

Haaretz: Netanyahu's conspiracy to drag the U.S. to war

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'Sometime between early June and mid-August, just before the Republican nominating convention, will be the ideal moment to drag the United States into war, the planners believe.'

Let's assume that everything goes beautifully. Defense Minister Ehud Barak claims that the barrage of missiles that will strike Israel in response to an attack on Iran will be smaller than previously expected, due to the situation in Syria and Lebanon, so let's assume that's true. Let's also assume that the attack causes the maximum possible damage, and that very few of our planes are hit. And let's assume too that because of the approaching U.S. elections, President Barack Obama, who is viscerally opposed to an Israeli attack and is currently making promises to prevent it, refrains from interfering, and even gives Israel verbal backing after it happens.

Yet even so, even assuming that all goes beautifully, too little will have been achieved. And Israel's situation after the attack will be dire.

The reason is simple: If we take Barak's talk about "zones of immunity" seriously - the idea that the Fordow site near Qom, and other similar sites, are invulnerable to attack - then Iran is already there. Fordow exists. It has uranium and centrifuges. And the know-how is there.

So even if everything else is destroyed, and only Fordow remains, Iran's nuclear project will be set back by two years at most - and not even that long in practice, because Iran will switch from inching toward a bomb to rapid enrichment of military-grade uranium.

Barak's promise that Israel will attack again in another two years is less than meaningless. It's clear that if there is a zone of immunity, it will exist then at Fordow and similar sites. And after a unilateral Israeli strike, a revenge-hungry Iran will become a nuclear state.

After Obama's warm speech last night at the AIPAC meet, and ahead of both the Netanyahu-Obama summit and the Purim holiday later this week, the time has come to remove the masks. Those Israeli planners who believe in an attack have one hope only - that the United States will be dragged in and complete the Israeli move.

The Israeli operation is meant to be a hydrogen bomb, with the Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear facilities serving as the detonator. If numerous missiles land on Tel Aviv and American assets in the region are hit, the carefully chosen timing, right before the U.S. elections, is supposed to compel Obama to send the only military force capable of destroying Iran's nuclear program.

Sometime between early June and mid-August, just before the Republican nominating convention, will be the ideal moment to drag the United States into war, the planners believe. Faced with this gamble, even former National Security Advisor Uzi Arad – the man who once gave Haaretz the most extremist interview ever on the nuclear issue, in which he spoke of the sexual pleasure derived from war games involving tens of millions of casualties – is now showing himself to be a comparative moderate. Even Arad insists on coordination with the United States, and thus found himself to the left of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the question of whether to attack. That, in his view, is why he was ousted: Netanyahu didn't want position papers offering other options.

Only once before has Israel committed a sin of comparable dimensions. Those responsible were then-Defense Minister Pinhas Lavon and then chief of Military Intelligence Benjamin Gibli. The situation appeared similar: A large country was being led by a radical tyrant with regional ambitions who supported Israel's eradication. Back then, in 1954, it was Egypt and its president, Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Due to exhaustion from previous wars, the American-led West appeared to be retreating from the region. The way to drag the United States back in – on Israel's side – seemed simple, in the planners' view: The solution was to attack American targets in Egypt and make it seem as if the perpetrators were Egyptians. That incident became known as the Lavon Affair, or the "rotten business," and gave rise to an ongoing debate over "who gave the order."

This time, the order is both more complex and more dangerous. It's just like Barak's plans for Operation Accountability in 1993, in which Lebanese civilians were supposed to flee the shelling and pressure the Lebanese government to oblige Syria to rein in Hezbollah: The current plan is meant to spark Iranian attacks on American targets that will drag America into the war.

The current Israeli chatter about attacking Iran isn't meant to spur sanctions and a diplomatic solution. Netanyahu doesn't believe that will work, and he's convinced that Obama won't attack of his own initiative – not before November, and not afterward.

The goal of the Israeli maneuvering is simple – to generate American chatter that will prepare the ground for dragging the United States into the battle following the Israeli strike. That's all.

There is no comparison between the Harpaz conspiracy, in which senior army officers allegedly plotted to keep Yoav Galant from becoming the next chief of staff, and the existential gamble inherent in this plan. And just as with former government minister Yitzhak Mordechai – a man once framed for the killing of two captured Palestinian terrorists, but later ousted from office by a sexual harassment conviction – being the victim of a conspiracy does not constitute license to sin.

After the "rotten business," David Ben-Gurion returned to the Prime Minister's Office. Instead of conspiracies, he created an intimate, well-coordinated alliance with France and launched the 1956 Sinai Campaign with Paris' assistance. Some 56 years later, Israel needs a long list of Ben-Gurions from the top ranks of the defense establishment, both present and past, who will make it clear to Netanyahu that it can't be done his way. You don't gamble Israel's security on conspiracies.

This is not an issue for a state commission of inquiry. This time, it's clear who gave the order, an order that is patently illegal, an order that must not be obeyed

- not this summer, and not in Israel.

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