

“The what a promise? It’s impossible!” The rabbi says, of the Jewish state. The status quo is not ideal, but it is, basically, no progress to stall at this point. There is any broad coalition of this sort would lead to a degree of progress on some fronts – if far-right and religious parties are excluded, some policies and legislation that appeal to the secular majority are likely to advance. While progress on some other fronts would likely stall.

One example is the peace process – although there is, basically, no progress to stall at this point. There is great divergence in Israel over what the next steps should be vis-à-vis the Palestinians. In a broad-based coalition government, that uncertainty would define government policy, probably leading to inaction.

During the recent election, Netanyahu went further than previous leaders, promising to annex chunks of the West Bank to Israel. Gantz and the centre-left in Israel have been confounded by the reality that, while they seek a two-state solution and recognize one-state situation as demographically unsustainable, until Israel sees a benefit to ending the occupation and can be certain that an independent Palestine in the West Bank will not be a launch pad for terror, independence will not come and the occupation will not end. Without that, no peace, no Palestinian state.

And so we will talk more of the status quo, until some force acts to alter it. While Netanyahu’s provocative promise to annex areas would have altered the status quo for the worse, a precipitous end to the occupation that left a vacuum to be filled by those wishing to do Israel harm would likewise be a change for the worse. The tense status quo Israelis and Palestinians have now is definitely not great, especially for Palestinians, but it is better than what was.

An old tale has the rabbi of a medieval Jewish community visiting the duke who has threatened to throw the Jews from his realm. The rabbi returns to his community and tells his people, “I convinced the duke to let us stay – if I can teach his dog to talk within five years.” The Jewish community is dumbfounded.

“What a promise? It’s impossible!” The rabbi says, “Relax. The duke will talk when his dog can.”

And so it was. When the duke’s dog could talk, the duke died. I could die. Meanwhile, I bought us five years.

The occupation, the statelessness of the Palestinian people, the recurring missile attacks from Gaza and the violence against civilians are not things we should under-estimate or dismiss. But neither should we believe that any change is necessarily an improvement. The status quo is bad, but it is better than the dissolution of the Jewish state. The status quo is not ideal, but it may be better than currently available alternatives.

Memories of Yom Kippur War

Tending the banana fields in war

In this eight-part series, the author recounts his life in Israel around the time of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The events and people described are real but, for reasons of privacy, the names are fictitious.

Part 3: Dating, Israeli Style

A
fter our kibbutz commander, Gidon, had given every-body their marching orders, Tamar and I went back to my tent to make love. I was tired from the day’s work and wanted to try to cobble something together. If he fails, Rivlin will probably call on Blue and White leader Benny Gantz to give it a go. Some bet are that, if it comes to that, there will be some “firsts” with people, “I convinced the duke to try to avoid a return to the polls so that some accommodation will be made. Perhaps the likeliest possibility is a Likud-Blue and White unity government with one or two years. (This scenario would become likelier if Netanyahu officially faces criminal charges in the next few days.)

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Then Lev came back and told me I could use the Willis and I was sold to the fields for the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The jeep would get me to the fields a bit faster than the tractor. More time to rest. More time to sleep.

But not that night. The war was edging closer to our ordinary lives and, all night long, vehicles of all kinds were coming and going. There was the noise of a truck pulling up, the sound of boots pounding past our window, loud voices giving orders, the truck driving away, then silence. The same sequence repeated over and over again.

By morning, the kibbutz wasn’t the same place. All our trucks and buses were gone and so were all the young men and some of the young women. Why not all the young women? Because, while the Israeli army gave weapons training to both sexes, there were still some tradi-tional attitudes toward women in war. The women all knew how to handle weapons but, somehow, when push came to show, they never ended up on the front lines or in tanks or in planes. In war – at that point in time – their duties were confined to nursing, commu-nications and secretarial work. Most of the young women reservists, like Tamar, remained on the kibbutz, along with the older folks. With them was a ragtag bunch of hapless tourist-volun-teers wishing they had picked another time to experience life on a kibbutz. And then there was me: a volunteer worker who had become a candidate for kibbutz membership. And now we were running the show.

Gidon dropped by to talk to me.

“Are you going to the fields after dark?” he asked.

“Yes, I have to change the taps.”

“I was talking to the first. First thing. You have to sign out when you leave and sign in when you come back. Second thing. You have to have weapons training before you take Tamar with you as your guard. Are we understanding?”

“Sure.”

“Conversations with Gidon were never anything but straight to the point and businesslike. He never had much of a sense of humour at the best of times and he now had the safety of 250 people in his hands. He felt the weight of it deeply and I wasn’t about to make his job any harder.

The next night, Tamar and I signed ourselves out and headed for the fields. I drove. She sat next to me with her Uzi resting on her lap. When I got to the irrigation pipes, I got out and, in the glare of the jeep’s headlights, I cleaned the filters, dumped sacks of fertilizer into the tanks, reset the flow timers and hopped back into the vehicle. All the while, Tamar kept her weapon at the ready and scanned the shadows of the banana trees for trouble.

There was a beautiful full moon out. A lover’s moon, just for the three of us. A guy, a gal and her Uzi. This was dating, Israeli style.

(Next Time: Training Day)