

Sacramento Bee
August 5, 2010

Only Israel can make its fateful life-or-death decision
By Lawrence J. Haas

WASHINGTON -- Who said this? "I'll never give a veto to any country over our security."

Was it Franklin Roosevelt? Or, perhaps, Ronald Reagan? Actually, that was John Kerry, the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate, and he made that pledge in the same debate with President Bush in which he later suggested that pre-emptive U.S. military action should pass a "global test" in which "you can prove to the world that you did it for legitimate reasons."

Well, global affirmation is nice, but Kerry had it right the first time. A leader's first obligation to his or her country is security, and no leader can defer to any other nation about how best to provide it.

That's true whether the leader presides in Washington or in, say, Jerusalem, where political and military officials are weighing the timing and consequences of a military strike against Iran's nuclear sites. Jerusalem does not need the permission of either Washington or the world at large before taking action against a nation whose leaders share a deep animus toward Israel, whose president has vowed to "wipe" it "off the map," and whose nuclear program could make such apocalyptic threats come true.

That's not to say that Jerusalem should be oblivious to U.S. concerns, which range from Iran's possible retaliation against U.S. troops in the region and U.S. interests around the world to a huge spike in oil prices that could occur, especially if Iran seeks to close the oil-transporting Strait of Hormuz.

Quite the contrary, Israel should be sensitive to U.S. concerns, for the two nations have a bond that rivals America's "special relationship" with Great Britain. They cooperate closely on intelligence, Washington provides Jerusalem with important military aid, and the United States has backed Israel at crucial moments over the years.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has clashed with President Obama over their perspectives on, and approaches to, the Middle East and its multiple challenges, surely must take seriously the greater chill in U.S.-Israeli relations that may result from Israeli action to which Obama was opposed.

Fortunately, Israel would be well-advised to put off military action for awhile anyway. The United Nations Security Council recently enacted a fourth series of sanctions against Iran, the United States and Europe have each followed up with additional sanctions, and – based on accounts emerging from the Islamic Republic – these steps are beginning to take their toll on Iran's economy and, in particular, its energy sector.

Israel should give the sanctions some additional time to squeeze Tehran. That's not because these sanctions will likely convince the regime to abandon its nuclear pursuits. Most experts believe that the world would have to squeeze Tehran much harder before its leaders would back down.

Rather, Israeli patience in the short term will somewhat inoculate its leaders against complaints later on by U.S. officials or the American people that they were too willing to take military action (if they eventually decide that they must do so).

Nevertheless, Netanyahu is not beholden to America or its leaders nor should he be. He was elected by Israel's people to maintain the security of their tiny state that's already surrounded by enemies, that's subject to frequent attack by Iranian-backed terrorists, and that's now facing a radical regime that is pursuing the weaponry to turn its dreams for the Jewish State into a horrific reality.

Even if Tehran never plans to nuke Israel, Israeli officials could well decide that Iran's mere possession of such weapons is unacceptable. With them, Tehran would have far more leverage to unleash its terrorist clients against Israel, knowing Jerusalem would be reluctant to retaliate for fear of a nuclear response.

Only Israel knows what Israel faces. Jerusalem can weigh Washington's views, but it alone must decide how to confront the nightmare at hand.

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