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## A surreal review

By Yehuda Ben-Meir

The conduct of State Comptroller Micha Lindenstrauss has raised many eyebrows since his appointment, including those of his predecessors in the post. The comptroller's style, his fondness for publicity, his close cooperation with the media and politicians, and the sense, shared by many good people, that the comptroller is waging a personal war against the prime minister – all these have added nothing to the comptroller's dignity nor contributed to strengthening the institution of state oversight, a vital instrument in any developed country.

But the comptroller really went overboard in his decision to review the efforts to secure the release of the spy Jonathan Pollard from prison in America. This review is not only superfluous, but also ridiculous, utterly irrational and pointless, and exceeds the purview of state control according to every standard.

The state comptroller is supposed to ascertain whether there has been a violation of ethical conduct, or proper administration, and whether government authorities are operating in an efficient and economic manner in providing services for the country's citizens. What does all this have to do with the Pollard matter?

Here we have a delicate political issue, convoluted and complex, which the elected government, and first and foremost the prime minister, has the right to handle exclusively. Is it conceivable that the comptroller is the one to determine whether, when, and how the prime minister raises the issue of Pollard's release before the president of the United States? Does the prime minister owe the comptroller an account of his conversations with the U.S. president, or of the measures he is or is not taking on a politically sensitive matter of the first order such as Pollard's, or on any other political-security matter?

The prime minister must account for his conduct in political matters only to the Knesset and the people – and the people will have their say at election time. These issues, by definition, are not and never have been within the comptroller's jurisdiction. Otherwise it would be possible to conclude that every state comptroller who preceded the current one, and who never dreamed of dealing with matters such as these, betrayed his duty. The comptroller appears to be under the illusion that he represents the people, that he is some sort of supreme judge to whose scrutiny everything done in the country must be subjected, particularly every activity by the prime minister.

Some will argue that it was not the comptroller who made the decision about this review, but rather the Knesset's State Control Committee. But that claim is flimsy and deceptive. True, several

members of the State Control Committee excel at demagoguery, populism, and a cheap and grating style, but without the comptroller's cooperation the Knesset committee would not have dared to obligate him to conduct such a review.

There have been reports that the comptroller will soon issue a hard-hitting report that the premier sinned and failed by giving precedence in his conversation with President George W. Bush to the Iranian nuclear program, the peace process, and the U.S.'s contribution to bolstering the Israel Defense Forces, over the Pollard matter. The prime minister would therefore be responsible for Pollard's not being released. I will not be surprised if the comptroller transfers the material to the attorney general and demands a criminal investigation for suspected breach of trust.

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