

The Fake Enemy

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TOWARDS THE END of 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and declared war on the US. Their Nazi ally followed with its own declaration of war, and so did all its satellites.

The joke tells about the Hungarian ambassador in Washington who delivered his declaration of war to the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, who decided to have some fun.

“Hungary, Hungary,” Hull queried, “Are you a republic?”

“No,” the ambassador corrected him, “We are a monarchy.”

“Indeed? So who is your king?”

“We don't have a king, but a regent, Admiral Horthy.”

“An admiral? So you have a large navy?”

“We have no navy at all, because we have no outlet to the ocean.”

“Strange, a monarchy without a king, an admiral without a navy. So tell me, why are you declaring war on us? Do you have claims against the USA?”

“No, we have claims against Romania.”

“So why don't you declare war on Romania?”

“We can't! Romania is our ally!”

I REMEMBER this joke every time Binyamin Netanyahu utters his blood-curdling threats against Iran. The struggle with Iran heads his agenda. He warns of the danger of an Iranian effort to produce nuclear weapons and implicitly threatens her with our “secret” nuclear arsenal.

Why?

God knows. I search desperately for a reason for the Israeli-Iranian conflict, a struggle of life and death, and do not find any. Nothing. Niente.

Wars between nations are based on conflicts of interest. Are there any conflicting interests between Israel and Iran? None whatsoever.

Israel has a conflict with the Arab world, which refuses to recognize and have normal relations with it as long as there is no peace between Israel and the Palestinian people. Israel is now practically at war with Syria and Hezbollah.

Iran wants to be the dominant Muslim power in the region. Therefore it is practically at war with Saudi Arabia (which wants the same) and its satellites. That looks like a community of interests between Israel and Iran.

And indeed, not so long ago there was a strong—though unofficial— alliance between Iran and Israel. That was when the Shah ruled in Teheran. Israelis acted in Iran at will. Iran was the basis for Israel's extensive military and political activities in Iraqi Kurdistan. Shabak, the Israeli secret service, trained the feared Iranian secret service, Savak. Except for the USA, Iran was Israel's closest ally.

SO WHAT happened? Regime change in Iran, of course. The Shah was thrown out, the Ayatollahs came in. The Ayatollahs are religious leaders. In the name of Shi'ite Islam they curse the “Jewish State”.

But religious ideology does not replace the basic interests of a state. These are based on objective facts, primarily geographical ones. Even the religious wars of the 17th century arose mainly from national interest. Mostly, religion was just a pretext.

National interests do not change when a regime change occurs.

The most obvious example is Russia. When the Bolshevik revolution replaced the Czars, foreign policy did not change. When the Communist regime broke down and power eventually came to Vladimir Putin, the foreign policy continues more or less as if nothing has happened.

And indeed, when the vital interests of Iran were concerned, the Ayatollahs did not despise Israeli aid. During the Iraqi-Iranian war, Israel provided the Ayatollahs with arms. That happened almost openly during the so-called “hostage crisis”. The US sent arms to Israel, Israel sent them to Iran, in return Iran released the American hostages. My friend Amiram Nir, then a government security official, went to Teheran to deliver them.

The thought that Iran could possibly attack a nuclear power like Israel and risk its own annihilation is ludicrous.

Iran is the heiress to one of the world's most ancient civilizations, almost as ancient as Egypt. Compared to it, Jewish civilization is a younger sister. Indeed, many experts believe that the Jewish religion is heavily indebted to the Iranian civilization.

Cyrus “the Great” founded the largest empire in the world (until then). He created a system of tolerance and progress. As part of the effort he sent the banished Jews from Babylon back to Jerusalem. The “Return to Zion” was, as many experts believe, the real beginning of Ju-

daism.

True, that was long, long ago. But, as mentioned above, objective interests have a very long life.

SO WHY do the Iranians curse us now? Why do they rain fire and brimstone on us?

Quite simple. The hatred for Israel is for the Iranians an instrument for the achievement of their real goals.

The real aim of the Iranians is to gain power over the entire Muslim Middle East. They are doing this systematically, with quite a lot of success. The logic goes like this: the Muslim world hates Israel. The Arab Middle East hates Israel. Therefore, the hatred of Israel can be an effective political instrument.

Curiously enough, Binyamin Netanyahu has adopted the same logic—only the other way round. Donald Trump hates the Ayatollahs. Many people in the Western world fear them. So Netanyahu has adopted hatred of Iran as his main political instrument. He goes around the world and peddles it everywhere. It is the main theme of his rousing speeches to the UN, the American Congress and AIPAC.

It is also a good remedy for his personal troubles. Netanyahu is now up to his neck in various corruption affairs, including large bribes. His admirers are ready to ignore them, because he is Israel's only bulwark against the terrible danger of annihilation by the Ayatollahs riding on nuclear missiles.

Since President Trump also has a thing about Iran and wants to withdraw from the international agreement in which Iran undertook to suspend much of its nuclear program, in return for adequate concessions, Netanyahu's anti-Iranian ranting cements the companionship between the two.

Lately the Iranians have been establishing bases in Syria and Lebanon, near the borders of Israel. The Israeli air force is bombing them from time to time, proudly showing aerial photos proving their success. These attacks raise, of course, Iran's credibility in Arab eyes. Everybody is satisfied.

STILL, IT'S a dangerous situation. It is based on the Israeli-Arab conflict that could explode any minute in var-

ious ways. Israeli "military experts" prophesy another Israeli-Arab war soon, probably against Syria and Hezbollah. This week, air-raid sirens were tested all over this country.

The best way to avoid it is to make peace with the Arab world. That means to make peace first with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu proudly tells us that he has achieved a remarkable victory— cooperation with Saudi Arabia and the Arab Emirates, who are now involved in a shooting war with Yemeni insurgents who enjoy Iranian backing. The Saudis are nowhere near to winning that war.

This Israeli-Saudi cooperation is strictly secret. The Saudi crown prince, a very young and inexperienced dictator, cannot admit it, because the masses of Arabs everywhere, including his own kingdom, see Israel as the arch-enemy.

No Arab country can establish real peace with Israel, as long as Israel occupies all of Palestine and subjects the Palestinians to a cruel occupation regime. The old Saudi peace plan is still lying around somewhere, but it is totally ignored by the Israeli government.

True, Israel has signed peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, but nothing even remotely resembling a thoroughgoing peace exists between us and these nations. The initial enthusiasm evaporated long ago, and both the Egyptian and the Jordanian governments keep relations to a minimum, aware that the masses of their peoples detest Israel.

There is just no way around the Palestinians.

Real friends of Israel should advise Netanyahu to make peace as long as Mahmoud Abbas (Abu-Mazen) is still around. In two weeks he will be 83 years old, and he is ailing. He is deeply committed to peace. He has no obvious successor, and his replacement may far, far less moderate.

But Netanyahu doesn't care. Peace is the last thing he has on his troubled mind. He is far more committed to the eternal conflict with both the Arabs and the Iranians.

After all, what would life be like without enemies?