

# The Luck of the Gambler

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**W**E ALL KNOW the picture from the books and the movies: a gambler sits at the roulette table in a casino. He has luck. A lot of luck.

In front of the gambler the pile of chips is growing. Higher and higher. Every spin of the roulette wheel adds to the heap.

When the heap reaches the level of his eyes, he could just get up, exchange the chips for money and go home. He winnings are enough to keep him in luxury for the rest of his life.

But the man cannot get up. Just cannot. He is glued to his place at the roulette table. And then his luck abandons him. The heap of chips starts to shrink.

He could still get up and save a part of his winnings. But he cannot. He is glued to his seat. Until he loses the last chip.

In the movies, the man gets up and puts a pistol to his head.

BINYAMIN NETANYAHU resembles this man. He has luck. A lot of luck. It is uncanny.

The whole country sees the luck. His popularity rises to the heavens.

The economy is flourishing. There is practically no unemployment. More and more Israeli start-up companies are being bought abroad for astronomical sums.

In the international sphere, Israel marches from victory to victory. The president of the world's most important country behaves as if he were Bibi's abject slave. The US has recognized undivided Jerusalem as the capital of Greater Israel. The transfer of the American embassy there turned into a national festival, on the same day as another festival took place in Tel Aviv, an outburst of popular joy over Israel's triumph at the Eurovision song contest. The masses are overcome, as if it was a victory in war.

The world press mentions Trump, Putin and Netanyahu in the same breath. Three giants.

INSIDE ISRAEL, Netanyahu has unlimited power. Emperor Bibi and his wife look like a royal pair.

He has no competitors. Every possible competitor was purged from the ruling party long ago. The remaining Likud functionaries look like dwarfs compared to Giant Bibi. The coalition partners are a miserable lot of small

factions, whose leaders know that they have no chance against Bibi. The "opposition" is pitiful, at best.

The institutions of democracy, whose duty it is to safeguard the democratic system from becoming a dictatorship, are being destroyed, one after the other, while the masses shout encouragement. The Supreme Court, the Attorney General, the State Comptroller, the Police Chief— those who do not surrender are crushed.

The corruption cases against both Binyamin and Sarah Netanyahu, which could be wound up within a month, drag on for years, with no end in sight.

ON THE most important front—the Arab— Netanyahu's luck has reached incredible heights.

The Arab world has always been disunited. But in the past it was a hidden disunity. The lack of coordination between Egypt, Jordan and Syria enabled us to win the 1948 war.

Now the disunity has become open and extreme. Something is happening that in the past was but a dream: Saudi Arabia almost openly cooperates with Netanyahu in the fight against Iran, and so does Egypt.

Two weeks ago, on Black Monday, unarmed Palestinians in Gaza were slaughtered wholesale. Yet not in a single Arab country did stormy demonstrations break out. Not even in the West Bank. Nor in East Jerusalem. Only a tiny Arab demonstration in Haifa, in which a policeman broke the leg of a shackled demonstrator after his arrest.

The entire world witnessed the hideous connection: the victory celebration of Netanyahu at the new US embassy in Jerusalem, while thousands were wounded or killed on the Gaza border. And just a few hours later—the mass outbreak of joy in Tel Aviv's central square over the victory of an Israeli songstress at the Eurovision contest.

The world saw and remained silent. The international reaction to the massacre in Gaza was even less than the usual hypocritical minimum prescribed for such occasions. The only serious reaction came from the Turkish ruler and was buried under a heap of derision in Israel.

During Israel's 70 years of existence, its governments have pretended to long for peace with the Arab world, and before that the Zionist leadership did the same. Since the Oslo agreement, the government also pretended to seek peace with the Palestinian people, whose very existence it

denied until then.

During Netanyahu's reign even this pretense has evaporated. At the beginning, Bibi uttered a few words which were construed as advocating the two-state solution. They have been forgotten long ago. Now even the hypocrisy has been swept away. No more peace offers, no "painful concessions", no nothing. Total ignoring of the Saudi Peace Plan (long forgotten).

Why? Simple: there is no possibility of peace without the creation of a Palestinian state. Such a peace necessitates the giving up of parts of the "Land of Israel". Netanyahu knows this well. He does not dream of doing so.

Does this hurt him in the national arena? On the contrary. Does this hurt him in the international arena? Not at all. Perhaps the opposite is true. The further the chances of peace move away, the higher his popularity rises.

A leader with such luck, who will stand up to him? Which politician, which journalist, which billionaire? Everybody flatters him. Everybody wants to serve him. All except a few idealists and other idiots.

WHAT WILL happen when the incredibly lucky gambler starts to lose, after all?

History is full of heroes who had legendary luck. Who conquered countries and continents, until the bitter day arrived. Napoleon, for example. Or his German successor, whose name had better not be mentioned in this context.

A person who is too successful will inevitably become a megalomaniac. Their mental equilibrium will be upset.

They will go one kilometer too far and fall into the abyss.

And when they fall, they will take the entire country with them.

Perhaps Netanyahu's luck will continue for some time. Perhaps he will still have more and more successes. Until it stops.

Where will Netanyahu move on from the dizzy height of his successes?

Wisdom would say: he should now exchange the chips he has won, which lie before him on the table, the table of the country, and offer the Palestinians and the whole Arab world a generous peace, which would assure Israel peace for generations to come. It is always wise for a country to

make peace while it is at the height of its strength.

But Netanyahu is not wise enough to do so. He will continue on his present path.

Perhaps he will be able to restrain himself and not lead us into a war with Iran—a war which will be lost by both sides. It would be a destructive, a catastrophic war. Perhaps Bibi is clever enough to avoid this trap. Unless the criminal investigations against him come too close to trial and his future becomes too endangered. War is always the last refuge of a nationalist ruler.

Even without war, Bibi's course is leading towards an apartheid state. There is just no other possibility. The "Jewish Nation-State" from the Mediterranean Sea to the desert, with an Arab majority that will inexorably grow, until the balance of power within the state turns, the international situation changes, and the willpower of the herrenvolk weakens.

That has happened in history again and again, and that will happen to us. The Jewish State will turn into a bi-national state, with a shrinking Jewish minority, since Jews will not want to live in such a country.

When? In fifty years? In a hundred years? At the end of the glorious Zionist chapter, the Jews will again disperse throughout the world.

I DON'T like to be a prophet of doom. My heart aches when I see the masses captivated by his charisma and following him to perdition.

It reminds me of the legend of the Pied Piper.

In Hamelin, a small town in Germany, there was a plague of rats. In despair, the burghers summoned a renowned rat-catcher and promised him a generous reward.

The rat-catcher took his flute and started to play. The melody was so sweet that all the rats came out of their holes and followed him. The Pied Piper led them into the river, where all the rats perished.

Having got rid of the rats, the burghers refused to pay the agreed price.

So the Pied Piper took up his flute again and started to play. The melody was so sweet that all the children of the town left their homes and followed him. He led them into the river, where all of them drowned.

Bibi Netanyahu, the Pied Piper. Frightening.