

# Goodbye to a War

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**B**INYAMIN NETANYAHU AND his patron, Sheldon Adelson, betted on Mitt Romney, with the State of Israel as their chip. They lost.

For Adelson, the betting tycoon, that doesn't amount to much. Some you win, some you lose.

For Netanyahu, it's a different matter altogether. He grew up in the US (where he got to know Romney in 1976) and prides himself as a great expert on America. It was one of his strongest cards, since relations with the US are vital for Israel. Now he stands exposed as a know-nothing, together with his ambassador in Washington DC, who was recommended by Adelson.

Does this hurt Netanyahu's chances in the upcoming Israeli elections? Perhaps. But only if a credible counter-candidate is found, who could repair relations with Barack Obama.

Ehud Olmert is presenting himself as such, and may now join the fray. Some dream of Shimon Peres giving up the presidency to run as a candidate. Peres, who is two weeks older than I, has never won an election in his fifty years in politics. But there's always a first time, isn't there?

ISRAELIS ARE, of course, interested mainly in the Jewish vote. It is indeed revealing.

Netanyahu made no secret of supporting Romney to the hilt. US Jews were told that voting for the Republican candidate was voting for Israel. So did they? They did not.

I don't yet have the detailed statistics, but from results in Florida and other states it seems that the great majority of Jews supported the Democratic candidate, as they have always done.

What does that mean? It means that one of the most basic contentions of Netanyahu and Co. has been shown to be fallacious.

Netanyahu declares almost hourly that Israel is the "nation-state of the Jewish people". This means that Israel belongs to all the Jews in the world, and that all the Jews in the world belong to Israel. So he speaks not only for the six million Jewish citizens of Israel, but for all the 13 million or so Jews around the globe. (Assuming that no Jews are discovered on Mars.)

Again, this has been proven a fiction. American Jews (or, rather, Jewish Americans) voted as members of the

American nation, not of the non-existent Jewish nation. Many of them are certainly sympathetic to Israel, but when it comes to voting, they vote as Americans. Israel plays a very minor role in their concerns. They may give a standing ovation to Netanyahu when he visits, as American Catholics would to the Pope, but they ignore his instruction to vote for a candidate.

This has great implications for the future. In any clash between vital American and Israeli interests, Jewish Americans are first of all Americans. In such a future situation, a similar miscalculation by Netanyahu or his successors may prove fatal.

FOR EXAMPLE, about the Iran war. Israeli hawks can kiss it goodbye.

I doubt that even Romney, had he been elected, would have allowed Netanyahu to attack. Campaign speeches would not have trumped the vital interests of the USA. He, too, would have taken one look at the map of the Strait of Hormuz and shuddered.

Be that as it may have been, there is no chance whatsoever that Obama will now tolerate an Israeli attack. It would have ignited a large scale war with incalculable consequences for the US and world economy.

Americans don't want another war. They want to get out of Iraq and Afghanistan, in practice ceding both countries to their adversaries. Starting another, and far bigger war in Iran is unthinkable.

This may be, for us, the most important result of these elections.

WHAT ABOUT Israeli-Palestinian peace?

No doubt, chances have picked up.

I don't want to sound too optimistic. The usual cliché says that US presidents in their second term are free of political pressures and can at long last act according to their conscience. That is certainly true – up to a point.

The President is the leader of a party, and from the first day after an election the party starts to think about the next election. Powerful lobbies like AIPAC don't cease to exist and will continue to exert a lot of pressure for the Israeli right. Big donors will still be needed. In two years, mid-term elections will come up.

But I hope that Obama will return to his starting position and try to compel both sides to commence serious ne-

gotiations. The forthcoming Palestinian application to the UN General Assembly to accept it as a state (with observer status) may be a test. Its acceptance is of great importance, since it would put the two-state solution squarely back on the international table. The US has no veto power there, and it is up to the president to decide whether to apply pressure or not.

The US is like a huge aircraft carrier. To turn around it needs a lot of time and space. But even a slight change of course can have a major impact on our lives.

IN ISRAEL, the major question is: Will He Take Revenge?

No doubt, Obama hates Netanyahu, and with good reason. Netanyahu will not receive a warm welcome in the Oval Office.

But Obama is a cold fish. He will keep his personal feelings in tight check.

But how tight? Will he change his attitude towards Netanyahu and his policies enough to give encouragement or even support to Israeli peace forces? Will he influence the Israeli elections as Netanyahu tried to influence the American ones?

Frankly, I hope so. For Israel's sake.

Obama's victory will reinforce the liberal, democratic, secular, social-minded, less-militant spirit throughout the world. If the Israeli government continues on its present course, its isolation in the world will increase dangerously.

Unless we do to Netanyahu what the Americans just did to Romney.

AS EVERYBODY knows, there are some basic similarities between the US and Israel.

Both are immigrant nations. Both were built by white settlers who carried out ethnic cleansing. Both glorify their huge achievements while keeping quiet about the darker sides of their past.

The elections in both countries illuminate another similarity: the ever-growing split between the various "sectors" of society. White male Americans rallied behind Romney, colored Americans and women behind Obama. Demographic factors played a major role. To some extent it was a rearguard action by the dominant white male elite against the new majority of blacks, Hispanics, women and the young.

The split was exacerbated by the Tea Party fanatics. It seems that every few generations the American nation is afflicted by a new wave of insanity – the anti-Anarchist hysteria after WWI, McCarthy after WWII, the Tea Party now. To its immense credit, America has a knack of overcoming these waves. But the Tea Party killed Romney, in spite of all his desperate flip-flopping.

Israel has a similar split. Society is divided into sectors, which cast their votes on sectoral lines: Whites (Ashkenazim), Orientals, Ultra-Orthodox (Haredim), National-Religious, Russian immigrants, Arabs. The Likud is a party of Orientals dominated by white males. Lieberman's is the party of the "Russians". Together with the religious of various stripes they constitute a powerful coalition. Unlike Obama, the Israeli left has not been able up to now to build an effective counter-coalition.

We need an Israeli Obama, who will work with the US Obama for peace.

Before it is too late, please.