

Thou doth protest too much

written by David M. Weinberg | 07.09.2025

This country is on the verge of complete chaos. Every single interest group thinks it can block roads and airports and besiege the homes of public figures. Every sect and splinter faction feels that it holds absolute truths that justify shutting down the country whenever they feel like it, until they get their way - no matter how inconvenient this is for others in the country or how close this takes us to civil war.

This has to stop. There must be limits to dissent and demonstration.

Alas, threats to “burn down the country” and instigate “civil war” are becoming standard language in various protest movements, say, among the hostage freedom “fighters” and the haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) anti-draft “shock troops.” And the protests themselves are becoming more violent every day.

Hostage freedom campaigners burn tires on the main roadways in wildcat style, and residences of the prime minister in two locations have been assaulted. The beat of bullhorns with ugly accusations of “war crimes” and concrete threats to personal security have become de rigueur outside the homes of government ministers - at 6 am, at 11 pm, and any other ungodly hour of the day or night. Even protests outside and inside of synagogues are not out of bounds.

“Kaplanist” protesters have even taken to pursuing government leaders and their families, hunting them down, literally chasing them down the street and marching outside the schools of their kids. The latest anti-government extremist slogan speaks about lighting a “ring of fire” around every minister and every army general who is implicated in government “crimes” related to continuation of the Gaza war and “abandonment” of Israeli hostages.

HAREDI FURY at the failure of the government to pass a military draft exemption law for their masses of yeshiva students (alongside anger at the arrest of a few draft deserters and the denial of budgets to such shirkers of military service) has led to mass demonstrations that choke off entrances to major cities like Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Ashdod.

Haredi chutzpah extends to blocking Ben-Gurion Airport too. “No one will fly, if

we can't fly," they threaten - referring to the possibility that draft-dodging acolytes of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov could be arrested at the airport en route to the rebbe's gravesite in Uman (Ukraine) before Rosh Hashanah. They even demand the Israeli government pay for part of this pilgrimage!

Last weekend, I saw gigantic haredi street posters (known as *pashkevilim*) with a one-word screaming headline: "War!" For a moment, I thought to myself, oh good, the haredi community finally has woken up to the fact this country is fighting a long and difficult war against its external enemies and that haredi people need to pitch in too.

But no, "War!" meant war against the haredi community's perceived internal enemies, meaning most Israelis, who seek to draw Ultra-Orthodox young men into some form of national or military service.

The posters went on to describe the "evils" of mainstream Israeli society (- perhaps that is the source of term *pashkevil*?) and to threaten to "burn" (*lisrof*) and "destroy" (*lehachariv*) the "Zionist state" if yeshiva boys are forced out of their study halls or kollel men are denied discounts in municipal taxes and HMO fees.

The demonstration free-for-all runs amok across the gamut of the upset: Distraught Ethiopian, Eritrean, handicapped, and LGBTQ communities. Angry settlers, disgruntled port workers, dissatisfied farmers, disadvantaged residents of the peripheries, displeased teachers and doctors. Even upset butterfly enthusiasts and bottlecap makers (just kidding, but only by a bit). They all think that they can demonstrate on major highways at rush hour with the declared intention of gridlock, until and unless they get their way.

Everybody else affected by such narrow-self-interest protests - which of course are self-defined by the protesters as emergency rallies of the highest and broadest national priority - be damned.

Unfortunately, the notion that a police permit is necessary before launching a protest or a march in the streets - is wholly out the door. Nor are the police "allowed" to arrest any illegal protesters; that becomes a cause for accusations of "dictatorship" and for additional protests.

COORDINATION WITH the police, not defiance of the police, is the logical

approach in a democracy, where balance in civil order is paramount. It is the job of internal security leaders to uphold the important right to protest against, or advocate for, a specific policy, and balance this with the rights of other citizens (who are not party to the vogueish cause-of-the-moment) to conduct their lives without undue interference.

And yes, balanced policy requires fair and uniform application of the law across societal sectors and the political spectrum.

By way of example, we all know what would have happened if so-called settler “hilltop youth” or haredi hooligans had climbed onto the roof of the National Library in Jerusalem or firebombed a car outside the Prime Minister’s home. These things actually happened this week.

But since the ruffians are left-of-center protesters against the Netanyahu government, well, don’t expect many arrests and certainly no arrests that lead to actual criminal prosecutions. The politicized Attorney General would never allow that.

I won’t rehash here the horrible disengagement from Gaza in 2005 but recall this: Sixteen-year-old Religious Zionist girls who merely were on their way to protest the destruction of Gush Katif settlements were incarcerated by very aggressive policemen, held incommunicado in jail for weeks, and then hit with severe criminal indictments.

For the sake of both civil sanity and minimal national unity, I therefore support the plan of National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir to limit the ability of protesters to block major roads, aggressively besiege personal homes, assault synagogues, etc. This includes highways, access roads to Ben-Gurion International Airport, hospitals, emergency routes, and roads whose closure would isolate communities.

The plan would not interfere with the large anti-government protests taking place on Kaplan and Begin streets in central Tel Aviv every Saturday, if they are coordinated with police (and generally they are, although extremists frequently have broken through barriers to block the Ayalon Freeway).

“The right to demonstrate is not an inherent right, but rather a relative right... and cannot come at the cost of human life and public safety,” reads the new policy

document.

I also support the bill placed before the Knesset by coalition chairman MK Ofir Katz that would impose mandatory heavy fines on protest lawbreakers – be they “Kaplanists” or “Breslovers,” settlers or asylum seekers, Ultra-Orthodox, ultra-Right or ultra-Left. The legislation sets fines of NIS 14,400 (\$4,300) for blocking critical roadways, and more than twice as much (NIS 29,200 or \$8,700) for burning tires or placing dangerous obstacles on such roadways. A repeat violation would cost the lawbreaker another NIS 22,000 (\$6,500).

Indeed, I wonder whether these fines are set high enough.

The broader point here is not (just) “public safety” or “public order” – and I am not seeking to give tools to a controversial government (whether this one or the next) to stifle dissent and punish all protesters. Nor am I indifferent to the desperation felt by hostage families, or *lehavdil* (big distinction!), haredi families.

Rather, the point is to place fetters on our passions that will allow for more civil debate and discourse; that will re-teach us to respect the concerns, viewpoints, and needs of others (yes, travel on unobstructed roads is a basic need); and that will set guardrails so that we collectively don’t drive off the roadways into the ravine. Civil sanity and minimal national unity demand no less.

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