

Newsbytes

The First Watch

November 27, 2019

No. 949

Since 2001

Newzbytes is a ministry of Calvary Chapel of Appleton

www.ccapleton.org

“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

Spinning Out of Control

Matt Ward

raptureready.com

Many today believe that the Middle East stands on the very brink of all-out war: that huge regional chaos is just around the corner.

At present, the only real certainty in the Middle East is that nobody actually wants all-out war. Certainly, Donald Trump, coming into a re-election season, would at all costs wish to avoid the quagmire of another Middle Eastern conflict, one that would inevitably drag the United States back into a full military commitment from which it has only just managed to extricate itself.

Iran, despite bellicose rhetoric to the contrary, also does not want any kind of a region-wide confrontation with the United States or, indeed, Israel. Iran knows well that it would not win either of those wars.

Israel, for her part, seems to be more than happy maintaining the status quo, confining military operations to limited and controllable single-strike missions into Syria, Gaza and Lebanon, against a range of non-state proxy groups.

Yet, Israel is also desperate to avoid a region-wide war for one other reason. Israel knows that in the next major war it will be bombarded by many thousands of rockets from the northern, southern and eastern fronts, all at once. Despite Israel's recent successes in nullifying this rocket threat, in the next significant war, there is every prospect Israel will be completely swamped by the sheer weight of rockets that will be fired at her.

Yet, despite each of these main Middle-East players not wanting war, the Middle East landscape has never looked more like war is coming. Indeed, I would even go so far as to say that the region has never looked more as if it is on the brink of an imminent all-out war in my lifetime.

In every direction one chooses, there are bubbling pressures, each of which is a potential trigger. Only recently, there was the unprecedented attacks on oil refineries in Saudi Arabia. Iran, no doubt indirectly responsible for these attacks, is actively goading the United States into a limited military confrontation that could easily get out of hand and draw in all her regional allies and enemies, quickly spiraling out of control. Equally, any one of a number of Israeli operations against Iranian hubs of power in Syria, and now in Iraq, could also provide the spark triggering an escalation into major, region-wide war.

Any confrontation or bloodletting in any of these areas will have a ripple effect upon the entire Middle East that could see it descending into chaos. One of the main, and most misunderstood, reasons why the

Middle East is more volatile today than it has been in the past is because of the sheer number of proxy wars taking place there right now.

Take, for example, the current war in Yemen, between the Houthis and the Yemeni government. On the surface, it is a simple conflict between two relatively unimportant regional actors. However, this war is in fact a proxy war where Saudi – Iranian rivalry has come to a direct head.

It is on Yemeni battlefields that Saudi Arabia has finally chosen to confront Iran, and neither side at this point looks to be backing down. This war stopped being about merely the Houthis and the Yemen government long ago. Now it is morphing into no less than a confrontation between two competing ideologies, between Sunni and Shia Islam.

Syria is another fine example of this. On the surface, it would appear to be a brutal and bloody internal civil war, essentially between pro and anti-Assad forces. However, like Yemen, this war has become much more than that now. It is the epicenter of a confrontation between major world powers, and every one of them have deeply entrenched interests in Syria that prevent them from backing down or giving an inch. Indeed, when one spends any serious time considering Syria, the only conclusion one can draw is that it would be truly remarkable if all-out war did not come from here. Interesting, and more than a little frightening, this is just the scenario that Isaiah describes in his Burden of Damascus prophecy. The house of Israel suddenly attacked, from Syria, provoking a reaction that can only be a nuclear retaliation, and thus Damascus, the oldest continually inhabited city on Earth, is reduced overnight into a heap of ruins. This could happen today or it could happen tomorrow.

This volatility in the Middle East is unlikely to change any time soon either because a number of huge power bloc confrontations upholds the current situation. It is these vast power blocs, similar to those that existed in pre-First World War Europe, that are fueling the chaos in the Middle East. Firstly, there is Israel, backed by America, against all her many regional enemies. Currently, these enemies consist of Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas and Syria. This power struggle is manifesting itself in sporadic violence between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza.

However, there are other competing power blocs in the Middle East too. Iran is actively engaged all over the region against Saudi Arabia, mainly through the proxy war both sides are fighting in Yemen, but also in Iraq and elsewhere.

Add to this mix Turkey and their ongoing, burgeoning offensive against the Kurds – and remember that Russia has very fixed commitments now in the Middle East too – and it is not hard to see how things could quickly spiral out of control.

Skeptics, though, would argue that the Middle East has always been this dysfunctional and volatile. However, this time is different. The dynamics of this present-day Middle East are different from any that have come before it, for three main reasons.

China, for the first time ever, is now very much present in the Middle East in a way it has never been before. Russia, that generation-old nemesis of NATO, is resurgent, and its influence over the region cannot be overestimated or overemphasized.

Yet, significant though these two pivotal factors are, by themselves they are no harbinger of war shortly ahead. What does create that harbinger is the relative decline of the United States, both in a general foreign policy sense, and in its “boots on the ground” influence in the region.

There is a sense in the Middle East that the old rules simply do not apply any longer. There is a belief that what might once have been out of bounds is now very much up for grabs, and that if these state and

non-state actors don't rush in and take what they perceive to be the new spoils, that opportunity may be lost to them forever. All of this reinforced by the obvious desire of the United States to disengage from all Middle Eastern military commitments.

In the past, there were known certainties in the Middle East that everyone counted on, all underpinned by one thing: the unyielding presence of the United States. Now that cannot be taken for granted, and the impact of this on the Middle East has been the removal of the restraint that once curtailed nations like Iran, and also transnational actors, from acting too rashly or foolishly.

Any future war between nation-states in the Middle East will easily spill across borders and quickly draw in a host of other nations. The paradox for America is that even despite Trump's obvious efforts to disengage from the region, any conflict between any of these nations would see the United States inevitably drawn back in to the region, and a situation that Donald Trump has spent the last four years trying to escape from will repeat itself.

The Middle East, at present, seems to be spinning out of control. When war does finally come, as it will, it is also looking more and more likely that Israel will stand in this war all alone.

Iran to Have Nuclear Bomb in a Few Months?

by Majid Rafizadeh November 26

Gatestone Institute

This marks a dangerous phase in Iran's nuclear defiance. Tehran is now using a kind of prototype centrifuge that enriches uranium almost 50 times faster.

Although Iran is a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), it refuses to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect its sites. The IAEA is also not allowed to inspect or monitor Iran's military sites where nuclear activities are most likely being carried out.

That is why, before it is too late, which it is fast becoming, it is incumbent on the US and the international community to take seriously Iran's nuclear advances and urgently address its rush to obtain nuclear weapons.

This marks a dangerous phase in Iran's nuclear defiance. Tehran is now using a kind of prototype centrifuge that enriches uranium almost 50 times faster.

The Iranian government is shortening its nuclear breakout time -- the amount of time required to produce enough weapons-grade uranium for a single nuclear weapon. Tehran has accomplished this through several steps in the last few months.

Iran's government first increased its enriched uranium stockpile beyond the 300 kilogram limit; it enriched uranium to levels beyond the cap of 3.67 percent, and then activated 20 IR-4 and 20 IR-6 advanced centrifuges. The Iranian leaders even boasted that their government is now exploring new uranium enrichment programs and producing centrifuges.

Most recently, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Ali Akbar Salehi, declared that Iran has an adequate supply of 20% enriched uranium. "Right now we have enough 20% uranium," he told the Iranian Students News Agency, ISNA, "but we can produce more as needed". He added that the country is resuming uranium enrichment at a far higher level at the Fordow nuclear facility -- an underground uranium enrichment facility which is reportedly located on one of bases of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC--)-- injecting uranium gas into centrifuges, and operating 60 IR-6 advanced centrifuges.

This marks a dangerous phase in Iran's nuclear defiance. Tehran is now using a kind of prototype centrifuge that enriches uranium almost 50 times faster.

Iran's nuclear breakout time in 2015 was estimated at less than one year. Tehran has advanced its nuclear program since then. In an interview with Iran's state-owned Channel 2, Salehi admitted that the "nuclear deal" initiated by then-US President Barack Obama not only failed to restrict Iran's nuclear program; it actually helped Iran to advance its nuclear program through the flow of funds thanks to the lifting of sanctions. "If we have to go back and withdraw from the nuclear deal," he stated, "we certainly do not go back to where we were before ... We will be standing in a much, much higher position."

Although Iran is a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), it refuses to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inspect its sites. The IAEA is also not allowed to inspect or monitor Iran's military sites, where nuclear activities are most likely being carried out.

Among the many concessions that the Obama administration granted to the Iranian government, one was accepting the Iranian leaders' demand that military sites would be out of the IAEA's reach. Because of this surrender, at various high-profile sites such as the Parchin military complex, located southeast of Tehran, the regime has been free to engage in nuclear activities without the risk of inspection.

The Iranian leaders keep claiming that their nuclear activities are solely for peaceful purposes. This claim is bogus. If the Islamic Republic is advancing its nuclear program for peaceful purposes, why has Tehran repeatedly failed to report its nuclear facilities, including those at Natanz and Arak, to the IAEA?

Also, why does the Iranian government keep refusing to answer the IAEA's questions regarding a secret nuclear facility, reportedly located in the suburbs of Tehran? Two nonpartisan organizations based in Washington -- the Institute for Science and International Security and the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies -- last year released a detailed report on Iran's clandestine nuclear activities at this site.

In addition, why did the Iranian government place an S-300 anti-aircraft missile system at the Fordow underground nuclear site after the 2015 nuclear agreement? Finally, why does the Iranian regime never adequately address reports about its efforts to obtain illegal nuclear technology and equipment? Germany's domestic intelligence agency, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, revealed in its annual report for 2016 that the Iranian government had pursued a "clandestine" path to obtain illicit nuclear technology and equipment from German companies "at what is, even by international standards, a quantitatively high level."

The truth is that, from the perspective of the ruling clerics of Iran, obtaining nuclear weapons is a must to help Tehran advance its hegemonic ambitions to dominate the region. Also, by having nuclear weapons, the Iranian government can more powerfully support terror groups and proxies to destabilize the region without being concerned that the West might strike Iranian military targets.

Most of all, in the view of the ruling clerics, having nuclear weapons can ensure the survival of their theocratic, anti-American and anti-Semitic establishment.

That is why, before it is too late, which it is fast becoming, it is incumbent on the US and the international community to take seriously Iran's nuclear advances and urgently address its rush to obtain nuclear weapons.

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh is a business strategist and advisor, Harvard-educated scholar, political scientist, board member of Harvard International Review, and president of the International American Council on the Middle East. He has authored several books on Islam and US foreign policy. He can be reached at Dr.Rafizadeh@Post.Harvard.Edu

The reign of the prosecution

by Caroline B. Glick

November 22

In Israel Thursday morning, the politicians were the big story. Israel Beitenu chairman Avigdor Lieberman was the villain who had held the country hostage for nearly a year as he fed his narcissistic personality disorder.

The left's latest flagship, the Blue and White party is all the once vibrant political camp can put together now that it has lost its ideology. With its God of peace killed by suicide bombers and missiles, and its socialism statues crushed under the weight of bankrupt government companies, all the left has left is Blue and White. The party stands on two planks – destroying Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and eternalizing the regime of Israel's unelected bureaucrats.

The party's figurehead – Benny Gantz – was tempted to join a unity government with Netanyahu that would guarantee he would serve as prime minister in a rotation agreement. But his comrades wouldn't let him. Joining a government with Netanyahu would be a betrayal of their very reason for existing. So, unhappily, he walked away.

And then there was Netanyahu himself. Thursday morning, his supporters shook their heads in frustration and his enemies clapped their hands in glee at the sight of Israel's greatest statesman, the leader the public wants to keep in office, unable to form a government,

The conversation about Israel's politicians lasted less than 24 hours.

At four in the afternoon, Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit's office announced that at 7:30 in the evening he would announce his decision to indict Netanyahu. The underlying message was crystal clear: The day after Gantz returned his mandate to form a government to President Reuven Rivlin after he failed to get a sufficient number of coalition partners to build a government, Mandelblit said that there's no point in talking about whether or not Israel is going to new elections in March.

Voters don't decide anything. The lawyers do. Politicians are irrelevant. The only people who count in Israel today are the unelected attorneys who run the country.

But then we already knew that. And the fact that – as expected – Mandelblit announced sternly that he is indicting Netanyahu on three charges of breach of trust and one charge of bribery was at best anticlimactic. The game was up – if it was ever in play – in February.

Last February, at the height of the first election campaign of the year, when Netanyahu and his right wing coalition partners were leading in all polls by a wide margin, Mandelblit took the unprecedented – and legally dubious – step of announcing his intention to indict Netanyahu of those charges – pending a pre-indictment hearing. The moment he made his announcement, the right began to slide in the polls. The Leader had spoken. And we had no right to question him. Blue and White's scattershot campaign converged around Mandelblit's "recommendation." The left had a rallying cry and a reason to vote. Netanyahu's neck was on the chopping block.

Ever since Mandelblit gave his "recommendations," he and his comrades have been the only political actors with any power to speak of. Our actual elected leaders were rendered bit players in the lawyers' regime. Mandelblit's announcement Thursday just made it official.

To the cheers of Israel's corrupt media, for the past three years our legal overlords have gnawed away at

all aspects of political power in Israel, and in the process – not that they cared – they corrupted Israel’s legal system from top to bottom. From beginning to end, their criminal persecution of Netanyahu has been a travesty of every norm in democratic societies governed by the rule of law. Carefully edited and wholly distorted recordings and transcripts of police interrogations of Netanyahu, his wife, son, and advisors were systematically leaked to the media. The fact that every such leak was a felony offense was of no matter. Netanyahu’s attorneys submitted request after request for Mandelblit to order an investigation of the criminal leaks. All were summarily and scornfully rejected.

As the probes escalated, overseen by State Prosecutor Shai Nitzan, police investigators extorted Netanyahu’s closest advisors to coerce them into becoming state witnesses against the most successful and admired prime minister Israel has ever had. Investigators threatened Netanyahu’s former spokesman Nir Hefetz that they would destroy his family and bankrupt him if he didn’t turn on Netanyahu. They finally succeeded in breaking him after incarcerating him in a flea-infested jail cell for 15 nights, denying him sleep and medical treatment and bringing a young woman he knew into an interrogation room next to him and then threatening to destroy his family.

In the earlier stages of the probes, then police inspector general Roni Elshech spun wild, unsubstantiated and frankly insane conspiracy theories about Netanyahu, including the claim that he hired private investigators to tail police investigators. Elshech then went out of his way to prevent the government from appointing a successor for him as he approached the end of his term of service. Still today, more than a year later, Israel has no police inspector general.

Then, of course, there is Mandelblit himself. Mandelblit who claims not to have known about the abuse of witnesses – but then refused to investigate the allegations. And Mandelblit who promised – after publishing his “recommendations” for indictment at the height of the election campaign – that he would approach Netanyahu’s pre-trial hearing with an open mind. That promise was exposed as a lie when the chief prosecutor Liat Ben Ari left the hearing two days early to take her family on a safari in South Africa. Wouldn’t want a little thing like the Prime Minister’s legal fate to ruin her chance to see the elephants. The same Mandelblit refused to investigate Ben Ari when recordings emerged last month showing that she submitted a false deposition to a court in relation to a lawsuit submitted against her by a former subordinate attorney.

Then, of course, there is the substance of the charges themselves. The charge that Netanyahu accepted a bribe is based on an invented notion that positive media coverage of a politician is bribery. The notion that press coverage can be considered bribery exists nowhere in the democratic world. No prosecutor in the world has ever indicted – or investigated – a politician or media organization of having committed bribery involving the provision of positive coverage. Senior American jurists appeared before Mandelblit in Netanyahu’s (self-evidently unserious) pre-indictment hearing to warn him that pursuing bribery charges against politicians for receiving positive coverage is a recipe for destroying freedom of the press and democracy itself.

But then, that is the entire point of going after Netanyahu with invented crimes. Now that Netanyahu has been charged for bribery – and incidentally, he never even received positive coverage from the media organ accused of providing it – every politician that gets on the lawyers’ bad side will be sweating bricks any time a reporter writes something nice about him.

After Mandelblit made his primetime announcement, Netanyahu pledged to fight for his freedom and for the restoration of Israeli democracy and the rule of law. In his speech Thursday night, he made an impassioned appeal to his “decent” political rivals to join him in this fight.

If any politicians doubt that Netanyahu’s struggle is their struggle, they should look no further than the prosecution’s announcement last week that it was opening a review, ahead of a criminal probe – of Gantz’s role in the so-called “Fifth Dimension Affair.” The Fifth Dimension was a start-up Gantz headed. Its sale

for \$14 million allegedly violated standard procedures.

Maybe Gantz did nothing wrong. But then, Netanyahu is being indicted for crimes that don't actually exist. So it doesn't matter. The message is clear. Every politician is at the mercy of the prosecutors. Fall out of line, and you will become a criminal suspect before you can say, "prosecutorial abuse."

It's certainly true that the left shares the prosecutors' hatred of Netanyahu. Blue and White exists to destroy him. But all the leftist politicians – and Liberman – who are celebrating today need to understand that the Netanyahu they love to hate is their best friend and defender today. If Netanyahu is found guilty of crimes that were invented for the purpose of destroying him, then their goose will be cooked along with his.

Politicians may make us happy or sad, frustrated or infuriated. But today, in post-democratic Israel it hardly matters. Netanyahu called last night for an "investigation of the investigators." Unless our elected officials join forces to heed his call, they – and the voters who elected them -- will never be relevant again.