

Is it anti-democratic for Israeli MKs to be required to pledge loyalty to the state?

by Matthew Hausman



After the last Israeli election and before the installation of the current unity government, the Joint Arab List offered to support the Blue and White Alliance in forming a minority government and excluding PM Netanyahu and the right-wing block. In return, it was offered among other things the chair of the Knesset Labor, Welfare and Health Committee, which provides assistance for disabled IDF veterans and victims of terrorism.

This proposed deal struck many as incongruent, if not Kafkaesque, considering that some Joint List members have praised terrorists, engaged in anti-Zionist rhetoric, and

demanded an Arab “right of return” intended to outnumber Jews in the Jewish state. The empowerment of those members who deprecate the country they were elected to serve begs the question of whether the current MK pledge “to bear allegiance to the State of Israel and faithfully to discharge my mandate in the Knesset” adequately reflects a commitment to national values.

The left opposes the concept of loyalty oaths, while the right has in the past demanded them as a condition for citizenship. The Knesset debated loyalty oaths in 2010 and penalties for treason in 2011 to much international consternation. Loyalty and seditious speech remain issues; and patriotism in government – if nowhere else – is relevant when any parliamentarian expresses support for those who engage in terror.

Uproar ensues whenever Israelis debate national loyalty or penalties for sedition, which critics claim weaken democracy. But such measures are neither anti-democratic nor uncommon. They do not contravene the principles establishing Israel as a Jewish nation in the ancient homeland while guaranteeing the rights of all citizens.

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