For Netanyahu, Iran Is Personal

Persson, Anders; Behravesh, Maysam

Published in:
The Huffington Post

2013

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
Unless other specific re-use rights are stated the following general rights apply:
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.
• Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
• You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
• You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Read more about Creative commons licenses: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.
For Netanyahu, Iran Is Personal

By Anders Persson

January 7, 2015

For the most part in recent years, the debate on Israeli-Iranian enmity in general and Israel’s threats to take military action against Iran’s nuclear program in particular has been framed around such “structural” or “big” issues as the regional balance of power, international law and the NPT, the national security concern, and normative values. This analytic perspective appears to enjoy adequate ground on the Israeli side too, and more specifically, applies to the incumbent Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Time and again over the past years, Netanyahu has pledged to use whatever it takes to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, including military force. With his pompous rhetoric and explicit threats, Netanyahu has placed himself in an “all-in” zero-sum situation vis-à-vis Iran. Like in poker, all-in means that you either win all or lose all. So, if Iran, which he firmly believes is dashing for the bomb, is forcefully stopped, he will be a national winner and probably secure himself a heroic place in Israeli history. If he fails to take action, however, and Iran is allowed to cross Israel’s red lines, Netanyahu will go down (http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/netanyahu-strike-iran.html) in history as the biggest loser ever in Israeli politics.
The whole issue of Iran's nuclear program, with its alleged weaponization activities, has personal importance to Netanyahu too. Throughout his political career, he has always been driven by feelings of unrecognized grandiosity. His father, Benzion Netanyahu, was ostracized by Israel's labor establishment and forced to pursue his academic career abroad. His wife Sara has been on the record saying her husband "is the very best prime minister ever to serve in Israel." Though Winston Churchill is his role model, Netanyahu has no stature of his own in Israel, and, of course, even less so abroad, where he is often accused of not acting "Churchillian" and for missing "Churchillian moments."

In Israel and abroad, it is widely believed that Netanyahu is seeking his place in the history books with his campaign to halt Iran's nuclear venture. Obsessive attempts on his part to personalize such a matter, which has enormous implications for Israel's national security and interests, partly explains why the Israeli military is suspicious of his policy line and more often than not expresses opposition to an attack on the Islamic Republic. While few in Israel doubt the gravity of the threat of a potential Iranian bomb, many worry about Netanyahu's true motives behind a forceful action to take it out. The former iron triangle of the Israeli military, namely former Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, former head of Mossad Meir Dagan, and former director of Shin Bet Yuval Diskin, all opposed an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear facilities during their incumbency because they could not trust Netanyahu's intentions and the disinterestedness of his attitude towards the issue. Stressing that Netanyahu is "possessed" by Iran, Diskin, for example, has quoted Bibi as saying that "his mission on Iran is on a much grander scale" (http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/ex-shin-bet-head-netanyahu-is-an-unreliable-leader-possessed-by-iran-premium-1.491927) than the previous Israeli strikes on Iraqi and Syrian nuclear facilities.

Though much of what happened during this time (around 2009-2011) in the corridors of power in Israel, is still under gag orders, leaks (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/05/world/middleeast/israeli-report-cites-a-thwarted-2010-move-on-iran.html?_r=4&) to the media point to a devastating situation in Israeli politics where the military leadership under Ashkenazi and Dagan refused to carry out a P-plus order from Netanyahu and his Defense Minister Ehud Barak, which would have prepared the Israeli military for an imminent strike on Iran's nuclear installations. In a functioning democracy, such acts of defiance by the military, which almost resemble a coup d'état, would be incomprehensible. Ashkenazi, Dagan and their allies also reportedly took measures to prevent Netanyahu and Barak's favored candidate for new chief of staff, Yoav Galant, from assuming office in 2011 and revoked the security clearance from Netanyahu's national security advisor, Uzi Arad, a move which led to his resignation in 2010. Galant and Arad had been strong advocates of attacking Iran.

The question of whether Israel will use military force against Iran is one of the decisive questions of our time. A lot is at stake here for Netanyahu. Everything that his critics have ever said about him -- that he is a cheap demagogue, that he has a weak character, that he is indecisive, and that he is no Churchill -- will be proven correct if one day Iran should exceed Israel's red lines. Iran is personal for Netanyahu.

This article is co-authored with Maysam Behravesh (http://www.svet.lu.se/english_pages/css_personligsida.lasso?token.id=MBE) who is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at Lund University, Sweden.

MORE: Israeli Palestinian Conflict, Iran, Israel, Syria, Iran Nuclear Weapons
For Netanyahu, Iran Is Personal | Anders Persson

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anders-persson/for-netanyahu-iran-is-per_b_3859206.html