

Journal charges, Netanyahu is preparing for war

by Joseph Brewda

Israel and Palestine, an English-language newsletter of Maxim Ghilan, has published a detailed report in its latest issue (no. 201), warning that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is intent on provoking a new Mideast war, possibly as early as the summer of 1998. According to the first installment of a series, entitled "The Next War: Self-Fulfilling Prophecies," the success of Netanyahu's plan entails a shakeup of the leadership of the Israeli military, to put together a new team ready to go to war at that time. The shakeup is required, Ghilan reports, because much of the top leadership of the military considers Netanyahu's confrontationist policies to be a security threat to Israel.

According to Ghilan, current Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak and other top officers, are opposed to such a war, since they estimate it could easily become nuclear. Netanyahu, on the other hand, is prepared to take this risk for the sake of Greater Israel. Consequently, Netanyahu is seeking to promote officers who are ready to do his bidding, and plunge Israel into a war which serves no one's interest.

Ghilan is a well-known figure on the Israeli scene, whose writings on such matters are often newsworthy, and need to be considered. Although his account has not been entirely confirmed, and some details are disputed by others in the region, his general assessment coheres with a broad range of evidence pointing to the likelihood that Netanyahu's de-ranked state of mind could lead the region into war.

Netanyahu must go

In fact, ever since he was installed in office in the aftermath of the Nov. 4, 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Netanyahu has carried out a series of actions intended to destroy Rabin's legacy, the Oslo Peace Accords, and to pave the way to war. These include building new Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, and efforts to discredit

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, through demands that he become a mere Israeli policeman. Netanyahu's aggressive actions also include tunnelling under the Al Aqsa Mosque, and related sacrileges to Islam, designed to provoke generations-long religious conflict.

Most recently, his apparent effort to kill a Hamas official in Jordan in September, has caused some observers to believe, correctly or not, that Netanyahu is intent on triggering the popular reaction in Jordan needed to overthrow King Hussein. Such a plan, as much as it has been rejected by sane elements in Israel, has long been a favorite of Netanyahu's crony, Gen. Ariel Sharon, now the strongman in his cabinet, who hopes to drive all Palestinians out of the West Bank into Jordan, and then claim that "Jordan is Palestine." For such a plan to work, the King has to go. Others also think that Netanyahu is doing his best to promote and provoke the terrorist wing of Hamas, by means of such assassination attempts, creating a pretext to finish off the Palestinians once and for all.

Because of such a dynamic, statesman Lyndon LaRouche has called for sane elements in the Israeli establishment to dump Netanyahu. In a radio interview with "EIR Talks" on Sept. 16, LaRouche specified: "If Netanyahu does not go, then Israel is on a course toward war, a war, if it unfolds, Israel can not survive without use of nuclear weapons. . . . The Israelis must dump Netanyahu *now*, because as long as this bum remains in office, there's no chance for peace in the Middle East—a new round of Hell is going to break out there, effecting we know not what!"

Two Israeli military camps

According to Ghilan, there are currently two opposing camps inside Israel's security forces, each with a strategic conception of its own.

One of them supports a hard line, “consisting of initiated action in Lebanon and other Arab States and direct, active and abundant intervention inside the Palestinian Autonomy, including activity against Arafat’s police and other services, accused of ‘not preventing’ fundamentalist Islamic terror.” This is the policy advocated by Netanyahu.

The other camp is somewhat more prudent, “defining Lebanon as a place that has, ultimately to be left alone — if proper guarantees are extended by Syria, and mostly by the United States.” This camp opposes direct intervention into the Palestinian Authority and “demands the Palestinians be given just enough economic and political breathing space to allow them to cooperate, at the top, with the Israeli Defense Establishment in its struggle for the liquidation of the Islamic welfare and political structures inside the West Bank and Gaza Strip.” This latter grouping, Ghilan says, is backed by the Clinton administration.

Netanyahu’s main problem, according to Ghilan, is that the Army brass, unlike the leadership of the civilian intelligence services, the Mossad and Shin Bet, are not ultimately subject to the prime minister. They oversee a vast establishment of their own, in fact they constitute *the* establishment of Israel, and their leadership cannot be readily hired and fired. As a result, it is not so easy for him to impose his war policies on the military.

Consequently, “Netanyahu has tried to reduce the Army’s influence, cohesion, and political power.” But, Netanyahu has not been very successful in this endeavor, and the best he has managed, is “to weaken the internal cohesion of the General Staff, and to undercut the Chief of Staff’s personal power.” This has been especially needed, according to Ghilan, because Chief of Staff Lipkin-Shahak, whose term does not end until the summer of 1998, is adamantly opposed to Netanyahu’s war policies.

To this end, Netanyahu chose Gen. Yitzhak Mordechai as defense minister, hoping he would oppose the current chief of staff, because of old personal grudges. But this tactic failed, since both Mordechai and Lipkin-Shahak “realized the danger of leaving defense matters in Netanyahu’s hands.” Other efforts by Netanyahu to oust Lipkin-Shahak have also failed.

Moreover, as a result, Netanyahu has increasingly been seen as a threat, because of such antics. “Netanyahu’s efforts to split, control, and emasculate the army’s political power is seen by the majority of top officers as both a personal and national danger. Netanyahu’s amock-running settlement, anti-Arafat and Lebanon policies have increased this awareness.”

There are those in the officer corps, however, who have a different view, especially among middle-echelon commanders who aspire to war-fighting experience, and who resent the discipline imposed on military action which leads them to be active either in covert anti-guerrilla action or defensive developments. “They would like a good new war, in which the

huge Israeli military juggernaut might be used in its entirety to steamroll over Arab — and Palestinian — forces, putting an end, once and for all, to terrorist and guerrilla activity.”

War in the summer?

According to Ghilan, once it was determined that Lipkin-Shahak would not be forced out, and would remain until his term runs out next summer, the struggle over power and policy concentrated on who would become his heir. There are reportedly two main candidates: Gen. Matan Wilnai, whom Ghilan reports is a pupil of Lipkin-Shahak, and advocate of his policies; and Gen. Shaul Mofaz, whom Ghilan reports is a warhawk (an assessment disputed by other Israelis), and, hence, Netanyahu’s candidate.

Therefore, according to Ghilan, who succeeds Lipkin-Shahak is an issue of war and peace:

“Both the incumbent Chief of Staff and Defense Minister are openly opposed to a war, which Netanyahu is actively preparing through his political choices. Lipkin-Shahak, one of the most sane political individuals in Israel, is said to be anxious that the next war may extend to all of the Middle East, not just remain contained to the Palestinians and Syrians.

“Moreover, the Chief of Staff estimates such a conflict might easily degenerate into a nuclear, chemical, or even bacteriological one. Netanyahu, prepared as he is to take this risk for the sake of historical Eretz Israel [Biblical Land of Israel], needs an obedient, even enthusiastic war lover as Chief of Staff for the next war.

“To put it bluntly, Netanyahu has decided that only a major military victory can permit him to destroy the Syrian military potential; to unravel the Palestinian Autonomy such as it is; and to ensure his own popularity inside Israel. Not just in the three and some months left of his personal mandate, but also for a further four-years term.

“Victory over the Syrians and the liquidation of the Palestinian Autonomy would allow Netanyahu to consolidate his power either through popularity-after-victory or through the establishment of a National Unity Coalition with Labor.

“It would also establish on a large base the ‘Whole Eretz Israel’ to which most Israeli leaders aspire — on either a long-time or (as Netanyahu does) on a short-time schedule.”

“To do this,” Ghilan concludes, “Netanyahu has to force Washington to accept his plot and pleas; or, if we were to adopt another viewpoint, to convince Washington that such a war is positive for U.S. interests.”

Whatever the accuracy of Ghilan’s particular account, there is no question that the Middle East faces a catastrophe, with global strategic effects, unless Netanyahu and his crowd are quickly removed from office.

The journal Israel and Palestine can be reached at: IPJU, P.O. Box 44, 75462 Paris Cedex 10, France; or by fax (33) 1 48009645.