

## Twelve Months of National Emergency

by

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The Democratic and Republican national conventions, which will choose each party's presidential candidate, will convene next summer. From that point on, with the race for President entering the final straightaway, through the elections in November and during the first year in office of a new and inexperienced President, the likelihood that the United States will attack Iran's nuclear facilities is close to zero. By then – that is, in two and a half years – if the sanctions fail, Iran is expected to cross the point of no-return in its quest to attain nuclear weapons.

In light of this predetermined timetable, President Bush will have to decide whether or not to attack Iran within the next twelve months. If he attacks, Israel is guaranteed a ballistic shower from Iran, Lebanon, Gaza, and possibly from Syria and the West Bank as well. If Bush chooses not to attack, then the government of Israel will have to decide during the next twelve months if the country is capable of carrying out a military operation against Iran.

If it is determined that we are incapable of implementing an effective operation, then Israel will have to immediately begin preparing for a new age in which our enemies will possess a strategic threat capability that will greatly reduce Israel's national security maneuvering room – not to mention the possibility that this threat will actually be realized. If Israel's government decides that the country is able to stop, either temporarily or permanently, Iran's nuclear program, then it must prepare in advance for the heavy price that we will have to pay – in blood as well as in physical damage, economic costs and in diplomatic terms.

In other words, during the next twelve months, decisions will be made in Washington that will require existential decisions in Jerusalem. Even inaction is a decision with a clear default outcome.

Despite all of the problems and difficulties that have befallen us in recent years, and in the last year in particular, we are today in a position of strength that we have not been in for some time. The army is rehabilitating itself and the economy is stronger than it has been for years. In addition, ironically – and by complete coincidence – this is also an hour of very rare leadership potential.

Three leaders, among the most talented in Israel as far as innate ability is concerned, leaders who have made huge mistakes in the past and have paid enormous personal and political penalties – with resultant gains in experience that are difficult to underestimate – are each currently positioned at the top of the country's three largest parties. One day, they will have a chance to compete with one another. But today, and during the next twelve months of national emergency that we face, we are one people united, in need of a leadership team that is the most talented and experienced that we can put forth. In addition to these three, the Knesset was wise enough to choose as president a backup leader, Shimon Peres, with an international reputation and global connections second to no other Israeli – a president who, during the upcoming period, will be able to provide crucial assistance abroad in presenting Israel's case and in shoring up the country's image.

This is an hour of reconciliation, and, if the temporary political union materializes, it will be an hour of strength. This team will determine not only the national security strategy that will decide the physical fate of the nation. It can also utilize the national emergency year to launch a new system of government in Israel that will guarantee – beginning with the next elections – leadership, governance and stability alongside separation of powers between branches, with checks and balances and a constitution. This team will be able to utilize the period of independence from sectoral political constraints to implement a widespread structural reform of the education system with a much improved and uniform mandatory core curriculum in basic subjects from kindergarten through the end of high school in each of the country's education streams – a change that will provide all of Israel's children, without any relation to their parents religion or degree of religiousness, the necessary tools for succeeding in a modern and competitive labor market.

All of the other issues, all of the other headlines, and all of the other personal and political considerations need to wait until the end of the twelve national emergency months ahead of us. From the possible death of the country in the future to its possible rebirth and rejuvenation this coming year, this is the unbelievable spectrum of possibilities that is in the hands of Ehud Olmert, Ehud Barak and Benjamin Netanyahu. This could be their finest hour.