

Israel's threat to Wage War on Iran: Bluff or Blunder?

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By If Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu convinces his cabinet to okay an attack Iran's nuclear sites, Israel may suffer a diplomatic disaster.

Never mind that Netanyahu's own top military and intelligence advisers are said to oppose the scheme. Never mind the Secretary-General of the UN is against it. Never mind U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta warns an Israeli attack could trigger "unintended consequences" such as "a serious impact on U.S. forces in the region."

Israel's overt use of force will isolate it diplomatically from the world community as never before. It's not just the Muslim world that's unhappy with Israel's recent conduct.

There is widespread criticism over Israel's attack on a relief "Freedom Flotilla" of aid-carrying vessels attempting to break the siege of Gaza; over Israel's announcement of construction of 2,000 more homes in West Bank Jerusalem, and over Israeli foot-dragging on negotiations for a Palestinian state, favored by a great majority of General Assembly members but thwarted by USA's Security Council veto.

UNESCO's emotional reception Oct. 31st for its new Palestinian Authority members after a lopsided 107-14 vote reflects the world's sympathetic attitude toward Palestinians and their right to nationhood. It also reflects the UN's displeasure with Israel. The vote came in spite of the threat of a U.S. fund cut-off that would wipe out 22% of UNESCO's budget if it voted Palestine in.

Now news reports are flying that Israel is considering an attack on Iran's nuclear sites before Christmas—denied by Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak. The Israelis, who refuse to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty—and are said to have got some 200-plus nuclear weapons in their own arsenal—are determined that Iran shall not make even one. (Iran insists its work to enrich uranium is to boost electricity output, not to make a bomb.)

Mohamed ElBaradei, former Director-General of the IAEA, said recently there is no "shred of evidence" that Iran is turning the atom to military use. Yet Israel chooses to believe IAEA's latest report under its new Japanese director implying Iran is walking the military road.

Uri Avnery, an Israeli peace activist and former Knesset member, writes in "Palestine Chronicle" that Israeli threats are so much bluff and bluster. His article is titled, "Israel Will Not Attack Iran. Period." "In a rare show of unity, all of Israel's service chiefs, including the heads of the Mossad and Shin Bet, are publicly opposing the whole idea." Avnery explains why: "An Israeli assault on a major Muslim country would instantly unite Sunnis and Shiites, from Egypt and Turkey to Pakistan and beyond. Israel could become a villa in a burning jungle."

And he predicts "it is quite certain that with the beginning of a war, missiles will rain down on Israel - not only from Iran, but also from Hizbollah, and perhaps also from Hamas. We have no adequate defense for our towns. The amount of death and destruction would be prohibitive."

At a time when as many as 100,000 protesters have taken the streets seeking funds for human needs, out come the politicians with an Iran scare. Avnery mocks them, writing, "We need every shekel to buy more planes, more bombs, more submarines. Schools and hospitals must, alas, wait." (Sounds a lot like what's happening in America as military contractors reap historic profits while human needs are ditched.)

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon "reiterates his belief that a negotiated rather than a military solution is the only way to resolve this issue," a UN spokesman told AP. Avnery predicts Iran's armed forces chief General Hasan Firouzabadi will respond militarily to an Israeli strike but Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has hinted at a radically different response.

Reiterating Iran's stance that it is not involved in making a nuclear weapon, he added: "They should know that if we want to remove the hand of the U.S. from the world, we do not need bombs and hardware. We work based on thoughts, culture and logic."

Is Ahmadinejad suggesting a non-violent response to an Israeli attack? That would be both novel and welcome on the international stage. It would require strength and fortitude, particularly if the Israeli air strike scattered radioactive materials across Iran or, possibly, into other countries as well. A non-violent response would recall the successful strategies of the esteemed Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King. And it would stand out in stark relief to Israel's illegal use of force.

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