

Column One: As we bumble into war

Caroline Glick , THE JERUSALEM POST

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Today Israel's leaders claim that Saudi Arabia is our new best friend. The Wahhabis will protect us from Iran and its proxies they promise. It's difficult to see how this view jibes with reality.

Indeed today, in a manner eerily reminiscent of last spring, we are on the precipice of a new war and our leaders stubbornly reject truth for delusion. Unless they acknowledge reality soon, they will again bar the IDF from fighting effectively, again maneuver us into diplomatic isolation and so again lead Israel to defeat.

With this in mind, it is our duty today to take a hard look at reality.

As they did in the months that preceded the outbreak of their jihad in September 2000, for the past several months the Palestinians have been accelerating their preparations for war. On Monday Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) Director Yuval Diskin revealed some of those preparations.

Diskin said that in 2006, the Palestinians imported 30 tons of explosives into Gaza from Egypt. Hamas has dug 10 tunnels into the western Negev from which it will be able to launch attacks against the IDF or against civilians. The situation along the breached Gaza-Egypt border is even worse. Diskin referred to the weapons and personnel smuggling tunnels there as "one big rabbit warren."

As the Palestinians prepare themselves for battle, this week they invented their justification for attacking the Jews. Just as they did in September 2000, this week Palestinian and Israeli Arab leaders opened their propaganda campaign for war by falsely accusing Israel of conspiring to destroy the mosques on the Temple Mount.

Like its excavation by the Western Wall that has been going on quietly for the past several months, the Israel Antiquities Authority coordinated its salvage dig by the Mughrabi Gate of the Old City with the Islamic Wakf, the Jordanian government and all other relevant authorities before its archeologists began their work this week. Everyone understood that the excavation is being conducted 70 meters away from the Temple Mount and will in no way affect it.

But facts are irrelevant. The Arabs are not interested in the facts. They are interested in war. Sheikh Abdullah Nimer Darwish, the head of the southern branch of the Israeli Islamic movement, made this point clearly Thursday morning when he told Israel Radio that the war will likely begin when the heads of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas and Ismail Haniyeh, return from Mecca. It can be reasonably concluded from Darwish's statement that the Fatah-Hamas unity talks taking place in Mecca have more to do with coordinating the coming jihad than with dividing government ministries in their soon-to-be-formed, Saudi-sponsored terrorist unity government.

However the talks conclude, there is no doubt that the PA is gunning for war with Israel. Palestinian television,

which Abbas and Fatah control, has been showing incendiary live and archival footage from the Temple Mount for the past three days. The images are interspersed with speeches by Palestinian and pan-Islamic leaders calling on the Muslim world to protect Al Aksa mosque.

As Israel's leaders praise the Saudis for their role in promoting the peace process, Al-Jazeera satellite network is broadcasting live calls to war to the entire Muslim world live from the Temple Mount. While Al-Jazeera reporters have been kicked out of Algeria, Iraq, Sudan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Jordan for calling for war against anyone who doesn't talk like Osama bin Laden, and even the PA closed its offices twice, the Israeli government apparently has no problem with Al-Jazeera reporters calling the Islamic world to launch a genocidal jihad against the Jewish state from the Temple Mount.

On the Lebanese front, the situation is also frighteningly familiar. Just as last summer the Palestinians and Hizbullah worked in close coordination, so the escalation of hostilities along the border with Lebanon this week shows that their coordination remains high. What is new in the current situation is the hostile role being played by the Lebanese military, and what this role tells us about the nature of the coming war.

Last summer many warned Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni that it would be unwise to allow the Lebanese military to deploy to the border. To the extent those forces participated in the last war, they did so on the side of Hizbullah. Lebanese units directed Hizbullah's missile attack against the INS *Hanit*. They were similarly involved in identifying targets in northern Israel for Hizbullah's rocket units. Forty percent of the soldiers and officers serving in the Lebanese army are Shi'ite and many of them owe their primary allegiance to Hizbullah.

In spite of these warnings, Olmert and Livni did not merely accept the Lebanese army's deployment along the border. They insisted on it. And Wednesday night, when the Lebanese military attacked IDF units operating within sovereign Israel, those who preached caution were proven right. By insisting that the Lebanese army deploy along the border, Olmert and Livni effectively enabled Hizbullah's reassertion of control over south Lebanon.

It should be recalled that the timing of last summer's war was anything but a coincidence. At the time, Iran ordered Hizbullah to attack Israel two days before the G-8 summit where the world leaders were poised to condemn Iran for refusing to cease its uranium enrichment activities, and a week before the International Atomic Energy Agency was scheduled to refer Iran's nuclear program to the UN Security Council.

So too, today, the escalation of enemy incitement and operations is anything but random. On February 21, IAEA inspectors are scheduled to report to the Security Council that in defiance of Resolution 1737 from two months ago, Iran has not ceased its uranium enrichment activities. In the wake of this report, the sanctions set out in the resolution are supposed to be firmly enforced.

On the Iraqi front, hostilities between the US and Iran escalate daily and signs abound that the much awaited US offensive in Baghdad is about to start. If successful, the offensive will seriously weaken Iranian proxy forces in that country and similarly weaken Iran's influence over the Iraqi government.

All in all, a two-front war against Israel would go a long way towards advancing Iran's interests today.

All of this naturally raises the question: What are Israel's leaders doing as our enemies prepare for war?

While demanding that Olmert order the IAA to stop its salvage dig at the Mughrabi Gate, Defense Minister Amir Peretz is preparing to renew his hostilities against his greatest foes - the Israelis who live in Judea and

Samaria. Last week Peretz ordered the IDF to draw up plans to destroy several Israeli communities in the areas. As to the Palestinians, Hizbullah and their state sponsors, Peretz has nothing constructive to say.

For her part, Livni continues to applaud her brilliance in negotiating the cease-fire agreement last summer under which Hizbullah has rearmed and reasserted its control over south Lebanon. Then too, Livni continues to act as the spokeswoman for the Fatah terror organization.

In her joint appearance with British Foreign Minister Margaret Beckett on Tuesday, Livni said that Israel and Fatah (which she refers to as the "moderates in the Palestinian Authority"), "are on the same side."

While repeating her vapid mantra distinguishing "moderates" from "extremists," Wednesday Livni claimed that the incitement surrounding the Temple Mount is being carried out by "irresponsible elements" which include "political groups within Israel and extremist elements outside Israel." As is her practice, Livni ignored the fact that her "moderate" friend Abbas stands at the center of those "extremists" inciting for war.

Finally we have Prime Minister Ehud Olmert himself. In his testimony last week before the Winograd Commission which he appointed to investigate last summer's war, Olmert continued to insist that Israel won. This being the case, we oughtn't be concerned about the defeated Hizbullah.

As to the Palestinians, Olmert is now busily preparing for his February 19 meeting with Abbas, the "moderate" terror master, and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. He continues to forbid the IDF from striking the burgeoning terror armies and armories in Gaza and refuses to acknowledge the known fact that Fatah is supported by Iran.

This week Olmert again tried to lull us into complacency about the ayatollahs' nuclear weapons program. Speaking to the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish American Organizations, Olmert enthused that we have ample time to deal with the threat and that anyway, the international community including China and Russia can be counted on to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons through diplomacy.

At this juncture it is worth recalling precisely what was wrong about the Olmert government's handling of the war last summer. While the Winograd Commission writes its report, the citizens of Israel should realize that regardless of what the members of the commission who Olmert appointed say, the war was not merely or mainly a military failure. The central cause of Israel's defeat was the incompetence of our political leaders. Specifically, Olmert and Peretz failed to act to ensure that the IDF achieved the goals they set for it.

Before ordering the IDF to war, Olmert held no discussions regarding the conditions on the ground, and so did not consider whether the war plans he approved were relevant to the achievement of his declared goals.

Olmert and Livni failed to grasp the diplomatic opportunities the war created. Had they been paying attention they would have seen a tangible willingness in Washington to consider a joint Israeli-American strike against the terror headquarters and training bases in Syria that serve not only the Palestinians and Hizbullah, but the insurgents warring against coalition forces in Iraq. The consequences that such a joint operation would have had on both Israeli-US relations and on Syrian-Iranian relations would have changed the face of the region in a dramatic and positive way.

Due to their ignorance of both military and diplomatic affairs, Olmert and colleagues barred the IDF from conquering south Lebanon and so denied the army the only means of achieving the goal of ending the missile attacks on northern Israel and destroying Hizbullah as a fighting force.

When Olmert's, Livni's and Peretz's incompetence last summer is compared to their current behavior, the unavoidable conclusion is that they have learned nothing from their experience and so remain incompetent to contend with the dangers we face today.

And so, as they bumble us into another war while speaking dreamily of their friends in Mecca, at least Olmert, Livni and Peretz cannot say that they weren't warned.

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