

Shah Mat: Iran's Victory

Alain Bauer

Since 1979 and the accession to power of Ayatollah Khomeini's regime, Westerners have never missed an opportunity to underestimate Iran's capabilities, regularly forgetting that this was the Persian Empire and that despite its strong religious dominance, Iran has remembered this.

It resisted the war that had been waged against it through its enemy Iraq, and gradually gained dominance over local Shiite militias by launching attacks and special operations all along the Shiite Arc (Lebanon and Yemen, with success, and Bahrain without success). Furthermore, by extending its influence with the support of its African trading posts and by enlisting Hamas under the flag of Jihad (thus reviving the protection granted by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood to Ayatollah Khomeini before his exile in France), the Iranian regime has managed to hold out despite the detestation of its own population and has become a major player in global chaos.

Between the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and the death of Ariel Sharon, the West, neighboring Arab countries, and Israel have done everything in their power to destroy the Oslo Accords and the Wolfensohn Plan, which envisaged the creation of a "Dubai over Gaza." The signing of the Abraham Accords, which lacked only the Saudi initials, made it possible to imagine a lasting peace process from above.

Now that he has managed to smoke out his partners in the name of a reconciliation that we can now see is a sham, the Iranian chess player has succeeded in an exceptionally complex operation, avoiding diplomatic criticism while launching a military-terrorist operation of which he can only be the beneficiary, whatever the outcome.

By putting an end to Israel's alleged absolute superiority over its territory by ruining the trust that existed between the Jewish people, Tsahal, and the Netanyahu government, and by using the internal political crisis invented by Israel's Prime Minister to avoid personal legal proceedings at the cost of his own country's security, Iran has paved the way for a combined operation. Prepared, trained and in part supervised by its special forces, which broke the Maginot Line set up in Gaza, it took control of major military and intelligence installations for several dozen hours, massacred civilians in a modern pogrom reminiscent of Oradour, Boutcha, or the Bataclan, and escaped with over two hundred hostages. Iran thus destroyed a myth. Since 1973, Israel had promised not to be surprised again. Internal divisions—arrogance yesterday in the face of Hezbollah, today in the face of Hamas—have now ruined for a long time to come the trust that held the country together.

The attack on October 7th settled nothing. Military and political disagreements between the military and politicians, the deterioration in IDF morale and resources, and technological fetishism have made it impossible for three weeks to define a policy that goes beyond vengeance and revenge—the awakening of public opinion to the issue of the hostages and their rescue, the weight of moral stakes, and disturbed political power in Jerusalem, which have hesitated between impossible negotiation, necessary incursions, potential invasion, and untenable occupation. For a long time, bombardments served as a mask for these unthinkable hesitations in the military history of Israeli armies. The unleashing of heavy operations from 10/27 onwards, despite the rather effective but piecemeal mediation of Qatar, the alarms of Egypt and Jordan, and the concerns of the American Godfather and the West, indicates that what remains of the ruling power has chosen to flee forward, thinking, thanks to a partially reconstituted intelligence network, that it is better to apply the “Hannibal” directive (according to which it would be better to save a nation than one or more individuals taken hostage) than to play for time.

Since, in the logic of Hamas, there are no real civilians or combat zones, and everything can be used as a hiding place or screen for structured underground installations, the Israeli strikes against Gaza could, in the short term, only revolt far beyond the Arab street. A dead child, Jewish or Palestinian, remains unbearable—and Hamas knows this better than anyone.

Israel has been unable to obtain more than a few moments compassion from the fires of hatred that have been burning for so long in Gaza, the West Bank, and the Arab world, as well as in many other parts of the world. The results of the vote on the Canadian amendment to the resolution submitted to obtain a ceasefire in Gaza, without any mention of what preceded the Israeli military operations, is a demonstration of this, and sheds light on Israel’s traditional position that, in the final analysis, the country can only count on itself. While the main resolution obtained 120 votes in favor, 14 against and 45 abstentions (with a totally disjointed European vote: France, Spain, and Belgium voted in favor of the text; Germany, Italy, and Finland abstained; Austria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary voted against), the Canadian text, which targeted Hamas, obtained only 88 votes in favor, and 55 votes against.

The days of consensus in the fight against terrorism and crimes against humanity are long gone. The immense work that enabled the consciences of the world to establish the Nuremberg Tribunal against Nazism and the ICC also fell victim to October 7th.

Everyone lost. The UN, Israel, the Jews, the Westerners, the Arabs, the Palestinians, the people of Gaza, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the present or future signatories of the Abraham Accords, and humanity.

China is watching.

Iran has won. Checkmate.

Alain BAUER

Professor at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers.

Author of *Au Commencement était la guerre*, New expanded edition (31/10/2023).

