

# Bibi and the Yo-Yos

Uri Avnery

May 28, 2011

IT WAS all rather disgusting.

There they were, the members of the highest legislative bodies of the world's only superpower, flying up and down like so many yo-yos, applauding wildly, every few minutes or seconds, the most outrageous lies and distortions of Binyamin Netanyahu.

It was worse than the Syrian parliament during a speech by Bashar Assad, where anyone not applauding could find himself in prison. Or Stalin's Supreme Soviet, when showing less than sufficient respect could have meant death.

What the American Senators and Congressmen feared was a fate worse than death. Anyone remaining seated or not applauding wildly enough could have been caught on camera – and that amounts to political suicide. It was enough for one single congressman to rise and applaud, and all the others had to follow suit. Who would dare not to?

The sight of these hundreds of parliamentarians jumping up and clapping their hands, again and again and again and again, with the Leader graciously acknowledging with a movement of his hand, was reminiscent of other regimes. Only this time it was not the local dictator who compelled this adulation, but a foreign one.

The most depressing part of it was that there was not a single lawmaker – Republican or Democrat – who dared to resist. When I was a 9 year old boy in Germany, I dared to leave my right arm hanging by my side when all my schoolmates raised theirs in the Nazi salute and sang Hitler's anthem. Is there no one in Washington DC who has that simple courage? Is it really Washington IOT – Israel Occupied Territory – as the anti-Semites assert?

Many years ago I visited the Senate hall and was introduced to the leading Senators of the time. I was profoundly shocked. After being brought up in deep respect for the Senate of the United States, the country of Jefferson and Lincoln, I was faced with a bunch of pompous asses, many of them nincompoops who had not the slightest idea what they were talking about. I was told that it was their assistants who really understood matters.

SO WHAT did the great man say to this august body?

It was a finely crafted speech, using all the standard tricks of the trade – the dramatic pause, the raised finger, the little witticisms, the sentences repeated for effect. Not a great orator, by any means, no Winston Churchill, but good enough for this audience and this occasion.

But the message could be summed up in one word: No.

After their disastrous debacle in 1967, the leaders of the Arab world met in Khartoum and adopted the famous Three No's: NO recognition of Israel, NO [] negotiation with Israel, NO peace with Israel. It was just what the Israeli leadership wanted. They could go happily about their business of entrenching the occupation and building settlements.

Now Netanyahu is having his Khartoum. NO return to the 1967 borders. NO Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem. NO to even a symbolic return of some refugees. NO military withdrawal from the Jordan River - meaning that the future Palestinian state would be completely surrounded by the Israeli armed forces. NO negotiation with a Palestinian government "supported" by Hamas, even if there are no Hamas members in the government itself. And so on – NO. NO. NO.

The aim is clearly to make sure that no Palestinian leader could even dream of entering negotiations, even in the unlikely event that he were ready to meet yet another condition: to recognize Israel as "the nation-state of the Jewish people" – which includes the dozens of Jewish Senators and Congressmen who were the first to jump up and down, up and down, like so many marionettes.

Netanyahu, along with his associates and political bedfellows, is determined to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state by all and any means. That did not start with the present government – it is an aim deeply embedded in Zionist ideology and practice. The founders of the movement set the course, David Ben-Gurion acted to implement it in 1948, in collusion with King Abdallah of Jordan. Netanyahu is just adding his bit.

"No Palestinian state" means: no peace, not now, not ever. Everything else is, as the Americans say, baloney. All the pious phrases about happiness for our children, prosperity for the Palestinians, peace with the entire Arab world, a bright future for all, are just that – pure baloney. At least some in the audience must have noticed that, even with all that jumping.

NETANYAHU SPAT in Obama's eye. The Republicans in the audience must have enjoyed that. Perhaps some Democrats too.

It can be assumed that Obama did not. So what will he do now?

There is a Jewish joke about a hungry pauper who entered an inn and demanded food. Otherwise, he threatened, he would do what his father did. The frightened innkeeper fed him, and in the end asked timidly: "But what did your father do?" Swallowing the last morsel, the man answered: "He went to sleep hungry."

There is a good chance that Obama will do the same. He will pretend that the spittle on his cheek is rainwater. His promise to prevent a UN General Assembly recognition of the State of Palestine deprived him of his main leverage over Netanyahu.

Somebody in Washington seems to be floating the idea of Obama coming to Jerusalem and addressing the Knesset. It would be direct retaliation – Obama talking with the Israeli public over the head of the Prime Minister, as Netanyahu has just addressed the American public over the head of the President.

It would be an exciting event. As a former Member of the Knesset, I would be invited. But I would not advise it. I proposed it a year ago. Today I would not.

The obvious precedent is Anwar Sadat's historic speech in the Knesset. But there is really no comparison. Egypt and Israel were still officially at war. Going to the capital of the enemy was without precedent, the more so only four years after a bloody battle. It was an act that shook Israel, eliminating in one stroke a whole set of mental patterns and opening the mind for new ones. Not one of us will ever forget the moment when the door of the airplane swung open and there he was, handsome and serene, the leader of the enemy.

Later, when I interviewed Sadat at his home, I told him: "I live on the main street of Tel Aviv. When you came out of that plane, I looked out of the window. Nothing moved in the street, except one cat – and it was probably looking for a television set."

A visit by Obama will be quite different. He will, of course, be received politely – without the obsessive jumping and clapping – though probably heckled by Knesset Members of the extreme Right. But that will be all.

Sadat's visit was a deed in itself. Not so a visit by Obama.

He will not shake Israeli public opinion, unless he comes with a concrete plan of action – a detailed peace plan, with a detailed timetable, backed by a clear determination to see it through, whatever the political cost.

Another nice speech, however beautifully phrased, just will not do. After this week's deluge of speeches, we have had enough. Speeches can be important if they accompany actions, but they are no substitute for action. Churchill's speeches helped to shape history – but only because they reflected historic deeds. Without the Battle of Britain, without Normandy, without El Alamein, those speeches would have sounded ridiculous.

Now, with all the roads blocked, there remains only one path remains open: the recognition of the State of Palestine by the United Nations coupled with nonviolent mass action by the Palestinian people against the occupation. The Israeli peace forces will also play their part, because the fate of Israel depends on peace as much as the fate of Palestine.

Sure, the US will try to obstruct, and Congress will jump up and down, But the Israeli-Palestinian spring is on its way.