**Fascist godfather**

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Fascism has been on the minds of Israel’s friends and foes alike since “the Jewish State” held its latest elections and its former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu began negotiations to form a new coalition. Warnings about Israel “heading toward a fascist theocracy” or “sleep walking into Jewish fascism” have multiplied.

But all these warnings appear to fall on deaf ears, as Netanyahu charts a path back to the premiership in coalition with Israel’s fascist parties. He dismisses concerns over the potential demise of Israel’s democracy and its worsening reputation in the West, especially in the United States, insisting that when it comes to the future of the Jewish State, it is he, Netanyahu, who will have the last word – in Israel as in America.

That’s probably true. But it is not reassuring. It is catastrophic.

Washington has thus far remained largely silent even as several prominent American Jews spoke against the fascist menace that emerged from the Israeli ballot box. Rather than addressing concerns directly, the Biden administration spinelessly suggested that it would judge Netanyahu’s next government “based on its policies, not personalities”.

If Trump was, well, reckless, Biden is an accomplice. As for the Arab regimes which congratulated Netanyahu for his victory, I can’t quite find an appropriate word.

But make no mistake, the problem of fascism in Israel lies less with the extremist parties that will be part of the next government and more with their enablers – Netanyahu and his chauvinistic Likud party which long strove for a Jewish state dominating both sides of the Jordan River.

In his autobiographical monstrosity, Bibi, My Story, which is part self-aggrandisement, part propaganda and part fascist manifesto, Netanyahu dedicates a chapter to his late father, Benzion. He boasts of his record as editor of a publication aptly named Hayarden (The Jordan), and as a leading voice in the militant revisionist movement which insisted upon the Jewish right to sovereignty over the whole of historic Palestine. Revisionist fighters, who eventually founded Likud’s predecessor Herut, were infamous for their terrorist operations before and during the 1948 war of independence.

That year, a number of leading Jewish voices, including Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt and others, described the Herut Party in a public statement published in the New York Times newspaper as a “political party closely akin in its organisation, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to Nazi and Fascist parties”.

Like father like son. As preached by his father’s revisionist guru Vladimir Jabotinsky in his infamous 1923 essay, The Iron Wall, Netanyahu also believes that Jewish settlers must use military force to persuade the Palestinian Arabs to give up their rights to their homeland.

Netanyahu entered into politics with this conviction and slowly built himself up as the father of modern Israeli fascism. He started by demonising then-Prime Minister Yizhak Rabin for signing the Oslo Peace Accords and helping pave the way for his assassination by a Jewish fanatic. Once he became prime minister in 1996, he started grooming a new generation of fascist and racist leaders. The likes of Avigdor Lieberman, Gideon Sa’ar, Naftali Bennett, and Ayelet Shaked all matured under his wing in the Likud party and went on to form and lead their own far-right parties.

Ahead of the last election, Netanyahu also godfathered a new relationship between fascist-religious parties Otzma Yehudit and Religious Zionism, inviting their leaders, Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, to his family home to personally help bridge their differences. Netanyahu wanted to unite them into one electoral list so that they can enter the parliament and help carry him back into the prime minister’s office.

And he succeeded. Spectacularly.

While polls had predicted the two parties would fall short of the threshold necessary to enter the Knesset individually, united they went on to win 11 percent of the vote and 14 parliamentary seats in the 120-seat Knesset. Worse, Ben Gvir, who is like a Netanyahu on steroids, has fared particularly well among Israeli youth.

Netanyahu has also cultivated close relationships with Israel’s two main ultra-religious parties – ultra being the operating word – Shas and United Torah Judaism, which seek authority over religious, educational and social affairs in the Jewish state. Now, they will get everything they ever wanted and more.

In return, his new extremist partners have agreed to use their parliamentary majority to curtail the role of the judicial branch and end the supreme court’s oversight over the Knesset. This will not only allow Netanyahu to tighten his grip over the country, but also help him escape legal accountability following his indictment on charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust. These parties have already used their Knesset majority to pave the way for the head of Shas party, Aryeh Deri, to become a minister despite his conviction for bribery and tax evasion.

Corruption aside, Israel’s far-right fanatics are defined by some basic fascistic characteristics, such as belief in a divine and historic nationhood and tradition that is superior to any notion of modern democracy and citizenship; a pronounced sense of aggrievance and victimhood; militaristic tendencies; and cult worship with a golden Netanyahu medallion of loyalty to go with it.

They are also driven by an avowed racism towards the Palestinians, whom they view as interlopers in their promised land. Indeed, the new Netanyahu-led government vehemently opposes the establishment of a Palestinian state, supports the expansion of illegal Jewish settlement in the occupied Palestinian territories, strives to annex part if not all of the West Bank, and denies equality to the native Palestinian minority in the Jewish State. It will demand that the Palestinians admit their historic defeat and recognise the Jews’ exclusive ownership of the country in order to live in peace.

Much of this was predicted by the late professor Zeev Sternhell, a Holocaust survivor and Israel’s foremost authority on fascism, who explained in his 2018 essay titled “In Israel, Growing Fascism and a Racism Akin to Early Nazism” that these fascists “don’t wish to physically harm Palestinians. They only wish to deprive them of their basic human rights, such as self-rule in their own state and freedom from oppression.” Though the appointment of the sadistic Ben Gvir as minister of National Security is about wishing the Palestinians physical harm.

In short, those who continue to doubt that fascism is an impending danger for Israel, are not paying attention to how its coalescing chauvinistic forces are planning on ravaging whatever is left of Israel’s liberal institutions in order to turn the Jewish state into a full-fledged fascist theocracy.

This is no time for appeasement.

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modern Israeli fascism’.

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