

April 17, 2007

## **Democracy or Securiocracy?**

Ali Haider

*The Shin Bet is taking upon itself the suppression of public discourse and security officials comprise the majority on a humanitarian committee. Until now, this has occurred in the shadows. Now it is official.*

In a private conversation with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Shin Bet director Yuval Diskin defined Arab citizens as "a strategic threat" (*Maariv*, March 12). In the Shin Bet's response to a query from the newspaper *Fasal al-Makal*, it was stated that "the Shin Bet will thwart the activity of those seeking to harm the Jewish and democratic character of the State of Israel, even if their activity is legal," and that the Shin Bet's operations also include "foiling the subversive activity of various entities, even if their activity is conducted through means that democracy provides." The Shin Bet director's remarks came in response to the publication of the "Future Vision" and the "Democratic Constitution."

The use of the Shin Bet to steer public discourse and conduct it through its own eyeglasses make the debate about the type of government in Israel superfluous, and shifts the emphasis from "demos" (the people) to "security." It seems that the appropriate definition in this case for the regime in Israel is "securiocracy" rather than democracy.

Support for this argument can be found in the Knesset's approval of the extension of the Citizenship Law. This law restricts family unification between Palestinian citizens of the state and other Palestinians. Not only is it a racist law that violates the basic, elementary rights of human beings, but according to the new law, a committee will be established to discuss exceptional humanitarian cases – and on the committee, of course, there will be a majority of security officials.

These statements by the Shin Bet, together with granting special weight to security officials in reviewing humanitarian cases, should arouse concern in every enlightened person. Since the establishment of the state, the Shin Bet has penetrated all areas of life in the Arab population, with the aim of supervising and controlling. But this is the first time that these things are being opening declared, in order to intimidate the Arab population and its leaders.

No less troubling is the fact that the prime minister did not voice opposition or disassociate himself from the remarks of the Shin Bet director, despite being present at the meeting. This raises the suspicion that he agrees with these statements. The Arab public is concerned that in light of its definition as a strategic threat, its affairs will be under the purview of the Minister for

Strategic Threats, Avigdor Lieberman, who is known for his racist views and for his plan to disengage from the Wadi Ara area. An up-to-date survey conducted by Haifa University indicates that 62% of the Arab citizens fear that the Triangle will be annexed to the Palestinian Authority. This fear intensifies in light of growing racism toward the Arab citizenry. A survey by the Center Against Racism and Defamation found that 31% of the Jews feel hatred when hearing the Arabic language and 37.4% responded that "Arab culture is inferior."

The Shin Bet bases its statements on the principle of a "defending democracy." The catch is that democracy in Israel has no reason to defend itself from the Arab citizenry. On the contrary, Arab citizens need to defend themselves against these distorted perceptions, which denigrate freedom of expression and democracy.

The prime minister, who recently made the public declaration that he is in his office "in order to work and lead," should take the authority back into his own hands. He should oppose the Shin Bet's remarks, emphasize the importance in achieving equality and respond to the call from the Arab public to conduct an open and frank dialogue, driven by a sense of responsibility for the future, and based on full partnership and equality between the state's two national groups, with a commitment to universal principles and the principles of equality, justice and liberty.

*The writer is the co-executive directive of Sikkuy – The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality in Israel.*