

# Lucky Bibi

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“GIVE ME GENERALS who have luck!” Napoleon once exclaimed.

Which reminds one of Goethe's Faust, who complained that “the fools never realize how luck is connected with talent.”

Luck can be a great benefactor. It can also be the cause of catastrophes. I seem to remember that one of those evil Greek gods or goddesses destroyed their human victims by making them lucky.

Luck goes with hubris. And hubris leads to nemesis.

TAKE, JUST for example, Binyamin Netanyahu. A very lucky politician—up to now, at least.

His predecessors were confronted with a united front of Arab states, which were determined to destroy Israel, or at least to help the Palestinian people to achieve freedom and independence.

In 1948, all the armies of the neighboring Arab states entered Palestine the day after the termination of British rule and the foundation of the State of Israel. In 1967, three of these states tried again, with catastrophic results (for them). In 1973, two of them attacked from the South and from the North, and were repulsed only after heavy fighting.

It was always an axiom that if the opportunity arises, all these armies would attack Israel again, in order to compel us to retreat from the territories we had occupied in 1967 and help the Palestinian brethren to set up, at long last, their own national state.

And look around now. Not the slightest Arab threat to Israel has remained. All the neighboring Arabs are totally occupied with killing each other.

Syria, the home of Arab nationalism, used to be the most determined enemy of Israel. Its army was considered the most efficient Arab force. What has remained of that?

The other day a friend asked me in despair to explain to him who is fighting who in Syria. I mentioned President Bashar al-Assad's army, the various Islamist militias fighting against Assad and against each other, the Islamic Caliphate (Daesh) fighting against all these and against the Kurdish forces, while Iran and Hezbollah support Assad against the USA, but help the USA against Daesh, with Turkey supporting Daesh but also helping the USA, which is cooperating with Russia against Daesh, while

fighting against the Syrian Kurds, which are supported by the USA...

After five minutes my friend gave up. “Too complicated for me,” he said.

All the time, Israeli generals and politicians look on, trying to hide their glee and pretending to be horrified by the awful pictures of atrocities and horrors coming out of Aleppo, once a center of Arab culture and commerce (and a highly respected ancient Jewish community).

Netanyahu has done absolutely nothing to create this situation, but he is one of the main beneficiaries. No threat to Israel will emanate from Syria for a long, long time to come, while we absorb the Syrian Golan Heights which we conquered and annexed after 1967.

SAUDI ARABIA considers itself the heart of the Islamic world, since it controls its two most holy places, Mecca and Medina. The Saudis finance fanatical Sunni Islamic cells all over the world, its imams are among the most extreme calling for the removal of that infidel abomination, Israel.

But now Saudi Arabia is fully occupied with its struggle against its main competitor in the Islamic region—Iran. The brutal war in Yemen is part of this. It needs all the allies it can get. And who is there? Lo and behold—accursed infidel Israel.

The Saudi princes—there are literally thousands of them—are now almost openly flirting with the “Jewish state”. And where Saudi Arabia goes, there go all the other Arab Gulf states—Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Dubai, you name them. All bloated with money. All discreetly cooperating with Israel now.

Saudi imams have already decreed that Jews are a lesser danger to Islam than the Shiites, the heretical rulers of Iran. So it is quite acceptable to cooperate with Israel against Iran.

What is good and pious for Saudi Arabia is even better for Egypt, the largest Arab state and people. We have fought several wars against Egypt, I was a soldier in the first of them and remember once crossing a large field entirely covered with Egyptian bodies on my own.

Almost 30 years ago, Israel signed a peace treaty with Egypt, but relations have remained cool, almost frozen. The Egyptian people have a strong feeling of responsibility

ity for their poor relatives, the Palestinians. They don't like what Israel is doing to them.

But between the two governments, the ice is now melting. True, the Egyptian judoka in Rio refused to shake hands with the Israeli victor and the Egyptian foreign minister said some dubious words after a visit to Israel, but behind the scenes relations are close and getting closer, in a joint effort to choke Hamas in the Gaza Strip, which is supported by Iran and all the other Palestinians.

Netanyahu has done absolutely nothing to bring all this about. But it all happened on his endless watch. Luck, sheer luck.

ON THE economic front, Netanyahu's luck has been equally benign. Sales of Israeli products and services are expanding in Asia, making up for slight losses in Europe and the US. The economic influence of BDS has hardly been felt.<sup>1</sup>

Israel's economic successes have a large effect on the country's mood. Most people who criticize Netanyahu's policies live a comfortable life. Comfortable people don't make revolutions. They vent their anger in private conversations among friends, or on the social media. A few write articles in "Haaretz". Thank God for Haaretz.

They don't mount the barricades.

At present, there is no effective opposition to Netanyahu. The Labor party leaders, heirs of Ben-Gurion and Rabin, are totally bankrupt, with no substitutes in sight. Meretz is a nice little island, content to be left alone. The Arab party is beyond the pale, much to its own satisfaction.

There are many dozens of peace and human rights organizations which do admirable work, fighting the occupation, assisting the Palestinians, defending democracy in many ways, sometimes at their own risk. Almost every week a new one appears on the scene, raises the flag and calls adherents to join.

Israel can be proud of these young idealists, but they have no political ambitions and therefore not the slightest influence on Israel's leadership, which makes the decisions.

The Knesset is now in such a sorry state, that I personally avoid it. As a former member, I am invited to all the numerous ceremonial sessions. I never accept. Not even to look from close up at the dozens of rightist infantile politicians who spend their time (and the tax-payer's money) submitting ridiculous bills, such as those "protecting the flag". This forbids the president of the state to take part in any public event in which the Israeli flag is not prominently displayed. One wonders whether any serious work can be done by this Knesset.

ALL THIS has caused many well-meaning Israelis

to despair of changing Israel from the inside and to put their trust in "foreign pressure". The hope is that "the world"—the US, the UN, the EU or any other compilation of letters—"compel" Israel to change course.

How? By political condemnations, economic sanctions, scientific boycotts and such.

That is, of course, a convenient hope. It compels nobody in Israel to do anything.

Many years ago I was invited to take part in an international forum in Portugal about peace in the Middle East. Another invitee was the Spanish statesman, Miguel Moratinos. In my speech I accused the European union of forsaking us in our fight for Israeli-Palestinian peace, instead of intervening forcefully to compel the Israeli government to change course.

Instead of the usual apologies, Moratinos turned on me and said something like "What kind of impertinence is this, asking Europe to do your job? It is up to the Israelis to change their government. Don't go around complaining to others about your government—go and do something about it!"

I answered angrily, but in my heart I knew that he was right. Why should anyone care? Why should Barack Obama expend political capital to save Israel from itself, when we ourselves don't do it? Why should Europe impose sanctions on Israel and be accused of anti-Semitism, when there is no one in the Knesset who organizes real, active opposition?

In the present ridiculous election campaign in the US, both candidates (somebody called them "the crazy one and the corrupt one") compete in flattering the Israeli government. Donald Trump even threatens to visit us soon.<sup>2</sup>

But this being so, placing any hopes on "American pressure" or "foreign pressure" is ridiculous. No foreigner gives a damn about Netanyahu, lucky or otherwise. They tell us, in so many words: "You elected him, you dispose of him."

Vladimir Putin, that ultimate cynic, is even ready to heap compliments on his head, in order to spite his Western colleagues. Why not? He can do quite well with or without Netanyahu. Nichevo.

SO WE are stuck with Netanyahu. Another ancient Greek proverb said that "those whom the Gods wish to destroy, they first make mad." This could explain the Israeli occupation.

Unless a new political force arises in Israel to change course, in spite of all the luck. I wish I knew which god to address.

<sup>1</sup>The extensive campaign of BDS would have been much more successful if they had concentrated on boycotting the products of the settlements. The Israeli peace organization Gush Shalom, to which I belong, started this boycott almost 20 years ago, with the declared aim of separating the citizens of Israel proper from the settlements and isolating the settlers. BDS has the opposite effect, strengthening Netanyahu and the Right.

<sup>2</sup>If I were an American, I would be ashamed. Is this really the best a nation of 320 million can produce?