

Will the Real Benjamin Netanyahu Please Stand Up?

By Roger L Simon

I have been following events in Israel intensely with bated breath since October 7, 2023 – now even more so since Sheryl and I will be arriving at Ben Gurion Airport later this month for a visit cum research trip for a novel I am writing. We're also pleased to be spending our vacation money in Israel under the circumstances.



While the situation seems to be improving, internal debate in the Jewish state swirls as usual, also as usual around the role and performance of Israel's longest-serving prime minister (17 years in toto) Benjamin Netanyahu.

The man is simultaneously recovering from a prostatectomy, facing a long-delayed trial for alleged personal improprieties and conducting a war on seven fronts. And that's just for starters. He also is a key player in the highly-contentious overhaul of Israel's legal system that as yet has no formal constitution. And then there's the debate surrounding ultra-Orthodox Haredi serving in the military that has crucial implications for the future of the country. And.. and...and...

Love him or hate him, living under the most extraordinary pressure, Bibi has come to symbolize the ups and downs of the nation he leads as much, undoubtedly more in current public view, than its founder David Ben-Gurion himself.

Like Winston Churchill and Donald J. Trump, he is a man of tremendous controversy. The "river to the sea" crowd despises him, often likening him to the Devil. (They aren't too fond of DJT or Churchill either, assuming they even know who the latter was.) Netanyahu also shares the remarkable self-confidence of the other two.

Is it merited? What is the reality?

As my title indicates, it puts me in mind of the CBS TV panel show of my youth, "To Tell the Truth," with that show's traditional question "Will the real [fill in the blank] please stand up?"

In a Jerusalem Post op-ed of Jan 4, Hadassah Chen makes a compelling defense of Bibi. She even calls herself a "Bibist" in "[Chose to lead: Netanyahu will be remembered as one of the greatest of all time](#)".

Worried about the results of his operation, she goes on to say, also referencing Churchill, "Sadly, the greatness of these men is always celebrated too late. When asked if Bibi is the right leader to handle this war, I answered firmly that only he has the ability to lead us right now."

She further writes: “So much fake news surrounds Bibi and his family. So many lies, and such unfairness in the way things have been handled, whether it’s his insane trial, handling of the war, or his standing by his wife, who gets massacred by the media. Try to stand in his shoes for a day – the average person would be overwhelmed and collapse.”

Sound familiar?

My friend of many years, Peter Berkowitz of the Hoover Institution, takes a more jaundiced view. Commenting on a recent Wall Street Journal interview with Netanyahu, Peter writes at [Real Clear Politics](#):

“Trump’s return to the White House bolsters Netanyahu’s optimism. In the Journal interview he expressed the hope that at last a deal could be struck to return the approximately 100 remaining hostages held by Hamas for more than 14 months in nightmare conditions in Gaza. And he anticipated expanding the Abraham Accords by normalizing relations with Saudi Arabia.

“Looking back, Netanyahu concluded that he was right, soon after the Oct. 7 massacres, to declare ‘total victory’ as Israel’s war aim.

“The Journal’s heartening account of Netanyahu’s war-time leadership and Israel’s resilience, courage, and military acumen and might provide a valuable corrective to the frequently one-sided and hostile coverage to which the Jewish state’s exercise of its right of self-defense has been subject. But the Journal’s portrait of Netanyahu is also incomplete and can lead astray.

“The prime minister’s insistence on total victory, for example, always has promised too much. Now, as last year, it masks the region’s harsh realities and Israel’s political turmoil.”

Peter, who is vastly more experienced in these matters than I

am and is writing from Tel Aviv in this article, no doubt expresses the prevailing wisdom of many there, journalists and academics whose views often mirror the same class in the USA. But I wonder if such a bleak assessment is merited. After, or perhaps even during, my short trip I will sharpen my opinion, although I am not certain anybody's is worth much. We are in the maw of history.

But currently I wonder this: If not total victory, what? The same old, same old? That's a bleak future indeed, for all concerned, including the Gazans.

Peter voices the criticism, as do many of that same group, that Netanyahu has not yet come up with a proposal of what to do about Gaza after the war. True enough. But who has? I haven't seen anything resembling a good solution from anybody, certainly not from our government.. It could be that there isn't one, which is all the bleaker.

As of now, to me anyway, total victory indeed seems the necessary first step to any solution. In fact, it is the obvious one in Middle Eastern terms as Lee Smith made clear years ago in his "[The Strong Horse](#)". Chamberlain-like ambiguity does not play well in that part of the world (maybe not in ours as well, if we're honest).

In that sense, I stand behind "Strong Horse" Benjamin Netanyahu. Without someone like that, rare as they are, we are lost. Criticism of Bibi's war management, while perhaps accurate in some details, frequently feels motivated by the most human of all failings that so frequently is exacerbated in politics, good old fashioned envy (cf. the Tenth Commandment). Or, as [Shakespeare](#) put it, "Why should that name be sounded more than yours?"

And then, needless to say, we have been lied to excessively by the media, Israeli and domestic.

In that regard, I have, of all people, soon to be former

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, whom I have often criticized and still see as a notoriously weak horse, in partial support. Mr. Blinken, in a farewell conversation with the New York Times, asserts that despite accusations that Netanyahu was torpedoing ceasefires and therefore the release of at least some of the hostages, the truth was otherwise. The Secretary told the Times: "No, that's not accurate. What we've seen time and again is Hamas not concluding a deal that it should have concluded."

No surprise there considering the brutal, sadistic behavior of the terror organization since its formation (1987), but I wish Mr. Blinken had said that earlier—and loudly. It might have moved things along more quickly and saved lives on both sides, not to mention countering the pervasive propaganda dominating the West ad nauseum. The mercifully departing secretary also admitted that every time he and the Biden administration demanded Israel provide more food and aid to Gaza, the more Hamas, sensing weakness, made a ceasefire and return of hostages all the more difficult.

With that same food almost always stolen by Hamas in the first place, this repellent pattern was long obvious from the outside, yet the Biden people persisted in their policy and pompous pronouncements. Why? Just for votes in Michigan that never materialized? Well, they're the people who gave a Medal of Freedom to George Soros.

This is what Benjamin Netanyahu has had to deal with, Hamas on one side, the Biden Administration on the other. One can only imagine the pressure on a head of a democratic state at war in such a situation. Considering that, he has done brilliantly—and done it for the other Western democracies that have been almost uniformly ungrateful, even made him a war criminal in some instances. This could be seen as the ultimate version of the old saw about no good deed going unpunished.

For that reason it's easy to answer the question "Will the

real Benjamin Netanyahu please stand up?"

[As others have written](#), if Israel were to have its own Mt. Rushmore, a sculpture of Netanyahu should be right up there with Ben-Gurion.

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