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Israel's options

Let's transpose the inconclusive July 23 Israeli election results to Canada. Neither the Conservatives nor Liberals gain a majority.

Instead, a cluster of tiny new parties holds the necessary votes to form a coalition.

Rev. Jerry Fallwell holds two seats; Rev. Ernest Angley holds one; Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan has two seats, the Anti-Saloon League holds two and the NDP seven; and three are held by the Rev. Moon. To form a new government, Mr. Turner, let's say, has to make concessions to each and every one of these eccentric groups.

This absurd scenario is quite similar to what will likely happen in Israel. In order to form a government, Labor needs 16 more seats; Likud needs 20. These errant seats must come from the constellation of petty religious or ideological parties that gravitate around the Knesset like Saturn's moons.

The failure of Labor to gain a clear majority in the election means that hopes for some sort of negotiated settlement with the Arabs are gone. Instead, a shaky coalition, formed by either party, will probably produce little more than political and economic paralysis.

Since political parties to the right outnumber those on the left, there is also the possibility that Likud may somehow jury-rig a coalition by attracting a few moderate groups.

Somehow, I suspect, many of Likud's leaders would like to stick Labor with the mess of running Israel: 400% inflation, technical bankruptcy, insolvency and a worthless currency.

Likud, in spite of these problems, has one burning mission: To oversee the final colonization of the West Bank and its absorption, along with Golan, Gaza and perhaps southern Lebanon, into Greater Israel.

Likud does not trust the leftish Labor Party to carry out this crusade.

The upcoming power

If Likud stays in power, the rightward trend of the party will probably accelerate. The generals, retired terrorists and arms manufacturers that dominate the party can be expected to press for a larger Greater Israel, more military spending and an occasional morale-raising bash at the Arabs.

The real upcoming power in Likud is the irrepressible Ariel Sharon, victor of Shatilla and Sabra refugee camps. This bulldozer of a man, who sees himself as a Jewish Napoleon, clearly intends to shoulder aside the colorless Yitzhak Shamir and become prime minister.

A lot of Israelis would like to see this happen.

Not, of course, Labor supporters who are, if I may generalize, by and large, nice, polite, cultured European Jews who sit home and listen to Bach.

Some Likud supporters, by contrast, mob the streets screaming "Sharon, King of Israel," a scene that would not be out of place in Damascus or Teheran.

Most Likud supporters are Sephardics: Jews originally from Arab countries — or, if you will, Jewish Arabs. They are now in a majority in Israel and are dead set to prevent the snooty esthetes of Labor from gaining power.

Like all good Middle Easterners, Israel's Sephardics believe in a policy of blast thy neighbor before he blasts you.

Perhaps Labor will manage to form a coalition. Should it do so, the result will be profound inaction. Labor's leader, Shimon Peres, simply lacks the strength or charisma to move his unwieldy alliance and make things happen.

A curious aside

This leaves Israel with the alternative of a national unity government, something that appears improbable, or ineffectual coalitions that will shortly collapse, provoking a new round of elections.

Such a process could go on indefinitely — Italy has been doing it for 39 years.

As a curious aside, it is interesting to compare Israel's fragmented coalition politics with those of its archenemy, the PLO. The Palestinians have been no more capable of uniting their myriad factions and subfactions than the fractious Israelis.

The PLO has been unable to agree on a negotiating strategy with Israel because its parent body, the Palestine National Council, had to make all agreements unanimous. No two Palestinians appear able to agree on anything.

While we watch Labor or Likud try to attract fragments of the 16 tiny parties necessary to form a coalition, Israel will continue to slide into economic ruin.

Fortunately for Israel, \$19 billion of its foreign debt is held by Uncle Sam and that's like owing money to your indulgent father. You pay off a little at a time while asking for even more.

Unfortunately for Israel, the inconclusive election results provide the perfect excuse for doing absolutely nothing about the nation's grave problems.

No politician wants to face the painful necessity of dealing with 400% inflation, living far above the nation's means, running at full wartime economy, or cutting pervasive welfare programs.

Some people may find it distressing that the Labor party failed to gain a majority, feeling that a faint flicker of hope for some sort of peace in the Middle East has been extinguished.

In fact, neither party has made much progress towards solving the explosive situation in which two peoples want to inhabit the same piece of land.

Instead, we may confidently expect more eruptions and trouble in the Levant.