

{FEBRUARY 19 2005}

BEWARE OF THE DOG!

It is not very flattering to be paraded like a Rottweiler on a leash, whose master threatens to let him loose on his enemies. But this is our situation now.

Vice President Dick Cheney threatened a few weeks ago that if Iran continues to develop its nuclear capabilities, Israel might attack her.

This week, President George Bush repeated this threat. If he were the leader of Israel, he declared, he would have been feeling threatened by Iran. He reminded those who are a little slow that the United States has undertaken to defend Israel if there is a threat to its security.

All this adds up to a clear warning: if Iran does not submit to the orders of the US (and, perhaps, even if it does) Israel will attack it with American help, much as it attacked the Iraqi nuclear reactor some 24 years ago.

The same week, something quite unexpected happened: Ariel Sharon sent the Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Ya'alon, packing. His successor will most probably be General Dan Halutz.

Halutz is, of course, a pilot, and one who played his part in the 1981 attack on the Iraqi reactor. If he succeeds Ya'alon, it will be the first time in the annals of the Israel Defense Forces that an airman is appointed Chief-of-Staff. That is rather curious. In the coming year, the army will be called upon to carry out a very difficult operation on land: the evacuation of the Gaza Strip settlements. The appointment of an Air Force general as Chief-of-Staff may hint that the IDF is planning something even more important in the air.

(Note: Nobody will shed a tear at the removal of Ya'alon. As Chief-of-Staff, he bears responsibility for all the terrible things that happened in the army during the last three years, from the “killing verification” of a 13-year old girl to the “neighbor practice” – compelling a Palestinian civilian to walk in front of soldiers on their way to kill a militant. But if Ya'alon is succeeded by Halutz, it will confirm the pessimistic dictum that for every bad man removed there is an even worse one to succeed him.

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For those who have forgotten: Halutz (“pioneer”, in Hebrew) aroused a public storm after the Air Force dropped a one-ton bomb on the house of a Hamas leader and killed him together with 15 civilians, including nine children. Asked what he feels when dropping such a bomb, he answered “a slight bump”, adding that he sleeps well afterwards. At the same time, he vilified Gush Shalom for its actions against war crimes and demanded that we be put on trial for treason.)

Back to Bush-Cheney and the Rottweiler.

When Bush came to power for the first time, the Neo-Cons laid before him a coherent plan for the extension of the American Empire in the Middle East. It contained three chapters:

One, to conquer Iraq in order to take control of its immense oil reserves and place an American garrison at the critical junction between the Caspian Sea oil and the Saudi resources.

Two, to break the Iranian regime and return Iran to the American bloc.

Three, to do the same to Syria and Lebanon. It was not yet decided whether Iran would come before Syria, or the other way round.

It might have been assumed that the experience of the American adventure in Iraq would cancel the next chapters. The Iraqi people did not receive the occupying army with flowers. The pretext for the invasion – Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction – was exposed as a blatant lie. The armed insurrection continues. The future of the Iraqi state hangs in the balance, even after the recent elections. The country may well break up into three parts, creating shock waves all around the Middle East.

Naive people believe that after all this, Bush would not risk more adventures of this kind. They are wrong.

First, because a primitive and vain person like him never admits to failure. When one of his adventures fails, this just drives him on to even more ambitious ones.

Second, the failure does indeed cost a lot of lives and destroys the infrastructure of life in Iraq, but that doesn’t matter for the planners of the operation. The main aim – establishing a permanent garrison in the country – has been achieved. Outside of Iraq, nobody is demanding that the American soldiers leave. And, whatever the acts of sabotage, the Iraqi oil is controlled by the US. The oil barons, who are the patrons of the Bush family, can be well satisfied.

The Europeans and Russian are trying to block Bush’s path. He is now going to pay a state visit to the EU and NATO, trying to convince them by sweet talk and threats that they should cooperate in his adventures.

Therefore, one must take seriously Bush’s and Cheney’s threats to unleash the

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Rottweiler. The moment they feel that the way is clear, they will give the sign to Sharon. Sharon will do his duty, in return for an American agreement to allow him to gobble up some more pieces of the Palestinian territories.

Will military action cause the regime of the Ayatollahs to collapse? I doubt it. It is, indeed, a detestable regime, but faced with an attack from the outside, especially from “Crusaders and Zionists”, the Iranian people will unite behind it. A proud people, with a glorious history like the Iranians, will not break easily.

Syria is a different target. Unlike Iraq and Iran, it has no oil resources. But without it the American Empire will not be contiguous and it is an obstacle to Israel.

In the 1967 war, Israel conquered the Golan heights, which until then were known in Israel as “the Syrian heights”. In place of many dozens of Syrian villages, which were wiped from the face of the earth, Israel settlements sprang up. The Syrians have never given up their resolve to recover their territory. In 1973, they tried to do this by war but were routed, in spite of a remarkable initial victory. Since then, the balance of military power has tilted even more in favor of Israel. Therefore, Syria is using another method: harassing Israel by proxy, by giving support to Hisbullah and radical Palestinian organizations, whose leaders reside in Damascus.

In order to make permanent its rule over the Golan heights, the Israeli government must break Syria. The neo-cons in Washington – surprise, surprise – have the same aim. The pretext: the fact that Syrian soldiers are stationed in Lebanon.

Historically, Lebanon is a part of Syria. Damascus has never resigned itself to the establishment of a separate Lebanese state by the French colonialists in the first half of the 20th century. At the most, it accepts Lebanon as a client state.

The Syrian army entered Lebanon in 1976, at the height of the terrible civil war there. The Muslims and Druze, with help of the PLO, were poised to conquer the Christian areas. It was the Christians (please remember!) who called upon the Syrians to come and save them. Since then, the Syrians have remained there. Many Lebanese believe that their departure would cause the civil war to break out again.

In 1982 Israel tried to dislodge them. That was the main objective of the army general staff (as distinct from then Minister of Defense Ariel Sharon, whose main objective was to drive the Palestinians out). But the invasion did not achieve its aim: in the end, the Israelis were driven out and the Syrians remained.

This week, the Muslim leader Fariq al-Hariri, who lately joined the opposition, was assassinated in Beirut. It is not yet known who did it. The huge American propaganda machine, which includes the Israeli media, has pointed at the Syrians. If they are indeed guilty, it was an act of supreme folly, since it was obvious that it would help the Americans build up the Lebanese opposition and arouse a storm of anti-Syrian

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sentiment. It happened at exactly the right moment for anyone interested in starting a campaign against Syria, under the slogan “End the Syrian Occupation!”

There is something laughable about this demand, coming as it does from two occupying powers: the Americans in Iraq and the Israelis in Palestine. But Rottweilers are not renowned for their sense of humor, any more than those who parade them around on a leash.