

Netanyahu's wars

by GWYNNE DYER

Israel's war with Iran is definitely the war that Prime Minister Binyamin 'Bibi' Netanyahu has wanted all along, but he may have bitten off more than he can chew.

In the past three months Israel has bombed Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and now Iran. It has an open-ended war involving tens of thousands of Israeli troops in the Gaza Strip, and a lower-intensity counter-insurgency war in the occupied West Bank that also soaks up lots of Israeli troops. And now it is also at war with Iran, a country of 90 million people.

This is less of a burden on the 7.5 million Jewish Israelis than it would seem, since geography decrees that the wars with Iran and Yemen do not require ground troops. (Neither country has a land border with Israel.) However, the air wars will hurt Israel's population and damage its infrastructure, and its reservist soldiers are already exhausted by twenty months of war.

So is the civilian population of Israel, which is emotionally drained by the long-running drama of the hostages. It is also deeply divided by Netanyahu's decision to use this moment of maximum Israeli power to try to wipe out every potential challenge to the country's status as the Middle East's dwarf superpower.

Netanyahu has declared that Iran is on the brink of getting nuclear weapons half a dozen times in the past twenty years, always in the hope that he could get the US military to do the heavy lifting in a war to 'disarm' it. And each time, after the US president of the day declined to do so, the Iranian 'threat' magically receded - only to be revived for the next president.

Bibi made some headway with Trump in his first term, convincing the latter that he should pull out of the treaty putting strict controls on Tehran's nuclear activities that Barack Obama had signed with Iran in 2015. But it turned out that Trump wasn't up for an actual war with Iran; he was just on a mission to destroy all the achievements of his predecessor.

Nobody could have been more pro-Israeli than Joe Biden, but he wouldn't go to war with Iran for Netanyahu either. Initially the Israeli prime minister thought that he was making more headway with Trump 2.0, but Trump's promises are as empty as his threats; by May he was negotiating with Iran for a thinly disguised return to the treaty he had cancelled in 2018.

At this point Netanyahu took the decision he had probably always promised himself never to make: he gave the order to attack Iran without a guarantee of full American support. He forgot that Trump, almost uniquely among post-1945 US presidents, has never committed the United States to a war overseas.

True to form, Trump posted on his Truth Social platform that 'The U.S. had nothing to do with the attack on Iran tonight.' That may not be strictly true, in the sense that he certainly must have known Netanyahu's plans, but it's accurate in the sense that he did not approve of them. Indeed, Bibi was deliberately preempting a possible revival of the 2018 treaty.

Saving face always comes first with Trump, so he was soon trumpeting 'If we are attacked in any way, shape or form by Iran, the full strength and might of the U.S. Armed Forces will come down on you at levels never seen before.' But he says that every time, to any country he disagrees with, and they are all still here. TACO.

The reality is that Netanyahu has broken his lifelong rule and attacked Iran without Washington's full support because he cannot bear to miss this opportunity to attack his enemies when they are all far weaker than ever before. He cannot actually lose this war he has begun with Iran, but he may find it almost impossible to end in a satisfactory manner.

There are three problems for which he has no apparent solution. One is that he lacks the specialized bombs that would enable him to destroy the Iranian centrifuges, labs and enriched uranium that are buried deep inside mountainsides. Trump would have to give

them to him.

The second is that Trump is extremely petty and vindictive when defied or 'disrespected'. If he decides that he no longer wants to deal with Netanyahu, he holds such power over the country's fate that a different prime minister would be found to replace him.

Finally, Iran has a 'nuclear option' that has nothing whatever to do with nuclear weapons. It can cut the world's oil supply by 20 per cent and cause a global recession simply by closing the Strait of Hormuz. And a recession is what Donald Trump fears above all else.