

# The Speech

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**S**UDDENLY IT REMINDED me of something. I was watching The Speech by Binyamin Netanyahu before the Congress of the United States. Row upon row of men in suits (and the occasional woman), jumping up and down, up and down, applauding wildly, shouting approval.

It was the shouting that did it. Where had I heard that before?

And then it came back to me. It was another parliament in the mid-1930s. The Leader was speaking. Rows upon rows of Reichstag members were listening raptly. Every few minutes they jumped up and shouted their approval.

Of course, the Congress of the United States of America is no Reichstag. Members wear dark suits, not brown shirts. They do not shout “Heil” but something unintelligible. Yet the sound of the shouting had the same effect. Rather shocking.

But then I returned to the present. The sight was not frightening, but ridiculous. Here were the members of the most powerful parliament in the world behaving like a bunch of nincompoops.

Nothing like this could have happened in the Knesset. I do not have a very high opinion of our parliament, despite having been a member, but compared to this assembly, the Knesset is the fulfillment of Plato's dream.

ABBA EBAN once compared a speech by Menachem Begin to a French soufflé cake: a lot of air and very little dough.

The same could be said about The Speech.

What did it contain? The Holocaust, of course, with that moral impostor, Elie Wiesel, sitting in the gallery right next to the beaming Sarah'le, who visibly relished her husband's triumph. (A few days before, she had shouted at the wife of a mayor in Israel: “Your man does not reach the ankles of my man!”)

The Speech mentioned the Book of Esther, about the salvation of the Persian Jews from the evil Persian minister Haman, who intended to wipe them out. No one knows how this dubious composition came to be included in the Bible. God is not mentioned in it, it has nothing to do with the Holy Land, and Esther herself is more of a prostitute than a heroine. The book ends with the mass murder committed by the Jews against the Persians.

The Speech, like all speeches by Netanyahu, contained much about the suffering of the Jews throughout the ages, and the intentions of the evil Iranians, the New Nazis, to annihilate us. But this will not happen, because this time we have Binyamin Netanyahu to protect us. And the US Republicans, of course.

It was a good speech. One cannot make a bad speech when hundreds of admirers hang on every word and applaud every second. But it will not make an anthology of the world's Greatest Speeches.

Netanyahu considers himself a second Churchill. And indeed, Churchill was the only foreign leader before Netanyahu to speak to both houses of Congress a third time. But Churchill came to cement his alliance with the President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who played a big part in the British war effort, while Netanyahu has come to spit in the face of the present president.

WHAT DID the speech not contain?

Not a word about Palestine and the Palestinians. Not a word about peace, the two-state solution, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jerusalem. Not a word about apartheid, the occupation, the settlements. Not a word about Israel's own nuclear capabilities.

Not a word, of course, about the idea of a nuclear-weapon-free region, with mutual inspection.

Indeed, there was no concrete proposal at all. After denouncing the bad deal in the making, and hinting that Barack Obama and John Kerry are dupes and idiots, he offered no alternative.

Why? I assume that the original text of The Speech contained a lot. Devastating new sanctions against Iran. A demand for the total demolition of all Iranian nuclear installations. And in the inevitable end: a US-Israeli military attack.

All this was left out. He was warned by the Obama people in no uncertain terms that disclosure of details of the negotiations would be considered as a betrayal of confidence. He was warned by his Republican hosts that the American public was in no mood to hear about yet another war.

What was left? A dreary recounting of the well-known facts about the negotiations. It was the only tedious part of the speech. For minutes no one jumped up, nobody

shouted approval. Elie Wiesel was shown sleeping. The most important person in the hall, Sheldon Adelson, the owner of the Congress republicans and of Netanyahu, was not shown at all. But he was there, keeping close watch on his servants.

BY THE way, whatever happened to Netanyahu's war?

Remember when the Israel Defense Forces were about to bomb Iran to smithereens? When the US military might was about to "take out" all Iranian nuclear installations?

Readers of this column might also remember that years ago I assured them that there would be no war. No ifs, no buts. No half-open back door for a retreat. I asserted that there would be no war, period.

Much later, all Israeli former military and intelligence chiefs spoke out against the war. The army Chief of Staff, Benny Gantz, who finished his term this week, has disclosed that no draft operation order for attacking Iran's nuclear capabilities was ever drawn up.

Why? Because such an operation could lead to a world-wide catastrophe. Iran would immediately close the Strait of Hormuz, just a few dozen miles wide, through which some 35% of the world's sea-borne oil must pass. It would mean an immediate world-wide economic breakdown.

To open the Strait and keep it open, a large part of Iran would have to be occupied in a land war, boots on the ground. Even Republicans shiver at the thought.

Israeli military capabilities fall far short of such an adventure. And, of course, Israel cannot dream of starting a war without express American consent.

That is reality. Not speechifying. Even American senators are capable of seeing the difference.

THE CENTERPIECE of The Speech was the demonization of Iran. Iran is evil incarnate. Its leaders are subhuman monsters. All over the world, Iranian terrorists are at work planning monstrous outrages. They are building intercontinental ballistic missiles to destroy the US. Immediately after obtaining nuclear warheads—now or in ten years - they will annihilate Israel.

In reality, Israel's second-strike capability, based on the submarines supplied by Germany, would annihilate Iran within minutes. One of the most ancient civilizations in world history would come to an abrupt end. The ayatollahs would have to be clinically insane to do such a thing.

Netanyahu pretends to believe they are. Yet for years now, Israel has been conducting an amiable arbitration with the Iranian government about the Eilat-Ashkelon oil pipeline across Israel built by an Iranian-Israeli consortium.

Before the Islamic revolution, Iran was Israel's stoutest ally in the region. Well after the revolution, Israel supplied Iran with arms in order to fight against Saddam Hussein's Iraq (the famous Irangate affair). And if one goes back to Esther and her sexual effort to save the Jews, why not mention Cyrus the Great, who allowed the Judean captives to return to Jerusalem?

Judging by its behavior, the present Iranian leadership has lost some of its initial religious fervor. It is behaving (not always speaking) in a very rational way, conducting tough negotiations as one would expect from Persians, aware of their immense cultural heritage, even more ancient than Judaism. Netanyahu is right in saying that one should not trust them with closed eyes, but his demonization is ridiculous.

Within the wider context, Israel and Iran are already indirect allies. For both, the Islamic State (ISIS) is the mortal enemy. To my mind, ISIS is far more dangerous to Israel, in the long run, than Iran. I imagine that for Tehran, ISIS is a far more dangerous enemy than Israel.

(The only memorable sentence in The Speech was "the enemy of my enemy is my enemy".)

If the worst comes to the worst, Iran will have its bomb in the end. So what?

I may be an arrogant Israeli, but I refuse to be afraid. I live a mile from the Israeli army high command in the center of Tel Aviv, and in a nuclear exchange I would evaporate. Yet I feel quite safe.

The United States has been exposed for decades (and still is) to thousands of Russian nuclear bombs, which could eradicate millions within minutes. They feel safe under the umbrella of the "balance of terror". Between us and Iran, in the worst situation, the same balance would come into effect.

WHAT IS Netanyahu's alternative to Obama's policy? As Obama was quick to point out, he offered none.

The best possible deal will be struck. The danger will be postponed for ten years or more. And, as Chaim Weizmann once said: "The future will come and take care of the future."

Within these ten years, many things will happen. Regimes will change, enmities will turn into alliances and vice versa. Anything is possible.

Even—God and the Israeli voters willing—peace between Israel and Palestine, which would take the sting out of Israeli-Muslim relations.