

# A Putsch Against War

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**G**ENERALS AND SECRET police chiefs get together for an attack on the politicians.

In some countries, they arrest the president, occupy government offices and TV stations and annul the constitution. They then publish Communique No. 1, explaining the dire need to save the nation from perdition and promising democracy, elections etc.

In other countries, they do it more quietly. They just inform the elected leaders that, if they don't desist from their disastrous policies, the officers will make their views public and precipitate their downfall.

Such officers are generally called a "junta", the Spanish word for "committee" used by South American generals. Their method is usually called a "putsch", a German-Swiss term for a sudden blow.<sup>1</sup>

What almost all such coups have in common is that their instigators thrive on the demagoguery of war. The politicians are invariably accused of cowardice in face of the enemy, failure to defend national honor, and such.

Not in Israel. In our country we are now seeing a kind of verbal uprising against the elected politicians by a group of current and former army generals, foreign intelligence and internal security chiefs. All of them condemn the government's threat to start a war against Iran, and some of them condemn the government's failure to negotiate with the Palestinians for peace.

Only in Israel.

IT STARTED with the most unlikely candidate to lead such a rebellion: the ex-Mossad chief, Meir Dagan.

For eight years, longer than most of his predecessors, Dagan led the Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service, comparable to the British MI6. ("Mossad" means "institute". The official name is "The Institute for intelligence and Special Operations".)

Nobody ever accused Dagan of pacifism. During his term, the Mossad carried out many assassinations, several against Iranian scientists, as well as cyber attacks. A protégé of Ariel Sharon, he was considered a champion of the most aggressive policies.

And here, after leaving office, he speaks out in the harshest terms against the government's plans for an attack on Iran's nuclear installations. Not mincing words, he said: "This is the stupidest idea I have heard in my life."

This week he was overshadowed by the recently relieved chief of the Shin Bet.<sup>2</sup> It is equivalent to the British MI5, but deals mostly with the Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories.

For six years, Yuval Diskin was the silent chief of the silent service. His shaved head could be seen entering and leaving

meetings of secret committees. He is considered the real father of "targeted eliminations", and his service has been widely accused of extensive use of torture. Nobody ever accused him of being soft on Arabs.

And now he has spoken out. Choosing a most unusual venue – a get together of some two dozen pensioners in a small-town cafe – he let fly.

According to Diskin – and who would know better? – Israel is now led by two incompetent politicians with messianic delusions and a poor grasp of reality. Their plan to attack Iran is leading to a world-wide catastrophe. Not only will it fail to prevent the production of an Iranian atom bomb, but, on the contrary, it will hasten this effort, this time with the support of the world community.

Going further than Dagan, he stated that the only factor preventing peace negotiations with the Palestinians is Netanyahu himself. Israel can make peace with Mahmoud Abbas at any time, and missing this historic opportunity will bring disaster upon Israel.

As chief of the Shin Bet, Diskin was the No. 1 official government expert on Palestinians. His agency receives and collates all the evidence, spy reports, interrogation results and information gathered from listening devices.

Leaving no room for doubt, Diskin said that he knew Netanyahu and Barak from close up, did not trust them and thought they were unfit to lead the nation in a crisis. He also said that they are deliberately deceiving the people. He did not omit to mention that they live in extreme luxury.

Anyone who thought that these accusers were lone voices, and that the whole choir of current and past security chiefs would rise and condemn them unanimously, was disappointed. One after another these experts were quoted by the media as agreeing with the two in substance, though not necessarily on their style. Not a single one questioned their assertions or denied what they said.

The current Chief of Staff and the Mossad and Shin Bet chiefs let it be known that they share the views of the two on Iran. Almost all their predecessors, including all the recent military Chiefs of Staff, told the media that they agree, too. Suddenly there was a united front of experienced security leaders against a war with Iran.

THE COUNTER-ATTACK was not late in coming. The entire battery of politicians and media hacks went into action.

They did what Israelis almost always do: when faced with serious problems or serious arguments, they don't get to grips with the matter itself, but select some minor detail and belabor it endlessly.

Practically no one tried to disprove the assertions of the

<sup>1</sup>Yes, the Swiss actually had revolts some 170 years ago.

<sup>2</sup>Shin Bet and Shabak are different ways of pronouncing the initials of the official Hebrew name "General Security Service."

officers, neither concerning the proposed attack on Iran nor concerning the Palestinian issue. They focused on the speakers, not on what they said.

Both Dagan and Diskin, it was asserted, were embittered because their terms of office were not extended. They felt humiliated. They are venting their personal frustration. They are speaking out of sheer spite.

If they did not trust the Prime Minister, why did they not get up and resign while they were in office? Why didn't they speak out before? If this was a matter of life and death, why did they wait?

Alternatively, why don't they continue to shut up? Where is their sense of responsibility? Why do they help the enemy? Why don't they speak only behind closed doors?

Diskin, it was added, has no idea about Iran. It was not in his area of responsibility at all. Dagan knew about Iran, but had a limited view. Only Netanyahu and Barak knew all the facts and the entire spectrum of opportunities and risks.

Sources "close to the Prime Minister's office" also had another explanation: Dagan and Diskin, as well as their predecessors, were just stupid. Taken together with Dagan's and Diskin's assertion that Netanyahu and Barak are not rational (and perhaps not quite mentally balanced) this means that our national security depends entirely on a group of irrational and stupid leaders – and that this has been the case for years.

A frightening thought: what if everything they say about each other is true?

THE MAN accused by his security advisers of messianic tendencies was exposed to personal scrutiny by another event this week.

His father, Ben-Zion Netanyahu, died at age 102, having remained of clear mind to the end. At the public funeral, he was eulogized by Binyamin. As could be expected, it was a kitschy speech. The son addressed his dead father in the second person – ("You taught me"... "You formed my character" etc) - a vulgar practice I find particularly distasteful. He also shed tears on camera.

There is no doubt that the father had a huge influence on his son. He was a professor of history, whose whole intellectual life was centered on one topic: the Spanish inquisition – a traumatic

chapter in Jewish history comparable only to the Holocaust.

Ben-Zion Netanyahu was an extreme rightist, obsessed by the idea that Jews might be exterminated at any moment, and therefore cannot trust any Goy. He held Menachem Begin in contempt, considering him a softy, and never joined his party. His intellectual attitude was reinforced by a personal trauma: his eldest son, Yoni, the commander of the spectacular Entebbe raid, was the only soldier killed in this operation.

It seems that he didn't have such a high opinion of his second son. He once remarked publicly that Binyamin was unfit to be prime minister, but would make a good foreign minister – an uncannily accurate judgment, if one sees the job of the foreign minister as marketing.

The home in which "Bibi" grew up was not a very happy one. The father was a deeply embittered man. As a historian, he was never accepted by the academic world in Jerusalem, who disavowed his theories.<sup>3</sup> Not getting a professorship in Jerusalem, the father emigrated to the US, where Binyamin grew up. The father never forgave the Israeli establishment.

The myth of the Great Historian laboring at his titanic task was a daily reality at home, in America and, later, back in Jerusalem. The three sons had to walk on tiptoe, not being allowed to make any noise that could disturb the great man, nor to bring their friends home.

All this shaped the character and world view of "Bibi" – the specter of imminent national annihilation, the role model of the fiercely rightist father, the shadow of the older and much more admired brother. When Binyamin now speaks endlessly about the coming Second Holocaust and his historical role in preventing it, this need not be just a ploy to divert attention from the Palestinian issue or to safeguard his political survival. He may – frightening thought!!! – actually believe it.

The picture that emerges is exactly that painted by Yuval Diskin: a Holocaust-obsessed fantasist, out of contact with reality, distrusting all Goyim, trying to follow in the footsteps of a rigid and extremist father – altogether a dangerous person to lead a nation in a real crisis.

Yet this is the man who, according to all opinion polls, is going to win the upcoming elections, just four months from now.

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<sup>3</sup>Mainly, that the Inquisition did not persecute the Marranos – Jews who had accepted Christianity rather than leave Spain – because they practiced Judaism in secret, but out of pure anti-Semitism. This was an attack on one of the most cherished tenets of Jewish mythology: that these Jews had remained true to their faith to the point of sacrificing their lives at the stake.