

His Father's Boy

WHICH IS the real Netanyahu?

- Bibi the weakling, the invertebrate, who always gives in to pressure, who zigzags to the left and to the right, depending whether the pressure comes from the US or from his coalition partners?

- The tricky Likud chief, who is afraid that Avigdor Ivett Lieberman might succeed in pushing him towards the Center and displace him as the leader of the entire Right?

- Netanyahu, the man of principle, who is determined to prevent at any cost the setting up of the State of Palestine, and is therefore using every possible ruse to sabotage real negotiations?

The real Netanyahu – stand up!

Hey, wait a minute, what's going on here? Do I see all three of them rising?

THE FIRST Netanyahu is the one who meets the eye. A leaf in the wind. The con man without principles and with plenty of tricks, whose sole aim is to survive in power.

This Netanyahu practically invites pressure on himself. Barack Obama pressured him, so he agreed to the settlement freeze – or the perceived settlement freeze. In order to avoid a crisis with the settlers, he promised them that after the agreed ten months, the construction boom would be resumed with full vigor.

The settlers pressured him, and he did indeed resume the building at the appointed time, in spite of the intense pressure from Obama, who pushed for an extension of the moratorium for another two months. Why two months? Because the congressional elections take place on November 2, and Obama desperately needs to avoid a crisis with the Jewish establishment before that. For this end, he is ready to sell Netanyahu the whole inventory – arms, money, political support, a set of guarantees about the outcome of the negotiations that have not yet even begun. Sixty days! sixty days! my kingdom for sixty days!

Netanyahu is now zigzagging between these pressures, trying to find out which is the stronger, which one to give in to, how much and when. In his dreams he probably feels like the Baron von Munchhausen, who found himself on a narrow path, with a lion behind him getting ready to spring and a crocodile in front of him opening its awesome jaws. (If I remember right, the baron ducked and the lion jumped straight into the jaws of the reptile.)

This is the great hope of Netanyahu. AIPAC will help to deliver Obama a crushing defeat in the elections, Obama will deliver a crushing blow to the settlers, and Baron von Netanyahu will rub his hands and survive to fight another day.

Is this the real Netanyahu? For sure.

BUT THE second Netanyahu is no less real. This is Tricky Bibi who is trying to out-fox Tricky Ivett.

Lieberman astounded the UN General Assembly, when, as the Foreign Minister of Israel, he addressed this august body from the rostrum.

Because our Foreign Minister did not rise to defend the policies of his country, as did his colorless colleagues. Quite the opposite: from the UN rostrum he vigorously attacked the policy of his own government, giving it short shrift.

The official policy of the Government of Israel is to conduct direct negotiations with the Palestinian leadership, in order to achieve a final peace treaty within one year.

Nonsense, said the Foreign Minister of that same government. Rubbish. There is no chance at all of a peace treaty, not within a year and not within a hundred years. What's needed is a Long-Term-Interim-Agreement. In other words, the continuation of the occupation without time limits.

Why did Lieberman give this performance? He was not addressing the few delegates who had remained in the UN assembly hall, but the Israeli public. He challenged Netanyahu: either dismiss me or pretend that the spittle on your face is rain.

But Netanyahu did not dismiss and did not react, except for a weak statement that Lieberman was not expressing his views. And this why? Clearly, if Netanyahu were to kick Lieberman's party out of the government and bring in Tzipi Livni's Kadima Party, Lieberman would do to Netanyahu what Netanyahu did to Yitzhak Rabin. He would declare him a traitor selling out the fatherland, an enemy of the settlements. His devotees would parade around with posters of Netanyahu in SS uniform or wearing a keffiyeh, while others performed arcane Kabbalah rituals to bring about his death.

Lieberman would raise the flag of the Right, split the Likud and take sole possession of the entire Israeli Right. He believes that this is the way to become Prime Minister.

Netanyahu understands this perfectly. That's why he is restraining himself. As a man who grew up in the United States he probably remembers what Lyndon Johnson said about J. Edgar Hoover: Better to have him inside the tent pissing out, then outside the tent pissing in.

AND PERHAPS this Netanyahu – the second one – does not really object to the plan outlined by Lieberman at the UN assembly.

The Foreign Minister was not content with rejecting peace and bringing up the idea of the Long-Term-Interim-Agreement. He described the solution he has in mind. Not surprisingly, it is the electoral platform of his party, Israel Beytenu ("Israel Our Home"). In essence: Israel, the "Nation-State-Of-The-Jewish-People", will be free of Arabs, or, translated into

German, Araberrein.

But Lieberman is a humane person, and does not advocate (at least in public) ethnic cleansing. He does not propose a third Naqbah (after the 1948 Palestinian catastrophe and the 1967 expulsion). No, his solution is far more creative: he will separate from Israel the Arab towns and villages along the Eastern border, the so-called "triangle", from Umm al-Fahm in the North to Kufr Kassem in the South. This area, together with its inhabitants and lands, would be joined to the territory of the Palestinian Authority, and in return Israel would annex the Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

That raises, of course, several questions. First, what about the Arab concentrations in Galilee, which include dozens of villages, towns like Nazareth and Shefa Amr, and the Arab population in the mixed towns, Haifa and Acre? Lieberman does not propose to transfer them too. Neither does he propose to give up East Jerusalem, with its quarter of a million Arab residents. If that is the case, is he prepared to leave in the "Nation-State-Of-The-Jewish-People" more than three quarters of a million Arabs? Or does he dream at night, lying in his bed, of conducting ethnic cleansing after all?

A second question: to whom will he transfer the Arab towns and villages of the 'triangle'? Without a peace treaty, there will be no Palestinian state. Instead, there will remain the Palestinian Authority, with its few small enclaves all subject to Israeli occupation. The Long-Term-Interim-Agreement would leave this situation, more or less, intact. Meaning that this area, now part of Israel, would become a territory under Israeli occupation. Its inhabitants would lose their status as Israeli citizens and become an occupied population, devoid of civil rights and human rights.

As far as is known, not a single Arab leader in Israel agrees to that. Even in the past, when it seemed that Lieberman agreed to the establishment of a Palestinian state and wanted to transfer to it the Arab areas of Israel, not a single Arab leader in Israel agreed. The Arab citizens of Israel, a population approaching a million and a half, are indeed a part of the Palestinian people, but they are also a part of the Israeli population.

Netanyahu is certainly afraid of Lieberman, but can it be that he did not condemn Lieberman's UN speech because he secretly shares his views?

In any case, this week Netanyahu announced that he is adopting Lieberman's baby, the demand that non-Jewish (meaning Arab) people who wish to obtain Israeli citizenship swear allegiance not just to the State of Israel and its laws, as is usual, but to "Israel as a Jewish and democratic state". This is a nonsensical and meaningless addition, solely devised to provoke the 20% of Israelis who are Arabs. One might as well

demand candidates for US citizenship swear allegiance to the "United States as a White Anglo-Saxon Christian and democratic nation".

BUT IT is quite possible that there is a third Netanyahu, who stands taller than the others.

This is the Netanyahu who always believed in a Greater Israel, and who has never given up the ideology which he suckled with his mother's milk.

The veteran Israeli journalist Gideon Samet goes further: he believes that Binyamin Netanyahu's main motivation is his total obedience to his old father.

Ben-Zion Netanyahu is now 100 years old, and in full possession of his mental faculties. He is a professor of history, born in Warsaw, who came to Palestine in 1920 and changed his name from Mileikowsky to Netanyahu ("God has Given"). He has always been on the extreme right-wing fringe. Ben-Zion Netanyahu spent several periods of his life in the US, where his three sons grew up. When in 1947 the UN General Assembly adopted the plan to partition Palestine between a Jewish state and an Arab state, father Netanyahu signed a petition, published in the New York Times, condemning the resolution in the strongest terms. Returning to Israel, he was not accepted into the new Freedom Party (the forerunner of Likud), because his views were too extreme even for Menachem Begin's tastes. He claims that he was barred from a professorship in the Hebrew University because of his opinions, and his bitterness about this poisoned the atmosphere at home.

The professor's special field is Spanish Jewry, with the emphasis on the Spanish Inquisition. He condemns the Jews who were baptized (the Marranos) and says that the great majority of them were eager to be assimilated into Christian Spanish society, contrary to the official heroic myth, which says that they continued to practice the religion of their forefathers in secret.

When Netanyahu the son transferred a part of Hebron to the Palestinian Authority, his father rebuked him and stated publicly that he was unfit for the job of Prime Minister, fit at most to serve as Foreign Secretary. But the son made a huge effort to remain true to his father's views, and that is the main motivation for his policy. According to Samet, he would not dare to face his father and tell him that he had given away parts of Eretz Israel.

I tend to accept this version. Netanyahu will never agree to be responsible for the establishment of the State of Palestine, will never conduct serious peace negotiations – unless under extreme duress. That is all there is to it, everything else is hollow talk.

If the real Netanyahu were called to stand up, all three, and perhaps a few more, would rise. But the third one is the most real.