

Patrick Lawrence

## **An historic turn in West Asia.**

Bibi Netanyahu is afflicted with a serious and (needless to say) consequential form of psychosis. I do not state this in the flippant, offhand manner of those many commentators who never have to answer for their irresponsible assertions and misjudgments. I rely here on the [clinical definition](#), psychosis as a formal thought disorder that causes one to lose contact with reality. There is much evidence to support this diagnosis, if I have any right to this term; [the Israeli prime minister's speech at the U.N. General Assembly last month](#) is a ready-to-hand example. Listen to it, study the facial features: This is a man who suffers hallucinations, delusions, palinopsia, and possibly other symptoms.

But we must acknowledge this about Netanyahu: He has moments of unusual clarity during which he tells us exactly what he means. It is up to us on these occasions to accept what a man given to all manner of fallacies and illusions says as exactly his intent—the truth and the whole truth, as American courts require witnesses to swear.

Netanyahu has been telling the world since midsummer that [the Zionist state is waging “a seven-front war”](#) across the region. He first used the term while addressing Israeli and American officials last July in what looks in videos like his cabinet room. Now, as the Zionist state continues its barbarous assault in Gaza, advances its aggression in the West Bank, bombs and invades Lebanon, regularly bombs Syria, and pledges to attack Iran, we have no grounds to profess surprise. I

have just named five of the seven fronts of which Netanyahu has spoken openly for several months. If we count recent rocket attacks in Yemen, our number is six; the remainder on the list is Iraq.

Two questions preoccupy the world as tensions mount across West Asia. One is how far, how swiftly, and how dangerously terrorist Israel will prosecute its war against its neighbors. The other is whether the U.S. can restrain the Israelis and how successful any such effort will be. “Can Biden walk the Middle East back from the brink?” [The Hill, a Washington journal, asked Thursday.](#)

We reach one of those moments in the course of which history will be made: Israel has indeed pushed West Asia to the brink of a war that could quickly threaten the world if it is not stopped. But we waste our time so long as we preoccupy ourselves with the sorts of questions just noted—which is the intent of those media incessantly putting them before us. It is better, as of the Israelis’ bombings of Beirut, its ground invasion in southern Lebanon, and its uninhibited threats against the Islamic Republic—all in the past week—to face new realities, adjust our expectations accordingly, and look in those directions where enduring solutions to this, the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s most egregious crisis to date, may be found.

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In December 2022, with his political survival in question, Benjamin Netanyahu named what is widely considered the most radically orthodox cabinet in Israel’s history. Overnight, the nation’s leadership shifted from a nationalist understanding of the Israeli project to a religious understanding. As Ilan Pappé, the expatriated Israeli historian, puts it in [a very fine essay published in the New Left Review’s](#)

[online feature](#), the State of Israel had faced off against “the State of Judea,” and the latter won out.

We must not miss the significance of this momentous turn in the Israelis’ story. The nationalist and religious factions agreed on many things—both are Zionist, both are Jewish supremacist, both lust of land, both have inalterably racist views of Palestinians and Arabs in general—but the ultra-right orthodox now holding powerful positions in Netanyahu’s cabinet have a biblical view of Israel’s destiny: They answer to the Old Testament and so take little interest in geopolitical realities or other such earthly matters. Bezalel Smotrich, the finance minister, is [wholly committed to the realization of Eretz Israel](#), a Greater Israel whose frontiers will lie far beyond those now drawn on maps. “Lebanon will be annihilated,” [Yoav Kisch, the education minister, declared](#) in evident confirmation of this view during a recent television interview. “Lebanon as we know it will not exist.”

Let us not flinch from the reality Smotrich, Kisch and others like them—speaking with the same diabolic honesty we get from the prime minister on occasion—put before us. Nothing will change the radical beliefs of such people, for they live and believe—as against think—beyond all reason. They have either transformed Israel or brought forth its true, previously submerged character the ethos that drives it. Netanyahu now interprets Israel’s present circumstances with plentiful references to Biblical prophecies. Even if this is a matter of political expedience, as I think likely, his rhetoric is a measure of the extent to which Israel has changed—and in my view irrevocably. The only thing that can stop the Israel they have brought forth is described in a single word: Force alone will bring this unspeakable offense to all humanity to an end.

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“Conflict in the Middle East is heading toward a tipping point, and Washington is scrambling for de-escalation,” *The Hill*’s reporters write in the aforementioned piece. One reads this kind of thing daily now. And here is a new line coming out of the corporate-owned American press. “Joe Biden has lost his grip,” [\*The Washington Post\* now tells us](#), and “the conflict is now out of control.” Roger Cohen a *New York Times* correspondent of considerable eminence, [reports with feigned sang froid](#), “The world’s biggest powers can’t stop a Middle East war”—not in “a turbulent world of decentralized authority.”

It is, of course, sheer nonsense that the United States finds itself—all of a sudden, after decades of unchallenged preeminence in West Asia—unable to control its premier client in the region. Yes, we can confidently believe President Biden and his adjutants when they protest that the Zionist state’s barbarities are “over the top” and the Israel Defense Forces must must must kill fewer children, women, and other innocent civilians. But you have never heard, I assure you, anyone in the Biden regime protest that Israel must desist in its campaign of... of annihilation. It must simply prosecute it more calmly, let us say more photogenically: This is the point Washington makes again and again.

In this connection, we in the West must now guard against our own case of psychosis. We must place the crisis Israel conjures across West Asia as we speak fully in the context of America’s postwar obsession—reiterated and updated in the post-Cold War years—with global hegemony and what neoconservatives took to calling, a few months before the events of 11 September 2001, “full spectrum dominance.” America’s defense of Israel is very key to this strategy, which was

devised under the influence of various American Zionists. This is the reality with which we must not lose touch. And along with it, a reality yet more bitter: If there is no stopping apartheid Israel short of force, this same is true of the American imperium. Empires, in one of history's simplest lessons, do not desist or fade absent the vigorous resistance of others or a drastic deterioration in material circumstances.



Where have the non-Western powers been these past 12 months? Why haven't the Russians, the Chinese, the Indians, and other emerging nations exerted themselves more forcefully in behalf of the Palestinian cause? China hosted a gathering of Palestinian factions, including Hamas, over the summer in an effort to promote some effective form of unity. South Africa has very honorably carried the case to the International Court of Justice. But these are exceptions that beg the question: Why has the non-West been so silent in the face of Israel's gross breaches of international law, its illegal acts of genocide and ethnic-cleansing?

This is a complex question, and we cannot pretend to answer it other than complexly. Too many factors—political, diplomatic, economic, and so on—weigh upon the non-West's determinations. But the intensification of the West Asian conflict, notably since the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah, the invasion of southern Lebanon, and the bombing of Beirut, may prove the moment when the geopolitical landscape begins to evolve. If this turns out to be so, it will be the Russian Federation that leads the rest of the non-West.

Early last week Moscow called on Israel—publicly, this—to withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon. Just before the weekend Israel conducted air strikes near Latakia, the city along the Syrian coast where Russia maintains air and naval assets. Possibly in response—and I would say probably—Russian naval vessels anchored in the Mediterranean reportedly shot down a number of Israeli missiles as they approached Beirut.

These developments remain short of confirmed. But the Russian ambassador to Tel Aviv has since—and again, publicly—advised Russians resident in Israel, of which there are many, to leave the country. More recently Vladimir Putin has repeatedly refused to take telephone calls from the Israeli PM. Chas Freeman, the distinguished former ambassador, reads these developments as possible signs Russia may now reassert itself in West Asia for the first time since it began bombing sorties against the Islamic State over Syria in the autumn of 2015. This could mark, Freeman suggests, a return to the East–West rivalry in the region that characterized the Cold War decades.

It is too soon even to speculate where these latest turns may lead or what they may portend. I would point out, however, that the Russians and Chinese have for some years shared a genuine anxiety as to the dangers of mounting global instability in consequence of the Biden regime’s famous “international rules-based order.” They have both been very clear that they have given up working constructively with the U.S.

In two weeks’ time the BRICS nations, which Russia chairs this year, will hold their sixteenth summit in the western Russian city of Kazan. There are now nine BRICS members, with many more in the process of joining. The BRICS is not and

has no plans to make itself any kind of military organization. But the most immediately consequential business scheduled for Kazan is the conclusion of a strategic partnership—if not a formal alliance, very close to one—between Moscow and Tehran. The potential implications here for the West Asian crisis will be evident.

5 October 2024, Bazenheid