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Article 1.

Bloomberg

Netanyahu Sees Strike on Iran's Nukes as Worth the Risk

Jeffrey Goldberg

Mar 26, 2012 -- A couple of years ago, Vice President Joe Biden, on a visit to Israel, offered Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu a piece of advice. He shared something his father often said: “There’s no sense dying on a small cross.”

Few American politicians would think it wise to invoke crucifixion in a conversation with the leader of the Jewish state (though the Jerusalem setting was apt), and fewer still would get away with it. But Netanyahu, who considers Biden his closest friend in the Obama administration, laughed. What he didn’t do was take the advice in the way it was intended.

What Biden meant was for Netanyahu to quit offering partial and ephemeral freezes in West Bank settlement-building, and to try instead for a dramatic compromise with the Palestinians, even if he had to pay a very high political price.

Instead, Netanyahu applied Biden’s aphorism to a different issue facing his country: what to do about Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Netanyahu has been warning about Iran’s nuclear program since the 1990s; now, as prime minister, he is in a position to do something about it. The lesson he took from Biden is that Iran is the one issue important enough to risk everything for.

Dangerous Overconfidence

There are a few reasons why this episode is now so important. Last week, I wrote about some of the assumptions Israel’s leaders are making about the potential fallout from a strike on Iran’s nuclear sites. I visited Tel Aviv and Jerusalem this month, and I was struck, in my conversations with Israeli officials and ex-officials, by the number of best-case scenarios they offered up. They seemed dangerously overconfident that they could manage the aftermath of a strike, and this has led them to contemplate what seems to me -- at this moment at least -- a

precipitous and premature attack.

I also went to Israel to test a notion I've often heard: that Netanyahu might be engaged in an enormous bluff. I doubted this theory (and certainly President Barack Obama and his secretary of defense, Leon Panetta, doubt it). But it seemed worth testing, in part because Netanyahu's campaign to focus the world's attention on Iran has worked so well without his having to resort to military force.

I came away from this visit certain that Netanyahu isn't bluffing. I disagree with Panetta's view that an Israeli attack could come by June, but I do think that, if current conditions prevail, there is a very good chance Israel will strike by the end of the year.

Which brings me to another belief of the Israeli leadership I heard during my visit. This one might surprise Obama's critics among right-wing Israel supporters (and among Republican presidential candidates): The Israelis don't see Obama as an adversary. Especially after the air-clearing meeting between Obama and Netanyahu this month at the White House, the Israeli leadership is fairly confident Obama will side with them if they launch an attack, and they are also fairly confident the president is serious when he suggests that the U.S. might one day use force to stop Iran.

But that's almost beside the point. From the perspective of the two men who matter most in the Israeli decision-making process -- Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak -- American promises are somewhat immaterial. Because it is imprinted on the Israeli DNA that Jews, post-Holocaust, shouldn't rely on the kindness of non-Jews to bail them out of trouble. In other words,

no matter how strong Obama's rhetoric, Israel's leaders will not subcontract out their defense to the U.S. or any other party.

Question of Timing

Senior officials I met with also told me that there are no gaps between the U.S. and Israel on intelligence issues, or in a basic understanding of the Iranian threat. The only gap is in timing: U.S. officials are confident they could destroy Iran's nuclear facilities in 2013 or 2014 if they needed to. The Israelis seem to believe that, because of their more modest offensive capabilities, they either strike in 2012 or don't strike at all.

In fact, I've concluded that there are only two reasons Israel's leaders haven't struck already.

First, they believe that there is still some time before Iran enters the "zone of immunity," in which its nuclear sites are so hardened or spread so widely that a strike would be ineffective. And second, because Iran has not yet approached the zone of immunity, Israeli leaders believe they can still pay heed to Obama's request to hold off. (Ultimately, they will make their own decision about a strike, but they believe they should heed the wishes of Israel's most important ally while they can.)

When Israeli leaders conclude that Iran (IATBXOIL) has reached the threshold of the zone of immunity, there's a strong likelihood they will act.

Which brings us back to Biden's cross. Netanyahu is a cautious man, who seems mainly interested in preserving his ruling coalition. But Netanyahu's father, Benzion Netanyahu, a renowned scholar of the Spanish Inquisition, taught his sons that

the Jewish people are constantly threatened by extinction- level plots, and the prime minister has internalized this understanding of Jewish history.

Another family story may have even more salience: the martyrdom of Netanyahu's brother, Yonatan, during a 1976 operation to free Israeli hostages in Uganda. Yonatan died in the act of rescuing Jews. His brother understands that whatever hardship he experiences by taking action against Iran, the price he pays will not be the price his brother paid in pursuit of what he sees as the same goal: protecting Jews.

In other words, Iran's nuclear program, to Netanyahu, is Biden's very large cross.

Jeffrey Goldberg is a Bloomberg View columnist and a national correspondent for the Atlantic.

Article 2.

Council on Foreign Relations

Nuclear Summit Progress and Pitfalls

Micah Zenko

March 27, 2012 -- The potential threat of nuclear terrorism has been markedly reduced due to the high-level focus produced by the initial Nuclear Security Summit in April 2010 and reinforced

by the just-concluded summit in Seoul, South Korea. The practical effect of both summits is the development of a clearly articulated work plan that prioritizes strategic objectives and specifies national commitments for the forty-seven participating countries. In the Seoul Communiqué, the leaders re-emphasized the threat of nuclear terrorism, and stressed that it is the responsibility of states "to maintain effective security of all nuclear material, which includes nuclear materials used in nuclear weapons, and nuclear facilities under their control." These state pledges are voluntary and nonbinding, and there are no enforcement measures to compel compliance. Yet, approximately 80 percent of national commitments from the first Nuclear Security Summit have been fulfilled. This was not due to diplomatic pressure or economic sanctions, but was instead driven by national leaders' fear of embarrassment that they could not deliver on their promises, combined with U.S. technical and financial assistance. For example, Ukraine (as a Soviet republic) once maintained a stockpile of five thousand nuclear weapons; last week, it shipped its remaining weapons-grade uranium to Russia, where it will be blended down to low-enriched uranium to fuel civilian research reactors. This was accelerated to meet the Nuclear Security Summit pledges, and made possible by \$60 million in U.S. technical and financial assistance.

But despite the sustained progress of the Nuclear Security Summits, President Obama will not meet his four-year deadline to secure all loose nuclear materials, which he first declared as a candidate in 2008, with the clock restarting after the April 2010 summit. In December 2010, Obama administration officials backtracked, claiming that the deadline was more of a "forcing function" that would accelerate U.S. nuclear nonproliferation

programs and mobilize international support for nuclear material security.

Moreover, there is still no comprehensive and coordinated U.S. government plan to secure all nuclear materials. National Security Council officials recently admitted to GAO investigators that "developing a single, integrated cross-agency plan that incorporates all these elements could take years."

There is mounting concern these days over the development of nuclear arms in Iran and North Korea. Yet, neither country has enough fissile material to fuel a nuclear weapon; together, Iran and North Korea have less than a fraction of 1 percent of worldwide nuclear material. Today, thirty-two countries possess 1 kilogram or more of weapons-usable nuclear material. Preventing nuclear terrorism requires, in large part, locking down all of that material--at least in accordance with the latest IAEA guidelines.

Raising awareness among the forty-seven national leaders attending the Nuclear Security Summit increases the likelihood of achieving the ultimate goal of nuclear material security. However, lasting and effective nuclear security is not a one-time pledge, but rather an ongoing process that will only end with the universal elimination of all weapons-usable material. Since that will not occur anytime soon, world leaders will need to sustain the progress of the past two years with the results to be reported at the next Nuclear Security Summit in 2014.

Micah Zenko, Fellow for Conflict Prevention.

Article 3.

SPIEGEL

Obama's Over-Hasty Withdrawal

Bernhard Zand

03/27/2012 -- This week, Baghdad will host its first Arab League summit since Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. The historical event marks Iraq's return to the international stage but diplomats will also focus on Iran's growing influence in the country. A few months after the US withdrawal, it is clear that -- despite Obama's claims -- Iraq is neither sovereign, stable nor self-reliant.

The garden is in a grove of palm trees in downtown Baghdad, as clean and manicured as a golf course, and surrounded by a high wall to keep out the noise and filth of the city. Ahmed Chalabi, 67, a man the world once thought would eventually be running Iraq, is hosting an event in the garden of his recently renovated house in the city.

There are no statesmen, ministers or diplomats in attendance, but there are two dozen students and a professor from the university. Chalabi has served his guests kebabs and rice, and he has promised them that he will put in a good word so that their poorly equipped university gets new blackboards, tables and chairs. Now they are lining up to pose for photographs with the former Iraqi deputy prime minister and oil minister, who is now a businessman. "Without Ahmed Chalabi," says one of the students, "Saddam Hussein would never have been overthrown."

The building where Saddam was hanged more than five years ago is just a few streets from Chalabi's villa, on the banks of the Tigris River. Exactly nine years have passed since the American invasion began. Chalabi was the first and most prominent of the senior politicians in exile at the time to return in the wake of US tanks, with the goal of building a new Iraq.

But is today's Iraq what he once imagined it would become? "My generation has failed," he says after the students have left, as he sits down in an armchair, looking exhausted. "We have all failed. Totally."

Historic Date

This Thursday, Baghdad is hosting the 23rd summit of the Arab League. It is the first time the country has done so since 1990, when former dictator Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and plunged his country into a catastrophe that would last more than 20 years. It is not an exaggeration to call the date historic. It marks Iraq's attempt to resume its place in international politics. It is also the first Arab League summit since the beginning of the Arab Spring, as well as Baghdad's first significant diplomatic event since the last US soldier left the country on Dec. 18, 2011.

At that time, US President Barack Obama took a few minutes to declare the end of a war that had lasted longer than the war against Nazi Germany and had claimed the lives of more than 115,000 Iraqis and almost 4,500 Americans. Obama conceded that Iraq was "not a perfect place," but he also pointed out that the US military was "leaving a sovereign, stable and self-reliant country with a representative government elected by its people."

Many observers would, however, question the description of

Iraq as "sovereign, stable and self-reliant."

Obama didn't want the Iraq war. His predecessor, George W. Bush, shoulders the political responsibility for this conflict. Nevertheless, the circumstances of the US withdrawal, and the language Obama used to whitewash it, border on negligence.

The 12th Guest

The agenda of the Arab League summit alone shows how little sovereignty the country America left behind actually has. In public, the summit will focus on Syria, Iraq's neighbor to the west, and the question of what the Arab League should do about its dictator, Bashar Assad.

Behind the scenes, the summit will focus on Iran, Iraq's neighbor to the east, and the question of how the Arabs should behave toward Tehran.

Iraq cannot act solely in its own interest on either of these issues. In addition to the 11 Arab leaders who had announced their intention to attend the summit by last Friday, there will be a 12th, albeit uninvited and invisible, presence felt at the conference table in Baghdad: Iran, the closest ally of the Syrian regime and a neighbor which has more influence in Iraq today than ever before.

While Bush was in a hurry to get into Iraq, Obama is in just as much of a hurry to get out again. In December 2010, Washington renewed its support for 61-year-old Nouri Al-Maliki as prime minister. Although he had lost the election, Maliki, as a devout Shiite and Iran's preferred candidate, stood a better chance of forming a government in the short term -- and

thus make it possible for the United States to withdraw quietly and quickly. The Arab Spring began in Tunisia two weeks later. It is conceivable that, under those circumstances, Obama would have had to make a different decision.

Paying Attention to Iran

In the three months since he has been solely in charge of the country, Maliki has made it clearer than in the five preceding years just how much attention he pays to Shiite Iran. Just one day after the last US soldier stepped across the border into Kuwait, Maliki had a warrant issued for the arrest of Sunni Vice President Tariq Al-Hashimi, who only barely managed to escape to the autonomous Kurdistan region, where he remains to this day.

Since then, the embittered Sunnis haven't been the only ones to criticize Maliki for increasingly forming alliances with Tehran. Chalabi, also a Shiite and a friend of Iran, concedes that Maliki, "like Ben Hur," is riding horses that support his rule but which are controlled by Tehran. Indeed, it is difficult to detect a sense of the kind of sovereignty Obama mentioned coming from the man in charge in Baghdad.

Since the American withdrawal, Maliki has also exhibited another trait more clearly than in the years before: his proclivity for autocratic rule. In addition to being prime minister, he is currently also serving as acting national security minister, acting defense minister and acting interior minister, which puts him in control of all central security organizations.

He has also filled many positions in the justice, telecommunications and electricity ministries with members of

his Dawa Party, as well as in the central bank and several provincial administrations. When such positions require parliamentary approval, he often leaves them unfilled and appoints his supporters as acting officials.

Lucrative Deals

His personal circles are also starting to resemble those of the classic Arab autocrat. In mid-January, a Kurdish agency reported that Maliki had appointed his son Ahmed as the assistant director in the office of the prime minister. Western embassies have now confirmed that this is true.

"Ahmed's name often came up when lucrative contracts were at stake, especially in relation to real estate deals," says a senior diplomat, who preferred not to be identified by name.

When one of his deputy prime ministers, Sunni politician Saleh al-Mutlaq, called him a dictator and compared him with Saddam Hussein, Maliki removed him from office and sought a vote of no confidence against him in the Iraqi parliament.

But now other opponents of Maliki are also making Mutlaq's shocking comparison. Never since the days of Saddam have so many people been executed in Iraq in such a short time as since the American withdrawal. Some 65 death sentences were carried out in the first six weeks of 2012 alone. "The Iraqi government seems to have given state executioners the green light to execute at will," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, in a recent statement. "The government needs to declare an immediate moratorium on all executions and begin an overhaul of its flawed criminal justice system." There are currently 50 offences that are eligible for the death penalty,

including not only murder, kidnapping and committing terrorist attacks, but also doing damage to public property.

Government Fails to Provide Basic Services

But Maliki's heavy-handed style of governing hasn't led to the stability that US President Obama said the country had attained.

There were more than 4,000 Iraqi victims of violent crime last year and about 800 in the first three months of 2012, including 44 who died in a series of attacks on Tuesday of last week. These are more people than were killed in the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain. In 2011, the number of dead rose slightly in comparison to the previous year for the first time since 2006.

As dramatic as the numbers are, they are still well below the figures for the 2005-2008 period, and the current security situation cannot be compared with the all-out civil war that shook the country at the time. But just as Iraq cannot be characterized as sovereign and stable, it also cannot be described as self-reliant, or as a country whose government can even come close to providing the provinces with the jobs and services they need.

On Monday of last week, almost a million people took to the streets in the port city of Basra, symbolically waving electric cables, empty water canisters and shovels to draw attention to the devastating infrastructure problems. Nine years after the invasion, no region in the country, other than autonomous Kurdistan, has more than a few hours of electricity a day. The drinking water supply in the south is as precarious as it was before the war, and it is only being maintained with the help of

the United Nations and foreign non-governmental organizations. Experts estimate that the unemployment level is significantly higher than the official rate of 15.3 percent. Objectively speaking, the situation in Iraq is significantly worse than in the North African countries where poor conditions led to the outbreak of revolutions early last year.

Risk of a Break-Up

The impression that the central government is corrupt has led to the reemergence of a trend that almost caused the country to break apart in the years of civil war. At the time, politicians in the Shiite southern provinces toyed with the idea of secession. Today, the Sunni provincial governments in central and western Iraq want to follow the example of the autonomous Kurds. The Arab Sunnis, who were given preferential treatment by Saddam for decades, make up a minority of about 25 percent in Iraq, while 60 to 65 percent of Iraqis are Shiites.

Following a wave of arrests of Sunni politicians, the government in Salah al-Din province, north of Baghdad, voted for extensive autonomy. Nineveh and Anbar provinces, which suffered the largest numbers of casualties before being pacified in the civil war, threatened to hold a similar vote. When Diyala province declared its autonomy in December, troops from the central government, as well as thousands of Shiite demonstrators, stormed the provincial council building in Baqubah.

This development will only intensify in the coming weeks and months, warns an ambassador from one of Iraq's neighboring countries who did not want to be identified. "Sooner or later, the regime in Damascus will fall, and the next Syrian government

will inevitably be run by Sunnis," he says. According to the ambassador, unless the Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad manages to do something about the alienation of Iraqi Sunnis, it will have to prepare for a secession movement in its western provinces.

As diplomatic as the communiqué from Baghdad will sound, at its core the summit meeting in the Iraqi capital will revolve around the question of whether Iraq, the Arab country with the largest Shiite population, can come to terms with its Sunni neighbors -- Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan and Turkey -- or whether its increasingly authoritarian Prime Minister Maliki will ultimately be steered by the Shiite regional power Iran.

Cosmetic Touches

As an Iraqi, says Maliki's ousted deputy Mutlaq, he ought to be proud of the fact that his country, after more than 20 years, is now returning to the fold of the Arab League and is being allowed to host its summit meeting. But that isn't the way he feels, he adds.

For Mutlaq, the pageantry of the summit lends legitimacy to a regime that only appears to be democratic. Maliki's diplomatic bows to his Arab brothers, he says, are as cosmetic as the landscaped lawn that he ordered to be put in the bomb craters along the road from the airport to downtown Baghdad last week.

Article 4.

The Christian Science Monitor

Islam's defining moment with democracy

Editorial

March 27, 2012 -- Muslims living in democracies of the West and Asia already know their practice of Islam can best flourish where religious freedom is protected and women's rights are honored. Now two Muslim countries liberated from dictators in last year's Arab Spring are trying to define their own line between mosque and state.

In Egypt and Tunisia, the Islamist parties that won postrevolution elections are leading efforts to write new constitutions. Their choices could reshape the Middle East if they decide that Islam must be compatible with democracy rather than the other way around.

On Monday, the leading Islamist party in Tunisia, Al Nahda, announced that sharia (Islamic law) should not be the source for all laws. It said the constitution should simply acknowledge that Islam is the state religion, as the old constitution did.

The party prefers to unite all Tunisians and set an example for other Arab states in transition. A woman, in fact, is heading up the panel to define rights and liberties.

Egypt, however, is home to the Muslim Brotherhood, once the modern source of radical Islamic ideas that inspired groups like Al Qaeda. While the Brotherhood has become pragmatic during six decades of military rule, it decided last week to use its majority in the new parliament to dominate the constitution-

writing process. And it is also pushing for a candidate in the coming presidential election who has “an Islamic background.”

Still, much can happen in Egypt’s ongoing political flux between the Muslim Brotherhood, the military, and pro-democracy youth who led last year’s protests against Hosni Mubarak.

Most Egyptians, who are largely rural, care more about clean government and a growing economy than democracy. Any party or person who becomes president later this year will have a difficult time delivering on those hopes.

The possibility of failing to fix the economy restrains the Brotherhood from being out front in leading Egypt for now. And recent dissent within the group reveals a healthy clash of ideas over Islam’s role in defining a new identity for Egypt, where 10 percent of the population is Coptic Christian.

Both Tunisia and Egypt have two models in the region that illustrate Islam’s long and difficult encounter with Western ideas of freedom and plurality.

Since 1979, Iran’s ruling Muslim clerics have botched the country’s minimalist democracy, while in Turkey the ruling Islamic party has ruled since 2002 with mostly liberal policies.

In fact, Turkey, once the seat of the Islamic Ottoman caliphate, has praised the virtues of democratic secular rule to Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood. It has also scolded Iraq’s Shiite-led government for not easing tensions with minority Sunnis. And it has told Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon to raise their voices against the violence in Syria or else “remove the word ‘Islam’ from their

names.”

It took centuries and many wars for Christians in Europe to come to terms with democracy. Muslims in the Middle East are on a faster track to reconcile their religion with representative government and rule of law. And they have plenty of models to help them see that democracy gives Islam its best protection from sectarian strife.

Article 5.

Guardian

Jerusalem is at the heart of the Palestinian struggle

Sarah Colborne

27 March 2012 -- Jerusalem is a city that embodies the cultural heritage of three religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Yet Palestinians – both Christian and Muslim – are being driven out of Jerusalem. Just one example of this ethnic cleansing is taking place in Silwan, where 1,000 residents are facing imminent eviction as their homes make way for the King David tourist park. In response to the urgency of the situation, an international alliance is mounting a series of peaceful protests worldwide on

30 March to call for an end to the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians living in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, the traditional centre of Palestinian social, religious and economic life, is increasingly being isolated and restricted by Israeli policies. As the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem points out, ever since Israel illegally occupied East Jerusalem in 1967, in violation of international law, "the government of Israel's primary goal in Jerusalem has been to create a demographic and geographic situation that will thwart any future attempt to challenge Israeli sovereignty over the city". Some 200,000 settlers now live in illegal Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem.

Concern over these policies is not limited to pro-Palestinian activists, or Israeli human rights groups. An EU Heads of Mission report last year highlighted the continued expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, evictions and demolitions of Palestinian homes, and restrictions on legal and religious freedoms. Palestinians who have lived for generations in East Jerusalem can lose their residency rights if they leave the city because of a Kafkaesque notion that the centre of their life is no longer in Jerusalem, while Israeli citizens retain guaranteed citizenship. Since Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem, more than 14,000 Palestinians have had their residency rights revoked. The 270,000 Palestinians living in East Jerusalem can find themselves ordered to demolish their homes or businesses, or being forced to watch whilst settlers take over their homes. It is estimated that 20,000 Palestinian homes in Jerusalem have been issued with demolition orders.

Despite Israel's violations of international law, and the Fourth

Geneva Convention – designed to protect those living under occupation – governments have failed to prevent Israel's violations of international law, which is why it is so vital that international civil society is acting.

The Global March to Jerusalem is bringing together an impressive coalition of Palestinian voices and organisations, with supporters from dozens of countries around the world travelling to Jerusalem, and to the border countries, to participate in the peaceful actions, or organising protests in London and other cities around the world. Two Nobel laureates, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Mairead Maguire, have joined the international endorsers. Other members of the advisory board include Mustafa Barghouti, Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, author and activist in the Jewish Renewal movement; and Ronnie Kasrils, the South African national liberation leader and former cabinet minister.

The struggle for freedom, peace and justice for Palestinians is a key issue for those of us committed to equality and human rights. I grew up during the era of apartheid in South Africa, and saw the potential for us all to successfully oppose injustice. This was why I sailed on the Mavi Marmara, in a flotilla with participants from over 40 countries, attempting to break Israel's siege on Gaza. The struggle for Palestinian rights is at the core of the global movement for social and economic justice, for liberation, for equality, and against racism. The Global March to Jerusalem is continuing in that tradition, organising a nonviolent response to Israel's violations of international law.

Sarah Colborne is director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and a member of the International Central Committee of the Global March to Jerusalem.

Article 6.

NYT

Israel's Top Court vs. Outposts

Editorial

March 27, 2012 -- Israel's Supreme Court made an important contribution to justice and kept alive hope for a two-state solution with the Palestinians, when it ruled this week that Migron, an illegal outpost built by Israeli settlers, must be dismantled by Aug. 1. Now it is up to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to comply promptly, while making clear to the settlers that violent resistance will not be tolerated.

The outpost, which houses 50 families, was started a decade ago in the West Bank near the city of Ramallah. It is among the largest of dozens of enclaves that — unlike the 120 full-blown settlements in the West Bank — even the Israeli government considers illegal because they were constructed without authorization. Yet the government has abetted their expansion, rather than dismantling them, as Israel long ago promised the United States in preparation for a two-state solution.

The case was brought by Palestinians, represented by an Israeli lawyer, and Peace Now, a group that opposes settlements as an obstacle to peace. Last August, the Supreme Court ruled that Migron was built on private Palestinian land and ordered the outpost dismantled by the end of March. The justices said there was “no justification for preserving the illegal situation and continued violation of Palestinian property rights.”

Instead of complying, Mr. Netanyahu negotiated a deal with the settlers that would let them stay in Migron until 2015. After that, they were to be moved to a newly built alternative community nearby. The Supreme Court rejected that deal and rightly chided the government for failing to dismantle Migron per the earlier court decision. “This is a necessary component of the rule of law to which all are subject as part of Israel’s values as a Jewish and democratic state,” the court said.

This case has broad implications. Under any plausible scenario, Migron and its environs deep in the West Bank are envisioned as part of a Palestinian State. The settlers should be relocated to existing settlements or as close to the Green Line as possible — all areas that are assumed to become part of Israel if there is ever a peace agreement.

Palestinians are despairing that the number of settlements and outposts are expanding so fast that they could soon preclude any chance of a two-state solution. If that is the point, Israel’s own hopes for a peaceful and secure future are seriously at risk.

Psychology Today

Does True Altruism Exist?

Neel Burton, M.D.

Mar 27 2012 -- Altruism has been thought of as an ego defense, a form of sublimation in which a person copes with his anxiety by stepping outside himself and helping others. By focusing on the needs of others, people in altruistic vocations such as medicine or teaching may be able to permanently push their needs into the background, and so never have to address or even to acknowledge them. Conversely, people who care for a disabled or elderly person may experience profound anxiety and distress when this role is suddenly removed from them.

Altruism as an ego defence should be distinguished from true altruism—one being primarily a means to cover up uncomfortable feelings and the other being primarily a means to some external end such as alleviating hunger or poverty. However, many psychologists and philosophers have argued that there is, in fact, no such thing as true altruism. In *The Dawn*, the 19th century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche maintains that that which is erroneously called ‘pity’ is not selfless but variously self-motivated.

Nietzsche is in effect agreeing with Aristotle who in the *Rhetoric* defines pity as a feeling of pain caused by a painful or destructive evil that befalls one who does not deserve it, and that might well befall us or one of our friends, and, moreover to befall us soon. Aristotle surmises that pity cannot be felt by

those with absolutely nothing to lose, nor by those who feel that they are beyond all misfortune.

In an interesting and insightful aside, Aristotle adds that a person feels pity for those who are like him and for those with whom he is acquainted, but not for those who are very closely related to him and for whom he feels as he does for himself. Indeed, says Aristotle, the pitiful should not be confounded with the terrible: a man may weep at the sight of his friend begging, but not at that of his son being led to death.

Altruistic acts are self-interested, if not because they relieve anxiety, then perhaps because they lead to pleasant feelings of pride and satisfaction; the expectation of honor or reciprocation; or the greater likelihood of a place in heaven; and even if neither of the above, then at least because they relieve unpleasant feelings such as the guilt or shame of not having acted at all.

This argument has been attacked on various grounds, but most gravely on the grounds of circularity— altruistic acts are performed for selfish reasons, therefore they must be performed for selfish reasons. The bottom line, I think, is this. There can be no such thing as an ‘altruistic’ act that does not involve some element of self-interest, no such thing, for example, as an altruistic act that does not lead to some degree, no matter how small, of pride or satisfaction. Therefore, an act should not be written off as selfish or self-motivated simply because it includes some inevitable element of self-interest. The act can still be counted as altruistic if the ‘selfish’ element is accidental; or, if not accidental, then secondary; or, if neither accidental nor secondary, then undetermining.

Need this imply that Aristotle is incorrect in holding that pity cannot be felt by those with absolutely nothing to lose, or who feel that they are beyond all misfortune? Not necessarily—although an altruistic act is often driven by pity, this need not be the case, and altruism and pity should not be amalgamated and then confounded with each another. Thus, it is perfectly possible for someone lying on his deathbed and at the very brink of death, who is *compos mentis* and whose reputation is already greatly assured, to gift all or most of his fortune to some deserving cause, not out of pity, which he may or may not be beyond feeling, but simply because he thinks that, all things considered, it is the right thing to do. In fact, this goes to the very heart of ancient virtue, which can be defined as the perfection of our nature through the triumph of reason over passion. The truly altruistic act is the virtuous act and the virtuous act is, always, the rational act.

Adapted from my new book, Hide and Seek: The Psychology of Self-Deception

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