

Chickenshit

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WHEN A HIGH-RANKING official of one country calls the leader of another country “chickenshit”, it may be assumed that the relations between the two countries are not at their best. In fact, they may be considered somewhat less than cordial.

This week, it happened. An unnamed very high-ranking US official said this in an interview with the respected American journalist who bears the very Jewish name of Jeffrey Goldberg.

No high-ranking official would use such a term for publication without the express permission of the President of the United States of America. So here we are.

HISTORY HAS seen many strange relationships between nations. But I dare say none stranger than that existing between Israel and the US.

On the face of it, no two states could be closer to each other. Just a minor example: the day the memorable Chickenshit remark made headlines, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution calling upon the US to put an end to its 50-year old embargo on Cuba. 188 countries, including the whole spectrum of EU and NATO countries, voted in favor. Two states voted against: the US and Israel.

Two countries against the entire world? No, not entirely. Micronesia, Palau and the Marshall Islands abstained. (These three mighty island nations generally support Israel, too, though few Israelis could place them on the map.)

Throughout the years, in hundreds of UN votes, Israel has stood loyally with the US, and vice versa. An unshakable alliance, so it seemed. And now they call our valiant Prime Minister chickenshit?

THE OFFICIAL based his uncomplimentary remark on Binyamin Netanyahu's disinclination to bomb Iran, as threatened repeatedly, as well as on Netanyahu's unwillingness to make peace with the Palestinians.

The first accusation is unfounded, since Netanyahu never seriously considered an attack on Iran. Some of my readers may remember that from the first day I assured them that such an attack would not happen, without even leaving myself a loophole in case I might be wrong. I knew that such an attack was quite out of the question. And not only because the entire Israeli defense establishment was

against it.

The second accusation is even more groundless. Netanyahu did not chicken out of making peace. This would presuppose that he wanted peace in the first place. If the Americans really believe so, they should read a few good articles (especially mine).

Netanyahu never entertained even for a moment the idea of making peace. His entire upbringing makes this quite impossible. His late father, Ben-Zion, was such an extreme and rigid nationalist, that compared to him Vladimir Jabotinsky, the Zionist right-wing leader, looked like a leftist pacifist.

Every word Binyamin Netanyahu has ever uttered in favor of peace and the Two-State solution was a blatant lie. For him to advocate a Palestinian state is like the Chief Rabbi advocating eating pork on Yom Kippur.

Any American diplomat who does not know this should be transferred at once to Micronesia (or Palau).

LATELY IT seems that Netanyahu has been doing everything in his power to provoke a quarrel with the US government.

At first sight, this looks like an act of lunacy, an act so dangerous that any competent psychiatrist would commit him to the closed wing of an asylum.

Israel is totally dependent on the US—not 99%, but 100%. On the very same day as the publication of the Chickenshit statement, the US agreed to sell Israel a second squadron of F-35 fighter planes, after the sale of the first 19 planes (which costs 2.35 billion dollars). The money comes from the yearly tribute the US pays to Israel.

Without the automatic US veto on all UN Security Council resolutions not approved by the Israeli government, there would have long been a State of Palestine as a full-fledged member of the UN. A cornerstone of our foreign relations is the belief of many countries that in order to gain entrance to the favors of the US Congress, they first need to bribe the gatekeeper—Israel. And so on.

Literally every Israeli is convinced that our relationship with the US is the lifeline of the state. If there is anything at all on which Israelis of all age groups, communities, beliefs and political orientations are unanimous, it is this conviction.

So how come our prime minister is working full-time

on destroying the relationship between the two governments?

When our Minister of Defense, Moshe Ya'alon, visited Washington DC this week, all his requests to meet US cabinet ministers and other high officials were categorically refused, except for a meeting with his colleague, Chuck Hagel, who could not very well object. It was an unprecedented, open insult.

Ya'alon, a former Chief of Staff of the army, is not considered a genius. Some believe that it would have been better if he had stayed at his former profession—milking cows in a kibbutz. When he declared that John Kerry suffered from an “Obsessive Messianism” in his efforts to achieve peace between Israel and Palestine, both Kerry and President Barack Obama were deeply offended.

But such statements by Israeli cabinet ministers have become routine. So have the sharp rebuttals of official US spokesmen and spokeswomen. These are ignored by the Israeli public.

BINYAMIN NETANYAHU is no fool. Chickenshit or not, unlike Ya'alon he is considered smart and intelligent. So what is he doing?

There is method in his madness.

Netanyahu grew up in the United States. When his father was boycotted by Israeli academia, which refused to take him seriously as a historian, the family moved to a suburb of Philadelphia. Binyamin prides himself on having an intimate knowledge of the US.

What is he thinking about?

He knows that Israel controls the US Congress. No American politician could possibly be reelected if he voiced even the slightest hint of criticism of the “Jewish State”. AIPAC, the most powerful lobby in Washington (apart from the National Rifle Association) will see to that. The powerful grip the Jewish lobby has on the media is a further guarantee.

In Netanyahu's view, in any confrontation between Congress and the White House over Israel, the President is bound to lose. So there is nothing to be afraid of.

NETANYAHU, IN FACT is playing roulette with all the capital of Israel in the vast casino called the USA. Perhaps he has been infected by his mentor and protector, the Casino Czar Sheldon Adelson, who has a hand in conducting Israeli policy in the US.

(It was Adelson who appointed the Israeli ambassador in Washington, Ron Dremer, a prominent activist of the Republican party, who is detested by the White House.)

In order to appreciate the magnitude of Netanyahu's gamble, with us as chips, one has to visualize the state of the union.

The US is now a dysfunctional democracy.

In a normal democracy—say the UK or Germany—there are two central parties, or party coalitions, which

face each other. They are both “mainstream” and the differences between them are minor. They succeed each other from time to time without much ado. The citizens hardly notice.

Not in the US. Not anymore.

The American public is now deeply divided between two camps, which hate each other from the bottom of their hearts (if they have any). This hatred is abysmal. One is the party of the ultra-rich, who defend their privileges, the other belongs to the moderately wealthy and serves their interests.

The ideologies of the two camps are diametrically opposed. Therefore, they cannot agree practically on anything. Anything the Democrats do is considered almost treason by the Republicans, anything the Republicans advocate is considered by the Democrats as stupid, if not crazy

The Republicans, who control Congress (and may do so even more firmly in a few days time) are out to immobilize the administration. Once they even stopped all federal payments, making the running of the state impossible. A consistent joint foreign policy is out of the question. I am not sure that the situation on the eve of the great Civil War was much worse.

INTO THIS crazy situation Netanyahu has plunged. He has placed all his chips (us) on the Republicans.

During the last presidential elections, he almost openly supported Mitt Romney, the opponent of Obama, thus practically declaring war on the present administration. The radical anti-Obama statements made now by Israeli leaders are used—and designed to be used—by Republican candidates against their Democratic opponents.

The Democrats make strenuous efforts to woo Jewish voters and donors by flattering Israel in the most outrageous terms, promising to support each and every action of the Israeli government, now and for all eternity, be it what it may. Inadvertently, they stick knives into the back of the Israeli peace forces, making the fight for peace even more Herculean.

But even if the mid-term elections make the House and the Senate even more subservient to the Israeli right-wing, Obama will be around for two more years. In a way, having no more elections to fear, he will be freer than before to obstruct Netanyahu.

I wish he would. But I do not entertain too much hope. Even as a lame duck, he will still have to consider the interests of the next Democratic candidate for the White House.

OBAMA COULD still do a lot for peace between Israel and Palestine, a peace supported by the entire pro-American Arab bloc—something clearly in the US national interest, not to mention ours.

For that, courage is needed. And—yes—a little more Obsessive Messianism.