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Article 1.

Project Syndicate

The New Old Year

Richard N. Haass

14 January 2013 -- Any look back at 2012 would necessarily focus on three parts of the world: the eurozone, with its seemingly endless financial uncertainties; the Middle East, with its many upheavals, including, but hardly limited to, the Muslim Brotherhood's accession to power in Egypt and Syria's savage civil war, which has already claimed more than 60,000

lives; and the Asia-Pacific region, with its rising nationalism and political tensions after decades of being defined almost exclusively by extraordinary economic growth amid considerable political calm.

But which issues will dominate 2013? In no small part, as the French are fond of saying, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. Thus, we can safely predict ongoing difficulty throughout Europe, as the countries of the south, in particular, struggle to reduce public spending in order to align their fiscal policies with actual economic capacity.

What might be different this year is that France, rather than Greece and Spain, could well be at the center of the storm. This would pose fundamental, even existential questions for Germany, the other half of a tandem that has been at the heart of the European project since World War II. The likelihood that Europe as a whole will experience little, if any, economic growth will make matters all the more difficult for officials in governments, banks, and regional institutions.

Likewise, the Middle East remains in the early phase of a revolutionary transition. In a year, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi will almost certainly still be in power, but it is not so clear how he will use that power – and what Egypt will look like politically and economically as a result. Recent disagreements over the drafting of a new constitution reveal a deeply divided society and a government that appears to equate (and confuse) majority rule with democracy.

By contrast, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime is likely to have been ousted before the year's end. But, as we have seen elsewhere in the region, it will prove far more difficult to put something benign and effective in its place. Civil war along sectarian lines could well predominate, or fighting between the various anti-Assad opposition groups could erupt. There is also a real possibility of major upheavals in both Bahrain and Jordan.

Finally, the friction in the Asia-Pacific region is unlikely to diminish; in fact, it is far more likely to intensify. The chance of a military incident involving China and one of its neighbors – be it Japan, the Philippines, or Vietnam – cannot be ignored, and it remains to be seen whether the region's diplomatic circuits can carry the load. New leadership in many of the region's countries, including China, Japan, and South Korea, make the future even more uncertain.

What else can we expect in the 2013? One disappointing probability is that global efforts to fashion new arrangements to promote trade, slow the pace of climate change, or regulate cyberspace are likely to come to naught. Large-scale multilateralism, in which most of the world's 193 United Nations-recognized countries meet to negotiate accords, has become too unwieldy. Instead, the most we can hope for are small accords among select governments or accords that tackle only a part of much larger problems.

The biggest challenge for the world may well be what to do about Iran's nuclear program. Iran has put into place much of what is needed to produce nuclear weapons. At the same time, sanctions that have been imposed by a substantial set of countries are taking a significant toll on the Iranian economy.

There are signs of a growing debate inside the country about whether to press ahead with nuclear weapons – and thus risk not only economic ruin, but also military attack – rather than to accept a diplomatic compromise. Such a pact would place limits on Iran's nuclear activities and require that it open itself up to more international inspection than it has ever permitted. The main question this year is thus likely to be whether an outcome can be negotiated that is enough for Iran but not too much for the United States, Israel, and others. What is certain, however, is that 2013 will be defined in a fundamental way by whether military action against Iran occurs or is averted.

One more country needs to be added to the list of “unpredictables”: the US. The question here is whether the American political system can meet the challenges that it faces, many of which it has aggravated. The US remains the greatest economic and military power in the world, but questions about its solvency have in turn cast doubt on its ability to act and lead in the world. Recent events in Washington have been less than reassuring. Global developments not just in the year ahead, but also during the next decade and beyond, will depend in large part on whether the US can better manage its domestic challenges and divisions.

Richard N. Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations since 2003, previously served as Director of Policy Planning for the US State Department (2001-2003), and was President George W. Bush's special

envoy to Northern Ireland and Pakistan, before resigning from the Bush administration in protest against the Iraq war.

Article 2.

Spiegel

Germany and Israel: A Relationship Full of Misunderstandings

Christiane Hoffmann and René Pfister

Jan 14, 2013 -- How critical can one be of Israel? It is a question that Germany has been debating since SPIEGEL ONLINE columnist Jakob Augstein was included on the Simon Wiesenthal Center's list of the world's worst anti-Semites. Political leaders in Berlin have a different answer than Germans at large.

Does Angela Merkel mistrust the very people she governs? Is she uncomfortable with the German people?

In October 2011, the German chancellor stood onstage at the academy of the Jewish Museum, in Berlin, next to conductor Daniel Barenboim. The celebratory concert had concluded, and the museum's director had just presented Merkel with its Award for Understanding and Tolerance.

This is one of many awards the chancellor has received from Jewish institutions over the last couple years, including the Heinz Galinski Prize from the Jewish Community of Berlin, the American Jewish Committee's Light Unto the Nations Award and an honorary doctorate from Tel Aviv University.

At the Jewish Museum, Merkel spoke a few pleasant words, calling the award both an honor and a responsibility. Then she cited a study, according to which 60 percent of Europeans -- including Germans -- consider Israel the most significant threat to world peace.

Following Merkel's logic seems to present a conclusion that two thirds of Germans harbor anti-Semitic sentiments. Is this really what the chancellor believes? Or was her intention simply, as she said in her speech, to warn against allowing anti-Semitism to increase?

Merkel's speech provides a direct path into the minefield that is relations between Jews and Germans, and between Germany and Israel. Of course it

is absurd to label Israel the world's worst aggressor. But does simply making such a statement count as anti-Semitism? Where does objective criticism end and defamation begin? The [controversy over journalist Jakob Augstein's](#) columns in SPIEGEL ONLINE and elsewhere has re-ignited this debate, a storm triggered when the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles [placed Augstein on its list of the world's worst anti-Semites](#).

Every Society Needs Taboos

Two different arenas of discussion have arisen in Germany in recent years, one for the country's politicians and one for the public. Most politicians cling tightly and fearfully to the safety of the official line when they give speeches. Particularly members of the Bundestag, Germany's parliament, haven't forgotten the 1988 case of Philipp Jenninger. Then president of the Bundestag, Jenninger expressed himself unclearly in a commemorative speech on the anniversary of the Nazi Kristallnacht pogroms in 1938, leaving his own views too open to interpretation. Within 24 hours of that speech, Jenninger resigned.

The general public, on the other hand, is tired of the strictures that dictate what can and cannot be said for the sake of maintaining good German-Israeli relations.

Every society needs its taboos, of course. In Germany, Holocaust denial is one such taboo, as is casting aspersions on Israel's right to exist. But doesn't each era need to find its own particular language in which to communicate? World War II has been over for more than six decades. The generation that perpetrated the crimes is dying out. Germany has become one of Israel's closest allies, as can be seen from the billions of euros' worth of arms sales from Germany to Israel. Isn't that grounds enough for speaking openly, even expressing severe criticism if necessary?

The chancellor certainly doesn't think so. More than any other head of government, she has aligned Germany with Israel. Some see these efforts toward reconciliation with the Jewish people as the only conviction the chancellor truly holds. "She takes the matter personally," says Deidre Berger, head of the Berlin office of the American Jewish Committee. Shimon Stein, former Israeli ambassador to Germany, was even a private guest at Merkel's weekend house in the Uckermark region northeast of Berlin.

In a 2008 address to the Knesset, Merkel declared Israel's security "part of my country's raison d'être." Even more spectacular was the statement that followed: "And if that is so, then these cannot be allowed to remain empty words at a critical time." This can only be understood as Merkel assuring Israel that Germany will step in with military aid if necessary.

Unconditional Solidarity

"A German politician must establish a relationship of mutual trust with Israel, so that criticism of Jerusalem is not misunderstood," says Ruprecht Polenz, a member of Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and chair of the Foreign Policy Committee in the Bundestag. Chancellor Merkel has certainly done this. But she has also offered at most quiet protest over [Israel's settlement policy](#), to little effect. Many within the Chancellery are frustrated that these arguments have not moved Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the least.

Merkel's unconditional solidarity with Israel has thus failed to pay off, yet at the same time her approach has distanced the chancellor from many Germans, who are unwilling to follow her so unconditionally. Just how wide that rift has grown could be seen in the public debate last spring over a poem by Günter Grass, in which the author portrayed Israel as the aggressor in the Middle East and a threat to world peace. None of the country's top politicians came to Grass' defense. Hermann Gröhe, secretary general of the CDU, said he was "appalled" by the poem and even Sigmar Gabriel, chair of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) stated, "Some of it is excessive, and in many parts hysterical." These reactions only made the public's support for Grass all the more vehement, with letters piling up in the parties' headquarters expressing outrage over the politicians' rebuke of Grass.

What exactly does this response signify? Are the Germans a nation of anti-Semites, with the ugly countenance of hatred toward Jews lurking behind every corner, as author Tuvia Tenenbom recently suggested in his book "I Sleep in Hitler's Room: An American Jew Visits Germany"?

There have been a number of studies on anti-Semitism in Germany, and few topics have been examined as extensively as Germans' resentments toward Jews. The most recent major study, conducted on behalf of the Federal Interior Ministry, clocks in at 204 pages.

A Degree of Skepticism

Still, the question remains: How can one measure an attitude, a feeling? In what units is hate calculated? Is someone an anti-Semite if they say Jews have too much influence in Germany? Or if they express agreement with the opinion that Jews never look after anyone but themselves and their own?

One thing can be said for certain, and that is that Germany falls more to the middle of the spectrum on such questions. In Poland and [Hungary](#), for example, resentment toward Jews is far more widespread than in Germany. All told, according to the Interior Ministry study, 20 percent of Germans harbor latent anti-Semitism.

Certainly these numbers should be taken with a degree of skepticism. The researchers themselves admit it's impossible to produce clearly measured results in this field. But one thing is clear: Germans' anti-Semitism acts as a great temptation in politics -- any politician looking to garner votes for his or her party quickly can play on anti-Jewish resentment.

That, though, is a dangerous game, as politician Martin Hohmann found out when he used the term "a nation of perpetrators" in connection with Jews. Merkel excluded him from the CDU's parliamentary group as a result.

The story of Jürgen W. Möllemann ended badly as well. Möllemann, a top politician in the Free Democratic Party (FDP), played a game that held not only many voters in thrall, but his own party as well, stating in an interview that he could sympathize with Palestinian suicide attackers, and accusing then-Vice President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany Michel Friedman of being "intolerant and spiteful."

FDP party head Guido Westerwelle was slow to take any action on Möllemann. Not until Hans-Dietrich Genscher and the party's higher-ups intervened did Westerwelle break with Möllemann. Israel hasn't forgotten the incident and keeps Westerwelle, now Germany's foreign minister, under close observation to this day because of the Möllemann affair.

'Sobering'

Israel feels under threat more than ever before, both from Iran and through the developments throughout the Arab world, and that sensitivity is only growing. At the same time, from Germany's perspective there are many reasons to view Israeli policies critically. The country has changed, with demographic changes due to immigration from Eastern Europe and Africa

causing a political shift to the right. Hardliners will have the say here for the foreseeable future.

Meanwhile, Israel's settlement policy will soon render the idea of a Palestinian state impossible. When Hans-Ulrich Klose, the SPD's top politician on foreign policy issues, recently attended a political congress in Israel, he met hardly any politicians still working for a two-state solution -- the solution Germany considers the only viable path to peace in the Middle East. "It was sobering," Klose stated.

What, then, should Germany do? Klose says he still believes the German government should refrain from publicly reprimanding Israel. "Why should Germany of all countries make itself Israel's critic?" he asks.

But some younger politicians take a different view, and are increasingly unwilling to stick to the old approach. "Germany has a [historical responsibility](#)," agrees Julia Klöckner, 40, head of the CDU in the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate. "But that's not a blank check to be uncritical in foreign policy."

Germany needs to find a way to be less inhibited in its dealings with Israel, Klöckner suggests. She adds, "Those who throw around accusations of anti-Semitism at every turn lose credibility."

"Less inhibited in dealings with Israel"? "Throwing around accusations of anti-Semitism"? Are these acceptable things to say? Klöckner may find herself taking considerable heat for her statements -- or meeting with considerable approval.

Article 3.

Foreign Affairs

Barak's Last Battle: An Israeli Lion in Winter

Jonathan Tepperman

[January/February 2013](#) -- Ehud Barak is one of Israel's most important leaders -- and also one of its most enigmatic and controversial. As defense minister in the current government, Barak prosecuted the November Gaza campaign, handles the Palestinian brief, and, along with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, gets the last word on whether to attack Iran -- Israel's most pressing security concern despite the recent focus on Hamas. Given

the pariah status of Israel's foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, Barak, a frequent presence in Washington, essentially covers that portfolio as well. Yet despite 35 years of military service and more than a decade in public life, Barak remains something of a cipher -- a man one of Israel's leading columnists, Ari Shavit, compares to a stealth bomber ("the usual radar doesn't capture him"). "I don't know anyone more difficult to read," Shavit says.

It's no wonder: to say that Barak is full of contradictions doesn't begin to do him justice. Now 70, Barak first came to national prominence in his 30s, as a hero among heroes in a security-obsessed country. An erudite, accomplished classical pianist, Barak was a special forces legend famous for actions such as planning the hostage-rescue raid on Entebbe and sneaking into Lebanon on an assassination run dressed as a woman. He finished his military career as chief of the general staff, then parachuted into politics in 1995, drafted into the left-wing Labor Party by his mentor, then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. In 1999, a few years after Rabin's murder, Barak was elected prime minister himself in a landslide, promising to withdraw from Lebanon and make peace with both the Syrians and the Palestinians. Less than two years later, his peace plans were in ashes, the second intifada was raging, and Barak was out of a job after the shortest tenure of any Israeli leader in history.

Banished from power, he withdrew to a lucrative private life. And then he reinvented himself again. Coming back from exile, he retook the reins of Labor and reentered the government in 2007 as defense minister. When his longtime sparring partner Netanyahu was reelected in 2009, Barak became his closest confidant and most powerful adviser.

Rather than win plaudits or even grudging respect for his return to relevance and his role as "Mr. Security," however, Barak saw his popularity fall through the floor. In a country famously unable to agree on anything, there is consensus on one issue: almost no one seems to like Barak. A 2010 survey by the independent pollster Dahlia Scheindlin ranked him the least popular major politician in Israel, with a favorability rating of only 22 percent. Although his popularity inched up during the Gaza campaign, most polls taken throughout the fall suggested that he might not even muster enough votes in the January 22 elections to keep his seat in the next Knesset. In one November survey, 60 percent of Israelis polled said they

approved of his work as defense minister, but only three percent said they would vote for him. And so in late November, in a move that stunned everyone, Barak announced that he would not compete in the elections and would withdraw from political life -- although he conspicuously avoided ruling out continuing to serve in some capacity if asked.

How was this former idol driven out of politics, and why is he so reviled in his homeland? How did an erstwhile champion of the left become the partner of a right-wing prime minister, so close that they are often referred to as a kitchen cabinet of two, the Batman and Robin of Israeli politics? How did this storied warrior become first a devoted peacemaker and then, later, an arch-hawk on Iran? What does Barak actually believe, and what will become of him after January? For if there's one indisputable fact about this most polarizing of figures, it's that he is hard to get rid of -- and every retreat lays the groundwork for an eventual counterattack.

A COMPLICATED MAN

The best way to answer the questions surrounding Barak is to start with his history, especially the tumultuous last 13 years. When we met this past fall to discuss them, the defense minister seemed supremely relaxed. The bloodshed in Gaza had yet to begin, but it was already a hectic moment in Israel's always frenetic political life: the Knesset was voting that day to dissolve itself ahead of the upcoming elections, and the halls were thronged with TV cameras, frantic aides, and stony-faced bodyguards. Yet inside Barak's cramped, drab parliamentary office, all was calm. Dressed in a black suit and white shirt with no tie (the dress uniform of an Israeli politician), Barak, feet on a coffee table, looked older and more tired than he does in photographs but still projected gruff confidence. Surveying his record, Barak told me he felt "neither guilt nor self-pity." He paused, then continued, "I feel kind of . . . content about every choice that I've made in the past. I don't feel the need to complain or explain too much."

Such sangfroid, real or affected, is remarkable given the number of daring and dangerous gambits Barak has attempted in his career -- and even more so given how many of them have failed disastrously. The most prominent failure, of course, and the one likely to forever define Barak's legacy, was his attempt as prime minister to cut the Gordian knots binding Israel to permanent insecurity by ending the conflicts with Syria and the Palestinians and the two-decade-long occupation of Lebanon. It's hard to

overstate the audacity of this triple bank shot. Aaron David Miller, a former U.S. State Department adviser who worked with Barak on the peace process, described it, with only a little hyperbole, as "a wacko agenda that bordered on the megalomaniacal."

The history of how it went wrong, in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, with the Syrians and at Camp David with Yasir Arafat, has been written and rewritten countless times from all perspectives. There is no clear consensus on who bears the lion's share of the blame for the talks' collapse, but most analysts put at least some on Barak -- for his waffling (with the Syrians) and his haste and highhandedness (with Arafat). If the causes are disputable, however, the consequences are not. Instead of peace coming to the Middle East, the Syrian track stalled and the Palestinians hit Israel with a bloody uprising. Israeli troops did pull out of Lebanon, but the withdrawal was chaotic and accompanied by Hezbollah rocket fire.

As the flames mounted, Barak's electoral coalition, much of which he had alienated through careless and dictatorial management, began to crumble. Ariel Sharon, another former war hero who then led the Likud Party, offered to form a national unity government. Barak refused, deciding to take his chances in early elections -- and was trounced.

Barak retreated to the business world of Tel Aviv to lick his wounds and make money -- lots of it, by all accounts. He bought a flashy apartment for millions of dollars. He divorced his wife (and the mother of his children) and married a childhood sweetheart. Earning big and living large is not uncommon for ex-politicians in the West, but it is still deemed unseemly in Israel, which clings to the myth of its Spartan pioneer roots, and Barak was excoriated for it in the press.

But then came Israel's botched war with Lebanon in 2006, a fiasco that offered the exile an opportunity to muscle his way back into politics. Retaking control of Labor from the feckless Amir Peretz -- a former trade unionist who, as defense minister, had mishandled the conflict -- Barak cast himself as a more humble, experienced politician who had learned from his mistakes, telling his party he understood that "there are no shortcuts and leadership is not a one-man show." The party bought it, and he replaced Peretz in Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's Kadima-led coalition government.

Then, in 2008, Olmert was forced to resign because of corruption allegations, and new elections brought Netanyahu and the Likud back to power. This development proved awkward for Barak, who had promised during the campaign not to join a Netanyahu government. But in one of the most striking turns in his switchback career, he pirouetted once again, dragging a reluctant Labor into the Likud coalition. When, a few months later, Labor rebelled and prepared to bolt from the government, Barak jumped first, leading four other legislators out of Labor and into a new party, Atzmaut (Independence). The gambit worked in that it allowed the renegades to stay in the government. But it gutted Labor, reducing the parliamentary bloc of Israel's once-dominant party to a meager eight seats (out of 120), and the process cost Barak much of his remaining public support.

Barak then proceeded to forge a remarkably close working relationship with the new prime minister. Understanding how these former adversaries, the longtime standard-bearers of Israel's left and right, could evolve such an intimate alliance requires understanding two distinctive aspects of Israeli political life. The first is that the country's fractious parliamentary system, with its numerous small parties, makes coalitions among unlikely partners surprisingly common. The second is the dominance of Israel's military culture. Virtually all Israelis spend time in the army, a life-defining experience that generates profound social cohesion. Barak and Netanyahu, moreover, aren't just ordinary veterans. They served together in Sayeret Matkal, Israel's most elite commando force, an outfit so legendary that it's known in Hebrew simply as "the Unit."

Barak's eyes light up with real affection when he speaks about his former lieutenant; he describes Netanyahu (known in Israel almost exclusively as "Bibi") as "capable of deep thought and possessing a deep sense of history," explaining their relationship this way:

Israel is not a nation of 300 million. The whole elite is probably just several thousand people, and they all know each other. So Israeli politics is familial. I first met Bibi when he was only 20 years old. I was eight years older. I was the commander of his unit, and both of his brothers were also in it. That's a formative experience. The unit was very small, and we were stretched to the utmost. And I became a kind of operational mentor to Bibi.

I guided him, directed him in his first missions. There has always been a mutual respect, a kind of appreciation, a basic trust.

Indeed, most analysts who know the two men say that despite their differences and past political battles, they retain a deep and genuine bond. Barak and Netanyahu "have a high regard for themselves and each other," explained David Makovsky, a former diplomatic correspondent for Haaretz. "They both see themselves as big-picture guys. They come out of the special forces culture and are far more similar than they are different." Of course, the pair's odd-couple routine has also served both of them extremely well. Barak has given Netanyahu centrist cover, making the prime minister's otherwise hard-right coalition look more mainstream and giving it greater legitimacy on military issues. Netanyahu, for his part, has given his old commander power and relevance that Barak, with his lack of popular support, couldn't access otherwise. The resulting deal, as Miller described it, "is like what they say about old age: not great unless you consider the alternative." Both sides come out ahead: "Bibi is likely to be the longest-serving prime minister in Israeli history, and Barak gets to be in the middle of the decision-making process at one of the most critical stages in Israel's life." Netanyahu's strategic timidity and general risk aversion -- his boldness is more apparent in words than deeds -- only sweetens the bargain. Martin Indyk, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel, told me that "Bibi's caution makes it possible for Barak to do his own thing" -- an irresistible prospect for someone used to giving orders.

THE STRATEGIST

All this history and background helps explain two important things about Barak: his basic psychology and how he came to his current positions on the critical issues in his portfolio, Iran and the Palestinians.

Ask any American or Israeli analyst with firsthand experience how to make sense of Barak's serpentine career, his successes and failures, and his unpopularity, and you'll hear the same thing again and again: that Barak is the ultimate strategic thinker. An inveterate risk taker -- one former army commander of Barak's told me that as a soldier, the young commando devised schemes that often had him facing tzalash or tarash (commendation or demotion) -- Barak still sees the world as a battlefield or a chessboard. This means that he always thinks several steps ahead. But it also means that he must make countless predictions about how other

players will respond, and he then assumes that by force of will, he can ensure that they act accordingly. Indyk put it this way: "There's a legend about Barak that as a hobby he takes apart clocks and puts them together again. His plans are like that: always incredibly intricate and carefully thought through and drilled and drilled. But when they're applied, they often end up being too clever by half because humans aren't clocks."

Added Makovsky: "When you think ahead by six steps, there are at least six, if not 12, 24, or 48 assumptions you have to make. When it works, it's brilliant. When it fails, it collapses horribly" -- as did Barak's grand peace overtures, his decision as prime minister to spurn Sharon's offer and seek early elections, and his move to split Labor.

Barak's history also reveals a profound lack of concern for ideological consistency, a supreme faith in pragmatic realpolitik. Critics such as Miller see this as a lack of scruples: "I think that, much like Bibi, you're dealing with a guy whose principles are capable of being reshaped in response to political exigencies." But Barak and his defenders explain his behavior in another way: as a willingness to do whatever's necessary to safeguard Israel's security, even at the risk of appearing inconsistent. As he told me the day after our first meeting, when we reconvened in his much more impressive office atop the towering Ministry of Defense building in the Kirya, in central Tel Aviv, "I am a man of action -- I never hesitate to take action." "I follow, and am very committed to, the tradition of Yitzhak Rabin and David Ben-Gurion [Israel's founding father]," he said, pointing to their portraits on his office wall, "because their approach was to always be open-eyed and wholly realistic about the need to do what's necessary." This philosophy, along with Barak's bruising history as a policymaker, has done much to shape his thinking on current events. His current hawkishness on Iran, his readiness to strike Gaza, and even his latest position on the Palestinian peace process -- he still favors a two-state solution, but one achieved by Israel's unilaterally withdrawing from the West Bank -- can seem, when contrasted with his early record as a peacemaker, like the reaction of a dove mugged by reality. But the hawk-dove divide is hard to parse in Israel, which has a long history of pragmatic warriors who chose to extend an olive branch when the time seemed right -- think Rabin, another ex-general, who later received the Nobel Peace Prize for his shepherding of the Oslo accords, or even Shimon Peres, who started

out as the father of Israel's nuclear program but later, as foreign minister, pursued peace talks with Arafat. These same leaders also proved willing to pick up the sword again when circumstances warranted. Barak self-consciously aligns himself with this tradition, so it should be no surprise that his positions can seem to contradict one another over time.

Consider how his stance on Iran's nuclear program -- which remains Israel's main strategic preoccupation -- has shifted during his current tenure. After becoming, with Netanyahu, the most forceful advocate of an attack on Iran, hinting darkly all through the spring and summer of 2012 that Israel would act soon if the United States didn't, Barak suddenly seemed to relax the timeline for a strike during the fall. He told me the explanation for the change was simple: the Iranians had suddenly diverted a third of their enriched uranium fuel rods to medical research. When I pressed him on why Tehran would have done this, he conceded that it was probably because Israeli threats and U.S.-led sanctions had worked -- in other words, that Iran had acted rationally and been deterred. Yet he continued to insist that deterrence wouldn't work if Iran went nuclear and that Israel had to do everything in its power to prevent such a catastrophe. That may sound inconsistent, but Barak's basic approach to security, although he never articulated it as such, boils down to expecting the worst and acting accordingly. It's a logical position for a chastened former peacemaker. It explains why he argues in the alternative when making his case against Iran, insisting that even if the mullahs probably don't intend to attack Israel directly -- "I don't believe that they're developing a nuclear capacity because of Israel per se," he told me -- they just might do so anyway. (Here he pointed me to a 2001 speech by former Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani calling Israel a "one-bomb country" and to the work of Bernard Lewis, the Princeton scholar who has compared Iran's regime to a doomsday cult willing to embrace the apocalypse.) Even if Iran never attacks, Barak continued, Iran's getting the bomb would still enable its hegemonic pretensions in the neighborhood, empower its proxies, set off a regional arms race, undermine Israel's strategic monopoly in the Middle East, and raise the risk that nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of terrorists.

Barak's pessimism also extends to the United States. It explains why he and Netanyahu were willing to push President Barack Obama to go much

further in making a commitment to prevention than the White House wanted -- a move Barak called "a major achievement." This campaign has led to accusations that Barak acted in bad faith, making threats he never intended to carry out merely to box Washington into a corner, forcing it to take a stronger position. Nahum Barnea, another of the country's most influential columnists, described Barak's efforts last spring and summer to me as a "\$3 billion lobbying operation," in which Israel spent nearly its entire annual defense aid allotment from the United States on measures meant not to convince Iran of the imminence of an attack but rather to convince the United States -- so that Washington would take the threat seriously and harden its own policy in order to head off a possible conflict. Barak denies such a cynical interpretation of his actions. But even if he was trying to game Washington, his pessimism ensures that he'll never be completely assuaged by U.S. security guarantees. His skepticism stems, in part, from a clear-eyed assessment of the two countries' differing priorities. "When America looks at the Iran situation, they look at it from the other side of the globe," he said. "They may worry about Iranian nuclear proliferation, but it appears, at most, as another blip on a big screen with other blips on it. For us, today, Iran is the only major blip; it fills the screen."

Barak's position also owes to his reading of history. "Over the last three decades, there were six cases of nonsuperpowers who tried to turn nuclear," he told me, gesturing at a big world map on the wall of his Kirya office. "North Korea and Pakistan succeeded. Libya and South Africa were derailed. And Iraq and Syria were physically blocked. The very fact that six tried and two succeeded tells you that anything can happen. I really trust and believe that Obama means what he says [when he talks about preventing Iran from getting a bomb], but there is a limit to what he can commit himself to doing in the future." Later, he added, "When Pakistan was trying to get the bomb, the Americans bribed them with F-16s not to. Now, some of those same F-16s are wired to carry Pakistani A-bombs. And remember Clinton and North Korea. He was determined to stop them. But look what happened."

Such a jaundiced view of history also lies behind Barak's advocacy of Israel's unilateral withdrawal from most of the West Bank. Barak's motivation here has little or nothing to do with Palestinian well-being. His

argument is twofold: one, that ending the occupation would strengthen Israel's moral and political standing against Iran, and two, that it would defuse the demographic time bomb facing the Jewish state. Israel, he said, is heading into "a historic tragedy" in the West Bank: "The painful reality is that between the Jordan River and the sea, we have 12 million people: 7.5 [million] Israelis and 4.5 million Palestinians. If over this ground, there is only one sovereign, called Israel, it will inevitably become either non-Jewish or nondemocratic, since there's no question that in the long run, it will have an Arab majority. So I believe we have to do something. I don't believe in waiting."

UNFORGIVEN

One might expect such positions to endear Barak to at least some of the Israeli public. After all, fear of an Iranian bomb and the determination to keep Tehran from getting one are almost universal in Israel, even on the left; that's why war remains a distinct possibility under the next government, just as it has been for the current one. Meanwhile, a clear majority of Israelis favor a two-state solution, even though they are also disgusted by the terror tactics and lack of leadership on the Palestinian side. Yet although his forceful response to missile fire from Gaza won Barak respect, instead of giving him credit for trying to solve the underlying Palestinian problem (unlike Netanyahu, who seems determined to ignore it), most Israelis accuse him of manipulating the issue for personal positioning. And they suspect something similar about his stance on Iran, an issue on which Barak stood shoulder to shoulder with the prime minister until the current campaign season.

Such charges are probably unfair. While no experienced politician ever disregards political calculations, let alone during an election cycle, Barak deserves more credit than he typically gets for advocating bold policies not always popular or in line with his own government. Indeed, he's been doing so for years, if inconsistently. He first raised unilateralism on the peace process, for example, shortly after the collapse of the Camp David talks more than a decade ago.

The fact that he's nonetheless treated with suspicion underlines what is probably the greatest of all the mysteries surrounding Barak: why, exactly, the country he has fought so hard to protect holds him in such low esteem. The numbers are striking. Barak told me that he thought he would need

about 120,000 votes to make it into the next Knesset. That's a tiny number, even for Israel -- about as much support as one would need to become mayor of Milwaukee or Albuquerque. Yet his decision to drop out of the race suggested that he did not expect to clear even that low bar.

There's something tragic about that. For all his faults, Barak has repeatedly put his life and career on the line for his country, which he has served for 50 years. In the words of Aluf Benn, editor in chief of Haaretz, Barak "has one of the best analytic minds in the world, let alone Israel." Even Barak's detractors admit the man is brilliant. Indeed, Benn adds, Barak is responsible for "most of the original ideas in Israeli security and foreign policy thinking in the last 20 years." In a land of dirty politicians, furthermore, Barak is more or less clean. Yet leaders such as Lieberman and Olmert, both of whom have been convicted of criminal charges, are more popular and are seen as viable candidates while Barak, whom one commentator recently called "the man everyone loves to hate," is not. Even his most frequently cited failures were not unmitigated disasters, Shavit points out: "At the end of the day, the unilateral retreat from Lebanon was messy, but it saved us. It saved us because it ended our occupation of southern Lebanon and gave legitimacy to our struggle against Hezbollah. The peace initiative in 2000, although it did not lead to peace, also saved us by giving us the internal and external legitimacy needed to fend off the Palestinian terror offensive of 2000 to 2004." That Barak gets no credit "points to something flawed and distorted in [Israel's] public life," Shavit said.

As such comments suggest, none of the conventional explanations for Barak's low standing suffice, although peers and the public have plenty of cause for frustration. The case against Barak usually starts with his abandonment of Labor -- even though other Israeli leaders (such as Sharon and Olmert) have ditched their parties and not suffered for it. It then moves on to his strategic blunders -- although here, too, he is hardly alone. His personal shortcomings are often cited: Barak is not a strong public speaker or even particularly smooth talking in person (he has, for example, a disconcerting habit of grabbing his gut to emphasize a point). Although charming when he wants to be, he doesn't suffer fools: when we first met, he wouldn't really engage until he'd grilled me on my professional and intellectual credentials. As he himself put it, "I'm not a great pretender. I

can't pretend. I don't want to pretend." Nor does he think much about his image: on the day of our first interview, he was eating a Popsicle and didn't bother to get up when I walked into the room; for our next session, at the Defense Ministry, he wore a black Hawaiian shirt.

But such bluntness is no great sin and might even be considered endearing in another politician. More troubling is his lack of social or emotional intelligence. He's often called aloof and arrogant -- not for nothing do his friends call him Napoleon -- and he is infamous for acting like he's the smartest guy in the room, as though "surrounded by mental pygmies," according to Makovsky. During our conversations, Barak managed to drop references to Nietzsche, de Gaulle, Spinoza, Baudrillard, Maimonides, Milton Friedman, Jeffrey Sachs, and Copernicus. Barak suffers from having "always been told that he was the brightest guy in the class, the platoon, the military command," said one former high Israeli official who has advised several prime ministers. "He thinks so highly of himself that he cannot have a real conversation with anybody." Another official is reported to have said, "Barak can tell you everything you've ever said in your life, but he makes clear that he hasn't listened to a word of it."

Such shortcomings have cost him with colleagues, aides, and the public. "He's not a man who bears a grudge," said a former U.S. official who often dealt with Barak. "So he doesn't expect others to bear a grudge toward him, which is part of why he's so inadequate as a politician. He's all brain and no heart." Yet even these traits, like the ostentatious apartment that got him savaged in the press, shouldn't be enough to nullify his substantial public record, especially with a population not known for its social skills and full of brusque and blemished politicians.

The real explanation for Barak's struggle with the public thus probably lies elsewhere -- in the way that he has managed, throughout his career, to inadvertently strike the raw nerves in Israel's collective psyche, exposing its own deepest conflicts and pathologies. Many of Barak's boldest and most controversial actions, after all, have held up an unflattering mirror to the Israeli public, and that public, not liking what it has seen, has responded by looking away and blaming him for it.

The younger Barak represented the old Israeli ideal: a selfless warrior-intellectual, born and bred on a collectivist kibbutz, who rose to the pinnacle of power. But then he failed spectacularly, embraced consumer

capitalism and started earning and spending wildly, and eventually abandoned the left entirely. His path resembles the country's own a little too closely for comfort. Rejecting him seems to help many Israelis assuage their uneasiness about following a similar trajectory.

But the worst crime Barak committed in the eyes of the public, and the one many Israelis will never forgive him for, is the way, in 2000, he exposed as a fantasy the idea that a negotiated peace with the Palestinians was possible. Barak himself blames Arafat for the collapse of the Camp David talks and says that all he did was "unmask" the Palestinian leader. But for at least half the population, Barak's great sin was, as Barnea put it, "blowing up the myth and showing Israelis the tragic truth." Shavit agreed: "Barak has many faults, and he failed personally in many ways. But when you see that Lieberman is forgiven where Barak is not, you come to the conclusion that the Israeli left cannot forgive him for trying peace and proving that the old naive peace theory was wrong. This is a national trauma, and many demonize him for it."

STAYING ALIVE

Whatever his critics might think, Barak has no intention of simply fading away. His abrupt announcement in November of his coming exit from politics may signal the end of his career -- but don't count on it. There are plenty of stories of Israeli politicians who managed to return from the political grave merely by sticking around. Miller points out that "in Israeli politics, you can be dead, or you can be dead and buried." Barak is merely the former, and he clearly draws hope from the cases of Peres, who as president at 89 has finally found the kind of public approval that long eluded him, and Rabin, who spent more than a decade in the wilderness before regaining power.

Barak could conceivably pull off a similar resurrection. The Israeli right, now represented by a new megaparty including Netanyahu's Likud and Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu, doesn't look likely to expand beyond its base in the elections. The center will be up for grabs if the Kadima Party -- currently the largest party in the Knesset -- gets wiped out, as expected. And no candidates on the left have serious national security credentials or true leadership experience. "Only Barak has the personal gravitas and foreign policy background to match Bibi," says Benn, and Barak knows it.

Ironically, perhaps, his hopes now rest on the loyalty of his old lieutenant, Netanyahu, who is likely to win the election and could then name Barak, although not in the Knesset, defense minister through a procedure known as a personal appointment. Many Israelis suspect that is precisely what Barak is counting on. Walking away from politics as he did, riding high on his performance in the Gaza operation, has allowed him to turn certain defeat into one last shot at relevance. The resignation, ironically, "maximizes his chance of being called back into service," says Shlomo Avineri, a veteran Israeli analyst. Amir Mizroch, an Israeli journalist and blogger, calls it "a truly Sayeret Matkal-like operation -- uncanny, unpredictable, with little or no chance of success, but if pulled off, extremely brilliant." Mizroch explains: "By exiting gracefully at the helm of a party that had zero chance of crossing the electoral threshold, Barak positions himself as . . . the elder statesman-general that any prime minister" -- especially one with few other good options and desperate not to lose his best conduit to Washington -- "would be wise to keep at his side."

The daredevil strategist, it seems, is at it again. His final gambit could still fail, as so many have before. But even if it does, Ehud Barak is unlikely to vanish from Israeli life for long.

Jonathan Tepperman is Managing Editor of Foreign Affairs.

Article 4.

The Financial Times

Netanyahu: tactical genius, strategic idiot

Gideon Rachman

January 14, 2013 -- In a normal time, in a normal country, Benjamin Netanyahu would be a political giant. He is already the second-longest serving prime minister in Israel's history. Next week, [when the country goes to the polls](#), he is likely to win a third spell in office. He has presided over an economic renaissance in Israel, during which the country has become [a byword for high-tech flair](#). At a time when the world economy has been in turmoil, Israel has kept growing strongly. Not a single Israeli

has been killed by suicide bombing during Mr Netanyahu's most recent period as prime minister, from 2009-2012 – compared with an average of more than 100 a year during the first years of the millennium. Israel has avoided major military engagements. [The recent bombing of Gaza](#) was (by Israeli standards) a relatively limited engagement. Mr Netanyahu can also claim to have negotiated a very difficult international environment with considerable tactical acumen. Many predicted that turmoil in the Arab world would spark an uprising among the Palestinians. So far, it has not happened. Israel is watching developments in Syria and Egypt with real nervousness – but, so far, its own national security is unaffected. The Israeli prime minister has also played a key role in cajoling the world towards ever-tougher sanctions on Iran. Mr Netanyahu has even defied the president of the US – apparently, without any real cost. When Barack Obama took office in 2009, his administration demanded a halt to Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. However, Mr Netanyahu and his government kept building. In the end, it was Mr Obama who blinked. Given all this, it is easy to understand why the Israeli election on January 22 is likely to result in Mr Netanyahu's re-election. Three spells as national leader would normally guarantee a politician an honoured place in their nation's history books. But instead, there is a strong chance that future generations will look back on Mr Netanyahu as a man who fatally undermined the Jewish state – by failing to answer the big questions about its future. The biggest question of all is the future of the Palestinians. It is a shock to realise that Israel has now been in occupation of the West Bank for almost 50 years – since the six-day war of 1967. It must be tempting for Israelis to believe that this situation can last forever. It cannot. Although life is relatively sweet for Israelis at the moment, their international environment is deteriorating fast. Israel used to have decent relations with the two most important governments in the region – Egypt's and Turkey's. But the two countries are now run by governments that are, to differing degrees, Islamist, and they are much less willing to accept Israel's continued dominion over the Palestinians. Israel is also losing support in the west. Israelis were justifiably stunned by the almost total lack of European support for their position at the recent UN vote on Palestinian statehood. Even the Germans, usually steadfast in support for the Jewish state, refused to back Israel.

The Israelis take comfort that US support is still rock-solid. But is it? [Mr Obama's nomination of Chuck Hagel](#) to be US defence secretary sends a powerful signal. Mr Hagel has attracted the anger of the Israel lobby for stating the obvious – that the interests of Israel and the US are not one and the same.

Mr Netanyahu's one gesture towards the Obama administration is to pay lip service towards the idea of a two-state solution. However, his actions suggest he has little genuine interest in the idea. Settlements continue to be built and the Israeli government has humiliated and undermined the moderate Palestinian leadership on the West Bank.

The truth is that Mr Netanyahu has no long-term strategy for the occupied territories – or, at least, none that he can admit to publicly. That has opened a gap for him to be outflanked from the far right. The rising force in the Israeli election is the [Jewish Home party](#), which is demanding the formal annexation of the 60 per cent of the West Bank that contains the vast majority of Israeli settlements. This plan would grant Israeli citizenship to between 50,000 and 100,000 Palestinians who live in the annexed areas. It would confine the remaining millions to a rump area, where they would exist without statehood or political rights.

Such a proposal would extinguish Palestinian hopes of statehood and turn the remnant of the West Bank into a pathetic Bantustan. Illegal annexation would destroy Israel's remaining international legitimacy – and probably incite a third Palestinian uprising.

Yet the fantasy of annexation is not confined to the Jewish Home party. It is also gaining strength within Mr Netanyahu's own Likud party. As [Daniel Levy](#) of the European Council on Foreign Relations says: "The most striking feature of this Israeli election is the growing strength of openly annexationist rightwing forces."

Mr Netanyahu is not openly annexationist. But his support for continued settlement and his failure to engage with Palestinian moderates seems tacitly to aspire to the same aim – while avoiding open confrontation with the outside world by continuing with his empty commitment to a two-state solution.

Such a policy is tactically astute – but offers no strategic vision. Mr Netanyahu may be returned to office in triumph next week. But he risks leading Israel to disaster.

The New York Times

Hypochondria: An Inside Look

Woody Allen

WHEN The New York Times called, inquiring if I might pen a few words "from the horse's mouth" about hypochondria, I confess I was taken aback. What light could I possibly shed on this type of crackpot behavior since, contrary to popular belief, I am not a hypochondriac but a totally different genus of crackpot?

What I am is an alarmist, which is in the same ballpark as the hypochondriac or, should I say, the same emergency room. Still there is a fundamental difference. I don't experience imaginary maladies -- my maladies are real.

What distinguishes my hysteria is that at the appearance of the mildest symptom, let's say chapped lips, I instantly leap to the conclusion that the chapped lips indicate a brain tumor. Or maybe lung cancer. In one instance I thought it was Mad Cow.

The point is, I am always certain I've come down with something life threatening. It matters little that few people are ever found dead of chapped lips. Every minor ache or pain sends me to a doctor's office in need of reassurance that my latest allergy will not require a heart transplant, or that I have misdiagnosed my hives and it's not possible for a human being to contract elm blight.

Unfortunately, my wife bears the brunt of these pathological dramas. Like the time I awoke at 3 a.m. with a spot on my neck that to me clearly had the earmarks of a melanoma. That it turned out to be a hickey was confirmed only later at the hospital after much wailing and gnashing of teeth. Sitting at an ungodly hour in the emergency room where my wife tried to talk me down, I was making my way through the five stages of grief and was up to either "denial" or "bargaining" when a young resident

fixed me with a rather supercilious eye and said sarcastically, "Your hickey is benign."

But why should I live in such constant terror? I take great care of myself. I have a personal trainer who has me up to 50 push-ups a month, and combined with my knee bends and situps, I can now press the 100-pound barbell over my head with only minimal tearing of my stomach wall. I never smoke and I watch what I eat, carefully avoiding any foods that give pleasure. (Basically, I adhere to the Mediterranean diet of olive oil, nuts, figs and goat cheese, and except for the occasional impulse to become a rug salesman, it works.) In addition to yearly physicals I get all available vaccines and inoculations, making me immune to everything from Whipple's disease to the Andromeda strain.

As far as vitamins go, if I take a few with each meal, over time I can usually get in quite a lot before the latest study confirms they're worthless. Regarding medications, I'm flexible but prudent because while it's true antibiotics kill bad bacteria, I'm always afraid they'll kill my good bacteria, not to mention my pheromones, and then I won't give off any sexual vibes in a crowded elevator.

It's also true that when I leave the house to go for a stroll in Central Park or to Starbucks for a latte I might just pick up a quick cardiogram or CT scan prophylactically. My wife calls this nonsense and says that in the end it's all genetic. My parents both lived to ripe old ages but absolutely refused to pass their genes to me as they believed an inheritance often spoils the child.

Even when the results of my yearly checkup show perfect health, how can I relax knowing that the minute I leave the doctor's office something may start growing in me and, by the time a full year rolls around, my chest X-ray will look like a Jackson Pollock? Incidentally, this relentless preoccupation with health has made me quite the amateur medical expert. Not that I don't make an occasional mistake -- but what doctor doesn't? For example, I once convinced a woman who experienced a mild ringing in her ears that she had the flesh-eating bacteria, and another time I pronounced a man dead who had simply dozed off in a chair.

But what's this obsession with personal vulnerability? When I panic over symptoms that require no more than an aspirin or a little calamine lotion, what is it I'm really frightened of? My best guess is dying. I have always

had an animal fear of death, a fate I rank second only to having to sit through a rock concert. My wife tries to be consoling about mortality and assures me that death is a natural part of life, and that we all die sooner or later. Oddly this news, whispered into my ear at 3 a.m., causes me to leap screaming from the bed, snap on every light in the house and play my recording of "The Stars and Stripes Forever" at top volume till the sun comes up.

I sometimes imagine that death might be more tolerable if I passed away in my sleep, although the reality is, no form of dying is acceptable to me with the possible exception of being kicked to death by a pair of scantily clad cocktail waitresses.

Perhaps if I were a religious person, which I am not, although I sometimes do have the intimation that we all may be part of something larger -- like a Ponzi scheme. A great Spanish philosopher wrote that all humans long for "the eternal persistence of consciousness." Not an easy state to maintain, especially when you're dining with people who keep talking about their children.

And yet, there are worse things than death. Many of them playing at a theater near you. For instance, I would not like to survive a stroke and for the rest of my life talk out of the side of my mouth like a racetrack tout. I would also not like to go into a coma, to lie in a hospital bed where I'm not dead but can't even blink my eyes and signal the nurse to switch the channel from Fox News. And incidentally, who's to say the nurse isn't one of those angel of death crazies who hates to see people suffer and fills my intravenous glucose bag with Exxon regular.

Worse than death, too, is to be on life support listening to my loved ones in a heated debate over whether to terminate me and hear my wife say, "I think we can pull the plug, it's been 15 minutes and we'll be late for our dinner reservation."

What worries me most is winding up a vegetable -- any vegetable, and that includes corn, which under happier circumstances I rather like. And yet is it really so great to live forever? Sometimes in the news I see features about certain tall people who reside in snow-capped regions where a whole village population lives to 140 or so. Of course all they ever eat is yogurt, and when they finally do die they are not embalmed but pasteurized. And don't forget these healthy people walk everywhere because try getting a cab

in the Himalayas. I mean do I really want to pass my days in some remote place where the main entertainment is seeing which guy in town can lift the ox highest with his bare hands?

Summing up, there are two distinct groups, hypochondriacs and alarmists. Both suffer in their own ways, and traits of one group may overlap the other, but whether you're a hypochondriac or an alarmist, at this point in time, either is probably better than being a Republican.