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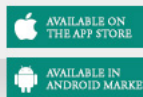
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For Netanyahu, Iran Is Personal

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For the most part in recent years, the debate on Israeli-Iranian enmity in general and Israel's threats to take military action against Iran's nuclear program in particular has been framed around such "structural" or "big" issues as the regional balance of power, state survival, national interests, and hegemonic dominance in the greater Middle East. While each of the factors sheds light on a unique aspect of the controversy, a gap opens up for the presence of personal dimensions to the increasing escalation of hostilities, rendering the whole problem yet more difficult to resolve. In the prime time of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's career as the Iranian president from 2005 to 2013, many academics and politicians alike were highlighting his thirst for grandeur, messianic beliefs and apocalyptic worldview as a major driver behind the escalation and thus an important cause for concern. This analytic perspective appears to enjoy adequate ground on the Israeli side too, and more specifically, applies to the incumbent Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Time and again over the past years, Netanyahu has pledged to use whatever it takes to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, including military force. With his pompous rhetoric and explicit threats, Netanyahu has placed himself in an "all-in" zero-sum situation vis-à-vis Iran. Like in poker, all-in means that you either win all or lose all. So, if Iran, which he firmly believes is dashing for the bomb, is forcefully stopped, he will be a national winner and probably secure himself a heroic place in Israeli history. If he fails to take action, however, and Iran is allowed to cross Israel's red lines, Netanyahu will go down (<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/netanyahu-strike-iran.html>) in history as the biggest loser ever in Israeli politics.

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The whole issue of Iran's nuclear program, with its alleged weaponization activities, has therefore personal importance for Netanyahu too. Throughout his political career, he has always been driven by feelings of unrecognized grandiosity. His father, Benzion Netanyahu, was ostracized by Israel's labor establishment and forced to pursue his academic career abroad. His wife Sara has been on the record saying her husband "is the very best prime minister ever to serve in Israel."

(<http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/week-s-end/who-s-the-boss-of-benjamin-netanyahu-1.405800>) Though Winston Churchill is his role model, Netanyahu has nothing of his stature in Israel, and, of course, even less so abroad, where he is often accused of not acting "Churchillian" and for missing "Churchillian moments."

In Israel and abroad, it is widely believed that Netanyahu is seeking his place in the history books with his campaign to halt Iran's nuclear venture. Obsessive attempts on his part to personalize such a matter, which has enormous implications for Israel's national security and interests, partly explains why the Israeli military is suspicious of his policy line and more often than not expresses opposition to an attack on the Islamic Republic. While few in Israel doubt the gravity of the threat of a potential Iranian bomb, many worry about Netanyahu's true motives behind a forceful action to take it out. The former iron triangle of the Israeli military, namely former Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, former head of Mossad Meir Dagan, and former director of Shin Bet Yuval Diskin, all opposed an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear facilities during their incumbency because they could not trust Netanyahu's intentions and the disinterestedness of his attitude towards the issue. Stressing that Netanyahu is "possessed" by Iran, Diskin, for example, has quoted Bibi as saying that "his mission on Iran is on a much grander scale" (<http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/ex-shin-bet-head-netanyahu-is-an-unreliable-leader-possessed-by-iran-premium-1.491927>) than the previous Israeli strikes on Iraqi and Syrian nuclear facilities.

Though much of what happened during this time (around 2009-2011) in the corridors of power in Israel, is still under gag orders, [leaks](#)

(http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/05/world/middleeast/israeli-report-cites-a-thwarted-2010-move-on-iran.html?_r=4&) to the media point to a devastating situation in Israeli politics where the military leadership under Ashkenazi and Dagan refused to carry out a P-plus order from Netanyahu and his Defense Minister Ehud Barak, which would have prepared the Israeli military for an imminent strike on Iran's nuclear installations. In a functioning democracy, such acts of defiance by the military, which almost resemble a coup d'état, would be incomprehensible. Ashkenazi, Dagan and their allies also reportedly took measures to prevent Netanyahu and Barak's favored candidate for new chief of staff, Yoav Galant, from assuming office in 2011 and revoked the security clearance from Netanyahu's national security advisor, Uzi Arad, a move which led to his resignation in 2010. Galant and Arad had been strong advocates of attacking Iran.

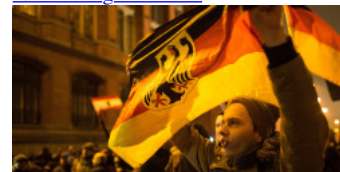
The question of whether Israel will use military force against Iran is one of the decisive questions of our time. A lot is at stake here for Netanyahu. Everything that his critics have ever said about him -- that he is a cheap demagogue, that he has a weak character, that he is indecisive, and that he is no Churchill -- will be proven correct if one day Iran should exceed Israel's red lines. Iran is personal for Netanyahu.

This article is co-authored with [Maysam Behravesh](#) (http://www.svet.lu.se/english_pages/css_personligsida.lasso?token.id=MBE) who is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at Lund University, Sweden

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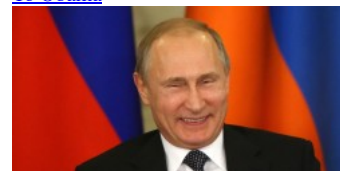
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