

IF ISRAEL STRIKES IRAN, IT'LL BE BECAUSE OBAMA DIDN'T STOP IT

By Ari Shavit Haaretz 24 02 2012

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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has dealt primarily with three things over the past three years: Iran, Iran, and Iran.

In the first instance, Netanyahu was busy making sure Iran was on top of the international agenda. While our prime minister won't say so out loud, he is deeply scornful of his predecessors for spending so much time on the Palestinian issue while neglecting the Iranian issue.

Netanyahu has indeed succeeded in reversing the order, and has made the centrifuges at Natanz the primary concern of the Western world. With the generous help of French President Nicolas Sarkozy, British Prime Minister David Cameron and various Arab leaders, he has succeeded in convincing the international community that the Iranian issue is of utmost importance. In Tokyo, Beijing, Moscow, Berlin, Paris, London, and Washington, everyone is now addressing what Netanyahu has been dealing with for a decade. And the diplomatic world is now holding its breath: Will Israel attack or not attack? Will Iran go nuclear or not go nuclear? Will an Israeli-Iranian war inflame the whole Middle East?

In the second instance, Netanyahu made sure that the Iranian threat would top the national agenda. Ten years ago we were still arguing about peace. Five years ago we were arguing about dividing the land - about a permanent settlement, an interim settlement, disengagement, convergence, and the like.

But today the only diplomatic-security issue that people talk about at their Friday night get-togethers is the Iranian issue. Nothing good is happening in the Middle East. As long as the shadow of the Shi'ite bomb casts a pall over all of us, there won't be any diplomatic breakthrough.

In the third instance, Netanyahu was busy building up Israel's abilities to face the Iranian threat. Netanyahu thinks that until he took office, Israel hadn't been preparing properly to confront Iran's cement-lined bunkers. Both Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert felt comfortable believing that the "invisible hand" would resolve the

problem. But the invisible hand did no such thing.

Yes, Iranian scientists were assassinated and Iranian centrifuges exploded, but at any given moment Iran had more fissionable material than the previous moment. One red line was crossed, and then another, and another. Thus, our prime minister's primary preoccupation over the past few years has been sharpening the Israeli sword. He has made the whole world truly worried that the sword might be unsheathed.

A few years ago Netanyahu held an in-depth discussion with Middle East expert Bernard Lewis. At the end of the talk he was convinced that if the ayatollahs obtained nuclear weapons, they would use them. Since that day, Netanyahu seems convinced that we are living out a rerun of the 1930s.

He hasn't forgotten for a moment that two leaders he happens to admire, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, didn't lift a finger to save European Jewry during the Holocaust. He is convinced that U.S. President Barack Obama won't lift a finger to save Israeli Jewry. Thus he believes solely in the Israeli sword, seeing it as a deep expression and the last defense of the Zionist revolution.

As of now, the military option is proving to be a diplomatic success. It managed to shake the international community out of its apathy and made a definitive contribution to the tightening of the diplomatic and economic siege on Iran.

But the time for playing diplomatic games with the military option is drawing to a close. There's a limit to how many times one can cry wolf. There's a point at which a "hold-me-back" policy exhausts itself. And that's a very dangerous point, because suddenly the military option turns into a real option.

The Netanyahu-Obama meeting in two weeks will be definitive. If the U.S. president wants to prevent a disaster, he must give Netanyahu iron-clad guarantees that the United States will stop Iran in any way necessary and at any price, after the 2012 elections. If Obama doesn't do this, he will obligate Netanyahu to act before the 2012 elections.

The moral responsibility for what may happen does not lie with the heirs of Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion. The moral responsibility will be borne by the man sitting in the chair that was once Franklin Roosevelt's.