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America's Israeli-Occupied Media

There should be little doubt that the Israeli government is making every effort to jump-start a war against Iran sooner rather than later. Many Israelis not surprisingly believe it is in their interest to convince the United States to attack Iran so that Israel will not have to do it, and they are hell-bent on bringing that about. Unfortunately, their efforts are being aided and abetted by a U.S. mainstream media that is unwilling to ask any hard questions or challenge the assumptions of the Israeli government.

Israeli intellectuals such as Benny Morris have been provided a platform to argue implausibly that a little war is necessary right now to prevent a larger nuclear conflict. The repeated visits to Washington by Israeli Minister of Defense Ehud Barak and Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi to pressure Washington to commit to a military option are generally unreported in the U.S. media, and no one is asking why the United States should be involved in what is clearly a "wag the dog" scenario.

For once, however, some officials in Washington appear to have developed a backbone and are pushing back. A flurry of visits to Israel by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Michael Mullen, and intelligence chiefs Mike McConnell and Michael Hayden have made clear that there is considerable opposition at the Pentagon and in intelligence circles to starting a third war at this time. Israel says that Iran is about to obtain a nuclear weapon while the Pentagon and American intelligence services are providing a more cautious assessment, putting forward the U.S. view that Iran is still far removed from having nuclear capability. Mullen went so far as to tell the Israelis flatly that Washington does not want another war. He even brought up the subject of the USS *Liberty*, a not-so subtle hint that Washington knows that Israel might try to engineer a Gulf of Tonkin-type surprise to force American involvement. Mullen may have been implying that any incident in the Persian Gulf that might lead to armed conflict will be scrutinized carefully to determine if it is a false flag operation initiated by Tel Aviv.

On the home front there is also some additional good news for those who prefer diplomacy to warfare: Congress is in recess and won't be able to do anything truly stupid, at least not until next month. House **Resolution 362** has 261 co-sponsors, but it is still in committee and the word is that it will be rewritten because of concerns about some of its language. Though not binding, it would have recommended a blockade of Iranian ports to stop the import of petroleum products, which many have rightly seen as an act of war. Senate **Resolution 580**, which has 49 senators as co-sponsors, is also reportedly being redrafted. The antiwar movement has claimed some credit for stopping the two resolutions in their original versions because of a mobilization that produced thousands of calls to congressmen, but AIPAC has

been lobbying heavily for the approval of both resolutions. I expect that the Israel lobby will prevail. Both resolutions should pass with overwhelming majorities when Congress reconvenes after Labor Day.

The principal problem in attempting to derail the rush to war has been the mainstream media, which provides a bully pulpit for those who want war. The media also accepts the framework of the Iran "problem" as defined by Washington and Tel Aviv, refusing to enter into any kind of serious, adult discussion of how the outstanding issues between the U.S. and Iran might be resolved. A good example of how it all works was provided on Aug. 3, when Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni was interviewed on CNN's *Late Edition* by Wolf Blitzer, who himself once worked for AIPAC.

Livni has an interesting resume. Her father was one of the Irgun terrorists who blew up the King David hotel in 1946 and later massacred Arab villagers in Deir Yassin. As a teenager, Livni participated in demonstrations on behalf of the nationalist extremist group Greater Israel, which advocated expelling all Arabs and extending Israeli domination over all of historic Palestine to include the West Bank, parts of Jordan, up to the Litani River in Lebanon to the north, and down to include Sinai and the Suez Canal in the south and west. She is reported to have mellowed somewhat since that time. She was close to Ariel Sharon, became justice minister, switched over to Kadima with Sharon, and was elected to the Knesset. She was rewarded with the Foreign Ministry by Sharon and now serves Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. She is a former intelligence officer, a lawyer by training, bright and articulate, and generally regarded as a "realist" vis-à-vis the Palestinians and the Muslim world, meaning that she supported the Sharon policy of "disengagement" and seeks a negotiated solution and normalization rather than continuing armed conflict. She appears to be the leading candidate to replace Ehud Olmert when he steps down later this year due to his acceptance of gifts from an American businessman.

Livni has been reported as having said privately in October 2007 that Iran poses no existential threat to Israel and was highly critical of attempts to hype the danger, but her private views have not in any way influenced her public pronouncements. In her interview with CNN she made a number of statements that are inaccurate or at best speculative, but predictably, she was not challenged in any way by Blitzer. Most viewers probably came away from the interview convinced that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons, is unwilling to negotiate over its nuclear enrichment program, and is a danger to the entire world.

Following a lead-in by Blitzer affirming that Iran is "showing absolutely no indication they're going to stop enriching uranium," Livni – representing a country that has ignored more UN resolutions than any other, engaged in ethnic cleansing, and attacked all of its neighbors without warning – asserted that "It is clear that Iran doesn't pay attention to talks ... Iran is a threat, not only to Israel, but this is a global threat."

Blitzer then obligingly provided another softball, referring to Ehud Barak's assessment that there is only a window of 15 to 36 months before Iran crosses the "line of no return." While it is not clear what the expression "line of no return" means, Livni jumped on it, saying that "any kind of hesitation ... is being perceived by the Iranians as weakness. ... Iran is a threat to its neighbors, as well. ... We shouldn't wait for what we call 'point of no return.'" Blitzer then asked, "You don't even give them 15 months necessarily. You think it's a more urgent matter?" "Yes," Livni answered.

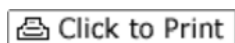
Blitzer then suggested that the U.S. might not be ready for a "third front" in the Middle East at the present time, to which Livni replied, "[T]he world cannot afford a nuclear Iran and weapons of mass destruction everywhere in this region, in the hands not only of states, but also of terrorist organizations." Livni clearly believes that it is all right for Israel to have a secret nuclear

arsenal but unacceptable for any of Israel's neighbors, because they cannot be trusted to behave responsibly. The allegation that Tehran would give nuclear weapons to terrorists surfaces frequently from Israeli and neocon sources. It is speculative and in all likelihood a complete fantasy, given the apocalyptic consequences of such an action for Iran, but Blitzer failed to contest the point. The terrorist argument is an essential line in the script for those who want the U.S. to engage in a war with Iran.

Tzipi Livni should not be blamed for reciting her lines in spite of her personal misgivings, because she is, after all, the government official responsible for explaining Tel Aviv's foreign policy. It is the American media that continues to play the patsy. If interviewers like Wolf Blitzer are the best that the U.S. mainstream media can come up with, then we are in serious trouble. The interview format itself is a travesty, particularly as it suggests that some rational process is being applied to either critique or validate what the interviewee is saying. As the Livni interview demonstrates, if the subject is the Middle East and the interviewer is Wolf Blitzer, that is not likely to be the case.

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