

"Anyone But Bibi" by Uri Avnery

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THE VULTURES are circling. They can see the wounded man on the ground, and are waiting for his end.

So are the human carnivores – the politicians.

They sing his praises, swear to defend him with all their heart – but in their heads they are already calculating who might be his successor. Each of them mutters to himself: Why not me?

Binyamin Netanyahu is facing the greatest crisis in his long career. The police are about to conclude their investigations. The Attorney General is under huge pressure to issue official indictments. The large demonstrations near the Attorney General's home are growing from week to week.

The Attorney General, the Inspector General of the Police and the Minister for Internal Security were all personally picked by Netanyahu (and his wife). Now even this does not help. The pressure is too strong.

The investigations may drag on for another few months, but the end seems certain: State of Israel v. Binyamin Netanyahu will go to court.

WHEN A member of the government is indicted for a felony, they usually resign, or at least take leave of absence. Not Netanyahu. No sir!

If he resigned, who would guard Israel and save it from the numerous dreadful dangers threatening the state from all sides? The Iranians are promising our extinction, the evil Arabs all around want to kill us, the leftists and other traitors threaten the state from within. How can we survive without Bibi? The danger is too awful to contemplate!

Netanyahu seems to believe this himself. He, his wife and his eldest son behave like a royal family. They buy without paying, travel as guests of others, receive expensive gifts as a matter of course.

Popular humor accompanies all these transgressions. The police have entered this spirit and decorated his files with many zeros.

File 1000 concerns the gifts. The Netanyahus are surrounded by a crowd of billionaires, who compete with each other in presenting gifts. Many jokes were made about the expensive cigars and pink champagne given to the family – until it transpired that their value amounts to tens of thousands of dollars. And the donors expect something in return from the donees.

File 2000 concerns a peculiar matter. Yedioth Ahronoth ("Latest News") was Israel's largest daily newspaper, until Israel Hayom ("Israel Today") appeared — a paper distributed for nothing. It was founded by Sheldon Adelson, an admirer of Netanyahu and the owner of huge casinos in Las Vegas and Macao. It is devoted to the single task of glorifying King Bibi.

In a recorded private conversation, Netanyahu offered Noni Moses, the owner of Yedioth, a deal: Israel Today would reduce its size and circulation if Yedioth started to glorify Bibi. Legally, this may amount to bribery.

And then there is File 3000, deep beneath the sea. The German shipbuilder ThyssenKrupp (two names well remembered as Hitler's weapons suppliers) builds our submarines. Three, six, nine. The sky — or the sea — is the limit.

What do we need submarines for? Not to sink enemy fleets. Our enemies, such as they are, have no powerful fleets. But they may obtain nuclear missiles. Israel is a very small territory, and a nuclear bomb or two could destroy it. But no one will dream of doing so if they know that out there lurk submarines, which will respond with nuclear missiles within minutes.

The German shipyard, with the support of the German government, sells the submarines to the Israeli navy. No middlemen needed. But there are middlemen who put millions in their pockets. How many pockets? Ah, there we are. Quite a number of pockets, and all these pockets belong to people very close to the Prime Minister.

Perverved minds may imagine that tens of millions have reached the PM himself, perish the thought.

This week, a prestigious TV program aired an investigation, and the picture was shocking. The entire military and civilian environment seems to be infected by corruption, as in a failed African state.

ONE OF the few lessons I have learned in my life is that nobody reaches the top of any profession if they are not devoted to it absolutely, totally.

To get stinking rich, you must love stinking money. Not the things money can buy, but money itself. Like the miser of Moliere, who sits all day and counts his riches. If you also want something else, love or glory, you will not get to be a multi-multi-billionaire.

Don Juan did not care for anything but women. Not love. Just women, more and more of them.

David Ben-Gurion wanted power. Not the pleasures of power. Not cigars. Not champagne. Not several villas. Just power. Everything else, like his Bible club and his reading Don Quixote in Spanish, was just pretense. He wanted power and held on to it as long as he could. (In the end, when he surrounded himself with a praetorian guard of youngsters like Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres, his colleagues ganged up on him and kicked him out, with some help from me.)

A person who wants political power, but also the amenities of life, several villas and a lot of money will not really reach the very top. Netanyahu is a good example.

He is no exception. His predecessor is in prison, and so are several former ministers. A former President of the State was just released from prison (for sexual offenses).

Netanyahu grew up in the a family which was not affluent. So did Ehud Olmert. So did Ehud Barak. So did Moshe Dayan. They all loved money too much.

Sarah Netanyahu, the Prime Minister's wife, is also about to be indicted. She is accused of paying for her extensive private needs with government funds. She is not widely appreciated. Everybody calls her Sarah'le ("Little Sarah"), but not from love. She also grew up in straitened circumstances and was a low-grade air stewardess when she met Bibi in a duty-free shop.

I was lucky. Until my tenth birthday, my family was quite rich. When we fled to Palestine, we soon became as poor as synagogue-mice, but much happier.)

ANOTHER LESSON: no one in power should stay there for more than eight years.

People in power attract flatterers. Every day, year after year, they are told that they are just wonderful. So wise, so clever, so handsome. Slowly they become convinced themselves. After all, so many good people can't be wrong.

Their critical senses become blunted. They get used to being obeyed even by people who know better. They become immune to criticism, and even get angry when criticized.

After the 12 year tenure of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a wise and successful president, the American people changed their constitution and limited the terms of the president to two, altogether eight consecutive years. Very sensible.

I speak from experience. I was elected to the Knesset three times. I very much enjoyed the first two terms – eight consecutive years – because I felt that I was doing the right things in the right way. During my third term I felt that I was less keen, less innovative, less original. So I resigned.

Netanyahu is now in his fourth term. High time for him to be thrown out.

THE BIBLE enjoins us: "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth" (Proverbs 24, 17). I do not rejoice, but I shall be very glad if he goes.

I do not hate him. Neither do I like him. I don't think that I have spoken with him on more than two or three occasions in my whole life. Once when he introduced me to his second – not last - wife, a nice young American woman, and once when he saw my picture in a photo exhibition, wearing a pilot's cap. He told me that I looked like Errol Flynn.

My attitude towards him is not based on emotion. It is purely political. He is a talented politician, a clever demagogue. But I believe that he is leading Israel slowly but surely towards a historic disaster.

People believe that he is devoid of principles, that he will do anything – just anything – to stay in power. That is true. But underneath everything there hide some ironclad convictions – the weltanschauung of his late father, the history professor, whose special field was the Spanish inquisition. Father Benzion Netanyahu was an embittered man, convinced that his colleagues despised him and blocked his career because of his extreme right-wing views. He was a fanatic, for whom even Vladimir Jabotinsky was far too moderate.

The father admired his elder son, Yoni, an army officer who was killed in the famous Entebbe raid, and did not respect Bibi very much. He once said that Bibi was not fit to be prime minister, but could make a good foreign minister – a very shrewd observation.

If Binyamin Netanyahu falls, which seems possible, who will replace him?

Like every clever (and unsure) leader, Bibi has destroyed every likely rival along the way. Now there is no obvious heir around.

But many people are now repeating a slogan: "Anyone, Just Not Bibi!"