

Mad or Crazy?

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August 18, 2012

BINYAMIN NETANYAHU MAY be crazy, but he is not mad.

Ehud Barak may be mad, but he is not crazy.

Ergo: Israel will not attack Iran.

I HAVE said so before, and I shall say so again, even after the endless talk about it. Indeed no war has been talked about so much before it happened. To quote the classic movie line: *“If you have to shoot, shoot. Don’t talk!”*

In all Netanyahu’s bluster about the inevitable war, one sentence stands out: *“In the Committee of Inquiry after the war, I shall take upon myself the sole responsibility, I and I alone!”*

A very revealing statement.

First of all, committees of inquiry are appointed only after a military failure. There was no such committee after the 1948 War of Independence, nor after the 1956 Sinai War or the 1967 Six-day War. There were, however, committees of inquiry after the 1974 Yom Kippur war and the 1982 and 2006 Lebanon Wars. By conjuring up the specter of another such committee, Netanyahu unconsciously treats this war as an inevitable failure.

Second, under Israeli law, the entire Government of Israel is the Commander in Chief of the armed forces. Under another law, all ministers bear “collective responsibility”. TIME magazine, which is becoming more ridiculous by the week, may crown “King Bibi”, but we still have no monarchy. Netanyahu is no more than primus inter pares.

Third, in his statement Netanyahu expresses boundless contempt for his fellow ministers. They don’t count.

Netanyahu considers himself a modern day Winston Churchill. I don’t seem to remember Churchill announcing, upon assuming office, *“I take responsibility for the coming defeat”*. Even in the desperate situation of that moment, he trusted in victory. And the word “I” did not figure large in his speech.

IN THE daily brainwashing, the problem is presented in military terms. The debate, such as it is, concerns military capabilities and dangers.

Israelis are especially, and understandably, worried by the rain of tens of thousands of missiles expected to fall on all parts of Israel, not only from Iran, but also from Lebanon and Gaza. The minister responsible for civil defense deserted just this week, and another one, a refugee from the hapless Kadima party, has taken his place. Everybody knows that a large part of the population (including myself) is completely defenseless.

Ehud Barak has announced that no more than a measly 500 Israelis will be killed by enemy missiles. I do not aspire to the honor of being one of them, though I live quite near the Ministry of Defense. . .

But the military confrontation between Israel and Iran is only a part of the picture, and not the most important one.

As I have pointed out in the past, far more important is the impact on the world economy, already steeped in a profound

crisis. An Israeli attack will be viewed by Iran as American-inspired, and the reaction will be accordingly, as explicitly stated by Iran this week.

The Persian Gulf is a bottle, whose neck is the narrow Strait of Hormuz, which is totally controlled by Iran. The huge American aircraft carriers now stationed in the gulf will be well advised to get out before it is too late. They resemble those antique sailing ships which enthusiasts assemble in bottles. Even the powerful weaponry of the US will not be able to keep the strait open. Simple land-to-sea missiles will be quite enough to keep it closed for months. To open it, a prolonged land operation by the US and its allies will be required. A long and bloody business with unpredictable consequences.

A major part of the world’s oil supplies has to pass through this unique waterway. Even the mere threat of its closure will cause oil prices to shoot sky-high. Actual hostilities will result in a worldwide economic collapse, with hundreds of thousands – if not millions – of new unemployed.

Each of these victims will curse Israel. Since it will be crystal clear that this is an Israeli war, the rage will be turned against us. Worse, much worse – since Israel insists that it is “the state of the Jewish people”, the rage may take the form of an unprecedented outbreak of anti-Semitism. Newfangled Islamophobes will revert to old-time Jew-haters. *“The Jews are our disaster”*, as the Nazis used to proclaim.

This may be worst in the US. Until now, Americans have watched with admirable tolerance as their Middle East policy is practically dictated by Israel. But even the almighty AIPAC and its allies will not be able to contain the outburst of public anger. They will give way like the levees of New Orleans.

THIS WILL have a direct impact on a central calculation of the warmongers.

In private conversations, but not only there, they assert that America will be immobilized on the eve of elections. During the last few weeks before November 6, both candidates will be mortally afraid of the Jewish lobby.

The calculation goes like this: Netanyahu and Barak will attack without giving a damn for American wishes. The Iranian counter-attack will be directed against American interests. The US will be dragged into the war against its will.

But even in the unlikely event that the Iranians act with supreme self-restraint and do not attack US targets, contrary to their declarations, President Obama will be compelled to save us, send huge quantities of arms and ammunition, bolster our anti-missile defenses, fund the war. Otherwise he will be accused of leaving Israel in the lurch and Mitt Romney will be elected as the savior of the Jewish State.

This calculation is based on historical experience. All Israeli governments in the past have exploited American election years for their purposes.

In 1948, when the US was required to recognize the new Israeli state against the express advice of both the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, President Truman was fighting for his political life. His campaign was bankrupt. At the last moment Jewish millionaires leaped into the breach, Truman and Israel were saved.

In 1956, President Eisenhower was in the middle of his re-election campaign when Israel attacked Egypt in collusion with France and Britain. It was a miscalculation – Eisenhower did not need Jewish votes and money and put a stop to the adventure. In other election years the stakes were lower, but always the occasion was used to gain some concessions from the US.

Will it work this time? If Israel unleashes a war on the eve of elections, in an obvious effort to blackmail the president, will the American public mood support Israel – or could it go the other way? It will be a critical gamble of historic proportions. But like Mitt Romney, Netanyahu is a protégé of the Casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, and he may be no more averse to gambles than the poor suckers who leave their money in Adelson's casinos.

WHERE ARE the Israelis in all this?

In spite of the constant brainwashing, polls show that the majority of Israelis are dead set against an attack. Netanyahu and Barak are seen as two addicts, many say megalomaniacs, who are beyond rational thinking.

One of the most striking aspects of the situation is that our army chief and the entire General Staff, as well as the chiefs of the Mossad and the Shin Bet, and almost all their predecessors, are totally and publicly opposed to the attack.

It is one of the rare occasions when military commanders are more moderate than their political chiefs, though it has happened in Israel before. One may well ask: how can political leaders start a fateful war when practically all their military advisors, who know our military capabilities and the chances for success, are against it?

One of the reasons for this opposition is that the army chiefs know better than anyone else how totally dependent on the US Israel really is. Our relationship with America is the very basis of our national security.

Also, it seems doubtful whether Netanyahu and Barak have a majority for the attack even in their own government and inner cabinet. The ministers know that apart from everything else, the attack would drive investors and tourists away, causing huge

damage to Israel's economy.

So why do most Israelis still believe that the attack is imminent?

Israelis, by and large, have been totally convinced by now (a) that Iran is governed by a bunch of crazy ayatollahs beyond rationality, and (b) that, once in the possession of a nuclear bomb, they will certainly drop it on us.

These convictions are based on the utterances of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in which he declared that he will wipe Israel off the face of the earth.

But did he really say that? Sure, he has repeatedly expressed his conviction that the Zionist Entity will disappear from the face of the earth. But it seems that he never actually said that he – or Iran – would ensure that result.

That may seem only a small rhetorical difference, but in this context it is very important.

Also, Ahmadinejad may have a big mouth, but his actual power in Iran was never very great and is shrinking fast. The ayatollahs, the real rulers, are far from being irrational. Their whole behavior since the revolution shows them to be very cautious people, averse to foreign adventures, scarred by the long war with Iraq that they did not start and did not want.

A nuclear-armed Iran may be an inconvenient near-neighbor, but the threat of a "second holocaust" is a figment of the manipulated imagination. No ayatollah will drop a bomb when the certain response will be the total annihilation of all Iranian cities and the end of the glorious cultural history of Persia. Deterrence was, after all, the whole sense of producing an Israel bomb

IF NETANYAHU & Co. were really frightened by the Iranian Bomb, they would do one of two things:

- Either agree to the de-nuclearization of the region, giving up our own nuclear armaments (highly unlikely);
- or make peace with the Palestinians and the entire Arab world, thereby disarming the ayatollahs' hostility to Israel.

But Netanyahu's actions show that, for him, keeping the West Bank is vastly more important than the Iranian bomb.

What better proof do we need of the craziness of this whole scare?