

Opinion & Comment

Amnon Be'eri-Sulitzeanu and Mohammad Darawshe

Avoiding a confrontation on Arab national service

If there is an issue that captures the essence of the deep-rooted disputes, mistrust and lack of dialogue between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority in Israel, it surely must be the subject of national-civic service.

Now, with the formation of a new government coalition, and after the High Court ordered the drafting of a new bill to replace the Tal Law, there is a likelihood we will see passage of a bill mandating universal service in either the army or a national or civic framework. Hence, it is possible that within weeks, Arab citizens will be told they are required to serve in a civic service corps.

It would be a grave mistake, however, to bundle ultra-Orthodox Jews and Arabs together in the same basket. It's true that both groups are not drafted into the army, but the reasons for this are fundamentally different. Any attempt to change the status quo with the Arabs must take into account their present lack of representation in decision-making circles, and the longstanding mistrust between Arabs and the state – a situation deeply rooted in a public climate that questions the legitimacy of their citizenship.

Advocates for civic service from the Jewish majority suggest that Arab youngsters should volunteer for service as an expression of their willingness to assume their share of the national burden and to advance their own integration. The Arab leadership has long rejected this line of thinking, fearing that agreement would be interpreted as acceptance of the second-class status quo and affirmation of Israel's definition as a Jewish state. They are also concerned that it would perpetuate existing discrimination, by legitimizing the anti-democratic notion that civil rights can be made contingent upon service.

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Added to these misgivings is Arab mistrust of the genuine aims of the existing national service program which initially involved organizations associated with the security establishment. These suspicions have been so deep as to trigger speculation that the current system is only the first phase of a plan to institute mandatory Israel Defense Forces service for Arabs, which would put them in an unbearable confrontation with their brethren across the borders. That the budget for national service volunteers comes out of the Fund for Discharged Soldiers within the Defense Ministry does nothing to dispel such fears.

Arab concerns are also aggravated by the unilateral manner in which the national-civic service apparatus was established, in 2007, without consultation with prominent members of their community. This is a classic example of the state's disregard of what it considers to be the "irrelevant" leadership of the Arab minority, a type of official indifference that triggers intense anger and frustration again and again.

All these factors have produced and fueled an opposition front to national service, organized by the Arab leadership. But they have also promoted thinking about possible alternatives.

Despite broad public opposition, there are Arab youngsters who do volunteer through the national-civic service administration, which operates today under the Ministry of Science. True, they number only 2,000 each year, representing a mere 5 percent of the 40,000 young people who reach age 18 during the same period. But, many perform a significant social service, primarily within the Arab community itself. And there is growing appreciation of the benefits such service can have for the youngsters themselves.

Such service can enhance their chances of success in academic studies and the job market. Today, tens of thousands of high-school graduates are not realizing their potential: Some sink into idleness or menial jobs, while others wait to continue their education, sometimes due to intentional age restrictions at colleges and universities.

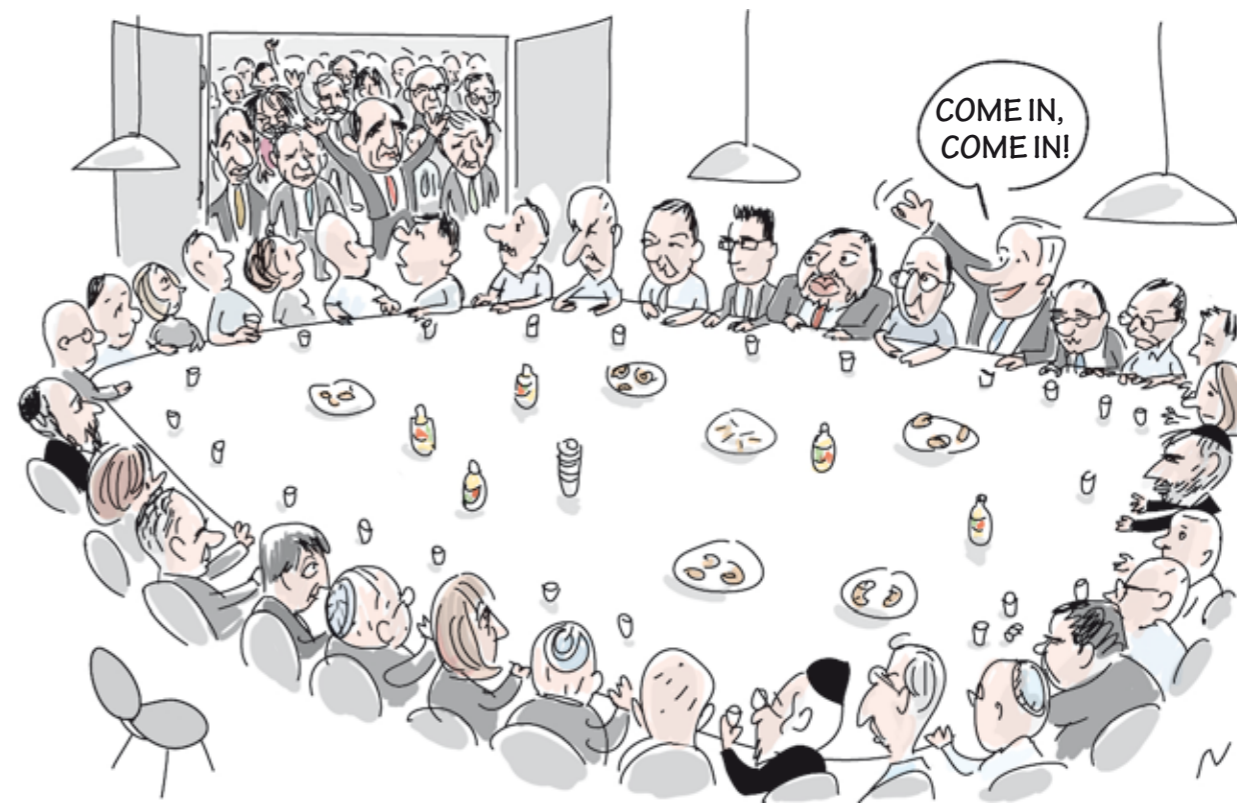
Fundamental support for social solidarity and voluntarism, as well as recognition of the need to offer more constructive opportunities to these young Arabs, have led to a search for alternative volunteering initiatives within Arab society. However localized and limited these initiatives may be right now – they are not recognized or funded by the national-civic service administration – they prove that Arab society has the desire and the ability to establish and independently administer such projects.

Still, if the initiators of the civic-service program had hopes that it would become a major, legitimate tool for widespread volunteer community service and integration of young Arabs in Israeli society, these hopes have been dashed. Needless to say, compelling Arab youngsters to serve by law will not repair this situation, but only deepen alienation and frustration among them.

Broad, sweeping legislation is not the way to settle this issue. However, the fact that the topic now tops the public agenda creates an important opportunity for dialogue. A responsible, significant parliamentary debate, in which Arab MKs and other leaders play a genuine role, could lead to a breakthrough and even to agreement on the principles of an alternative, popular civic service program for Arab youngsters.

One alternative is to establish a volunteer community service organization operated by Arab local governments. Its programs would be subject to supervision of a regulatory-professional authority in the welfare or interior ministries, and funded by government budgets earmarked for this purpose. Such an initiative should be part of a comprehensive government program to reduce the gaps between Jews and Arabs, and grounded in a dialogue with elected officials of the Arab public. The service would be purely civic in nature and would give Arab local governments the additional power and agency they so need. Above all, such a program would clearly signal to Arab society that its welfare, its empowerment, and the future of its young people are at the center of public interest and concern.

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Eran Wolkowski

Ahmed Rashid

If Iran decides to mobilize the Shia

Iran's nuclear program, which could have the capacity to produce weapons-grade nuclear material sooner rather than later, remains a principal focus of international attention, despite a vast international policy crisis vis-a-vis the Middle East, due to the developments engendered by the so-called Arab Spring. The harshest sanctions regime applied in modern times is in place against Iran, even as other covert efforts, including a cyber-war intended to sabotage Iran's research, have been carried out, presumably by Israel and the United States. As a result of this global pressure, Iran has come back to the negotiating table to see if it can strike a deal that will alleviate some of the pressure.

Nonetheless, hawks in both Israel and the United States still maintain that bombing Iran's nuclear facilities is the only way to slow down, if not stop its nuclear progress. Yet the potential repercussions of such an escalatory step have not been sufficiently discussed in the media of either country. Rather, the debate has so far focused on the possible blockade by international forces of the Straits of Hormuz which, it is anticipated, would lead to a massive increase in oil prices. That in turn could be expected to severely affect the already recession-hit economies of Europe and the United States, not to speak of those poorer countries of the developing world that are dependent on Middle Eastern oil.

However, if Israel bombs Iran's nuclear facilities – a step that is bound to involve the United States, either actively or indirectly – Iran is unlikely to retaliate in an all-out confrontational style: by launching missiles against Israel, trying to sink U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf or even imposing its own closure of Hormuz. Instead Iran is far more likely to mobilize on the basis of the much wider support it can muster in the Muslim world, which is already seething with anti-American and anti-Israeli feelings.

The Islamic Republic's primary support would come from the small but politically active and well-financed Shia minorities that can be found in almost all the states stretching from Lebanon to India. In many countries like Pakistan or Afghanistan, the Shia communities constitute up to 15 percent of the population. In the Gulf state of Bahrain, and of course in Iraq, Shia constitute a majority.

Since the Iranian revolution, in 1979, Tehran has seen itself as both spokesman and protector of the global Shia population, even though many Shia may resent this fact. In this self-delineated role, it has funded local Shia organizations, provided educational scholarships to Shia students to study in Iran, trained and armed local Shia militias in such places as Lebanon, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and provided military training and education to young Shias in their countries of origin.

In the Arab states of the Gulf, for example, these Shia minorities are often at odds with their own regimes because of the lack of protection or respect they receive, or the prejudice that is inherent to many Arab Sunni fundamentalist regimes. In countries that border Iran, such as Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan, all of which are subject to a powerful U.S. military or political presence, Iran, to protect itself against possible American incursions or sabotage, has trained local militants to attack U.S. targets in their respective countries in the event of any attack on Iran. This program had its origins during the second term

of the Bush administration, when Vice President Dick Cheney spoke openly about attacking Iran. Iran organized and planned for retaliatory attacks against U.S. targets everywhere that it was in a position to arm and fund clandestine groups.

Thus, the Shia protest in the Muslim world would likely be organized and widespread, and would target Americans and Israelis, and include major acts of terrorism and extreme violence.

At the same time, anti-Americanism is reaching dangerous levels in predominantly Sunni countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan. Both countries have extremist Sunni groups that engage in terrorism, as well as conservative Islamic parties that participate in electoral politics. Any attack on Iran could see a merging of all these Sunni elements as well as of the broader Sunni population, and one could expect widespread anger in the streets.

Such widespread and angry protests could make it almost impossible for Americans or Israelis to travel, work or do business across the Arab world and the Indian subcontinent. Such protests would almost invariably wipe out the gains and aspirations of the democratic movements within the Arab Spring countries, and lead to a reinforcing of Islamic fundamentalist parties, which could be expected to jump on the anti-American bandwagon. Widespread Sunni protests would invariably make the U.S. and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan planned for 2014 much more difficult and possibly lead to the strengthening of the Taliban. It also could lead to a possible new intifada among the Palestinians, who in any case see little hope of

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an agreement with Israel on a two-state solution.

Thus any attack on Iran can be expected to unleash a violent reaction throughout the Muslim world, both in the more organized Shia minority camp where Iran has influence and in the majority Sunni countries where Iran may not have influence but anti-Americanism certainly does. The risk will be greater for Israel than for anyone else – a state already isolated and besieged by hostile states. With its conflict with the Palestinians unresolved, it will find itself even more isolated and under threat. The United States will find itself besieged in many parts of the Muslim world, making normal diplomacy unworkable and the effort to enlist Muslim states to support the U.S. war against Al-Qaida more difficult.

Israel needs to carefully consider the consequences of any military action against Iran.

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Robby Berman and Jacob Lavee

Turning morality on its head

More than a hundred Israelis die needlessly each year because not enough people donate organs for transplant. Yet the same Israelis who refuse to donate organs are willing to take them when their lives depend on it. In an attempt to stop this social parasitism, the Knesset recently passed a law that gives priority in organ allocation to transplant candidates who are organ donor cardholders. The law is the epitome of fairness, representing the ethical principle of reciprocal altruism – those who try to help others will be helped themselves. Yet Rabbi Dr. David Shabtai, in a recent oped in Haaretz English Edition ("An immoral incentive," May 4, 2012), turned the moral aspect of this law on its head, and described it as "unfair" and an example of "religious discrimination."

Some Orthodox Jews do not accept that brain death constitutes death. They believe that a brain-dead body is a living human being so long as its heart is still beating, even if that's with the help of a ventilator. These religious people claim that to agree to have their organs removed when their

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heart is still beating would be like agreeing to be murdered. They just can't do it.

It is true that religiously observant people should not be punished for their convictions, but we believe they should be held accountable for their behavior. What kibbutz, for example, would allow a member to eat communal food if the member refuses to work?

In truth, the new law is not as severe as it should be. In accordance with principles of strict justice, the law should dictate that, if you don't give, you don't get. But the new law is more merciful, saying: If you don't give, you still will get – but only after others have gotten first.

Shouting "religious discrimination" in a liberal society is a sure way to attract attention. But it is a faux cry. The new law applies to everyone, and not just to a group of people affiliated with a specific religious sect. It applies to people who act (or in this case don't act) in a certain way. Many Orthodox Jews accept brain death as death and have organ donor cards – and they will benefit from this new law. It is people who are not ready to help others who will be "discriminated" against and "punished."

The law does not target religious people; it targets behavior. It also targets secular Israelis who are too squeamish to sign a

donor card, or too lazy to type www.kartisadi.org.il into their Web browser to register for an organ donor card.

Moreover, consider the immorality of someone who rejects the concept of brain death as death, but who is willing to take an organ from a brain-dead patient for themselves or their loved one. In effect, this individual is asking the medical establishment to commit – what he or she believes to be – murder. The argument that the organs are being taken out in any event, so why not make use of them to save lives, is simply based on a false assumption. Organs are only removed once an appropriate recipient has been identified. This is because they have very limited viability outside the human body, and need to be matched with a specific recipient (based on tissue, blood and size compatibility) before they are removed. Make no mistake about it: The organs are being removed for the person who put his name on the organ transplant waiting list.

Even if you don't think you are an accomplice to murder, putting yourself on the waiting list for organs and taking a beating heart means you are at the very least participating in commerce in ill-gotten goods (because you believe the donor

was alive and murdered). An analogy can be made to the purchase of stolen goods, which is prohibited by halakha (Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Gneivah, 5:1). Even if the goods weren't stolen specifically for you, halakha (Jewish law) still forbids you from buying them because you are encouraging immoral activity. In the same way, for a religious person to put his name on the organ transplant waiting list, asking physicians to remove organs from what he believes to be a living person, would be akin to encouraging a market for immoral activity.

The bottom line is that some Israelis are contributing to society in the field of organ donation while others are willing to sit back and reap the benefits from it. The situation is as untenable as it is repugnant. People have a right not to sign an organ donor card – but they should have the courage to bear the consequences of their own conviction.

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Corinne Mellul

Au revoir, Nicolas

Le Pen with an unprecedented 17.9 percent of the vote in the first round (some pundits pointed out that, "people prefer the original to the copy.") Yet Sarkozy pursued this losing strategy in the two weeks before the runoff – apparently blind to the hostility most Le Pen supporters felt for him. As a result, he alienated the centrist vote that might have saved the day for him.

Worst of all, perhaps, he introduced character assassination as a weapon of mass destruction between the two rounds in a country whose political culture is averse to it, alleging at one point that controversial Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan, along with the imams of 700 mosques in France, had expressed their support for his opponent.

Hollande nimbly reacted to the blitz by remaining above the fray. He is uncharismatic, and his platform promises a tidal wave of social expenditure that only manna from heaven could fund, at a time when Europe is striving to reduce the debt. But virtually all he had to do was portray himself as a "normal" candidate who, if elected, would be a "normal" president. In multiple ways, Sarkozy handed him a victory.

Where does that leave France? And, French Jews

might add, where does that leave us, and where does that leave Israel? It is likely that a majority of the Jewish vote went to Sarkozy. Like most Israelis, most French Jews perceived him as a friendly figure with deep sympathies for Israel. Those who voted for him may now fear both the rise of Marine Le Pen – who intends to play a leading role in the opposition – on the far right, and the access to power of the Greens, who are nominally allied to Hollande and have radical anti-Israel views.

On the night of Hollande's victory, TV broadcasts showed Arab-French youths displaying Palestinian, Algerian and Moroccan flags on Place de la Bastille, where his supporters had gathered to celebrate. To many Jews this must have been an unsettling sight. But disgruntled supporters of Sarkozy in Israel and among Jews here may be well advised to ask themselves what exactly Israel has gained from his presidency, what diplomatic impact his affection for Israel and strong stance on Iran has really had. Hollande too has sympathy for the Jewish state (and many more Jews on his staff than Sarkozy ever had), and he shares Sarkozy's advocacy of the two-state solution. There's little reason to anticipate the Greens having any say on

foreign policy in a Hollande government. And, to be frank, France today is a negligible diplomatic player in the Middle East anyway. Even the European Union hasn't been able to carve a significant role for itself there, in particular as a mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As for the National Front, I believe that Jewish concern is moot. Yes, Marine Le Pen's father, who headed the party for decades, is a notorious anti-Semite, and the daughter might be, too, at heart, though she's taken great pains to distance herself from her father's histrionics and develop a more palatable persona. But yesteryear's France is gone. The French state has never been able to choose between promoting diversity through participative citizenship, as Anglo-Saxon countries do, or bulldozing minorities into integrating, a policy it has officially advocated but has never pursued consistently. Sarkozy, who easily rode to power in 2007 on promises to impose a French Muslim embrace of the Republic's core belief in the secularist model, failed on this count as well, which laid the ground for the rise of the far right. Consequently, the National Front's No. 1 enemy today is no longer the Jews, but outwardly observant Muslims, militant Islamists and disenfranchised Arab youths. If Marine Le Pen rises to the status of major political player in the coming years, she may find in a growing segment of the Jewish population here her best supporters.

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