

# Opinion | Israel's Supreme Leader Points to the Target, and the Trigger Will Be Pulled Soon



Pro-Netanyahu protests in Holon, with the sign reading 'leftists are traitors', October 17, 2020. Credit: Tomer Appelbaum

My conscience has been tormenting me lately for not saying what is weighing on my mind so that afterward, I won't have to berate myself for what I didn't say when a red light was flashing.

I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I carry on my shoulders decades of dealing with the worlds of terrorism, counterterrorism, subversion, and guerilla warfare. This experience has given me, I believe, the ability to recognize the direction in which things are headed, and trends whose culminations pose threats to public order and to human life.

Until the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, we said: It (political assassination) will never happen here. Then it happened and the rafters didn't

really shake all that much. A growing number of Jewish Israelis have even been calling for the scum who committed the murder to be released from prison. Lest anyone think that I'm the only prophet in town, here is a quote from a former prime minister.

Ehud Olmert, who knows a thing or two about politics and the mob mentality, and how this may be swayed or manipulated so that a "facilitator" will appear "out of nowhere" and pull the trigger, writes: "The police officers who are awaiting the upcoming round of job appointments are arresting demonstrators who are abiding by all the rules that were set for gatherings, handcuffing them and removing them. Before long, assemblies will be banned too. Demonstrations will be outlawed and protesters will be tried... This process is not just beginning, it is already well underway." (Maariv, July 3).

Olmert concludes: "Netanyahu is not as well-versed in history as he purports to be, but he knows enough to know that this will end badly. That the current situation will evolve into civil conflict and bloodshed in the Israeli street."

At this point, I must say something too. I spent an eternity in the basement surgical ward of Ichilov Hospital as the team of surgeons tried in vain to save Prime Minister Rabin, who was shot by a vile member of our own people. Could it be? The first decision I made as I stood there was to immediately end my tenure as head of the Mossad, after six and a half years.

In my remaining time on the job and ever since then, I have pondered the question: How could something like this have happened? I concluded that there are two possible models of a democracy that has lost its checks and balances: the religious-messianic model and the civil model.

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I arrived at the first model by considering the Iranian example, wherein the supreme spiritual leader Ali Khamenei is considered more akin to Allah than to the Muslim faithful. He is infallible because everything that comes out of his mouth is the word of the living God. This status frees him from the need to account to his flock. If he so desires, he speaks to them, and if he so desires, he is

silent. He does not owe anyone an explanation for anything, and responsibility for any action or failure does not touch him. In this model, at the top of the hierarchy is the spiritual leader who signals the objective in a general, sometimes obscure way. The president and commander of the Revolutionary Guards convert his words into a plan of action that is then executed by the Basij (a term for the gangs of idle Iranian youth who, for meager reward, are willing to carry out any mission assigned to them by the Revolutionary Guards) or by mercenaries.

In our case, the Israeli one, the model is a combination of a waning democracy with a messianic theocracy in regard to the Land of Israel. In such a theocratic democracy, when you want to be rid of someone, the person at the top cannot be fully freed from responsibility and when it comes to any action or failure, he must leave himself some "room for denial." Therefore, the hierarchy, in this case, is manifested by the "divine echo" that comes out of the boss' mouth, points to the target, and defines it as illegitimate. His closest subordinates, who are his confidants, are supposed to plot the move and have it trickle down to the middle levels, where the plan is translated into action. This is where the graph then splits in two, branching out to the messianic track and the civil track.

On the messianic track and with anything connected to the Land of Israel, there is a small group of rabbis, unknown to the public at large, who are very quick to issue halakhic rulings of rodef ('pursuer') or moser ('informant') - which can amount to death sentences - against a target that has been singled out. On this track, the "facilitator" will be, at least some of the time, someone who doesn't really fit in, who is fanatical in his faith, someone searching for the kind of reinforcement that he can very easily find from these rabbis. In Yigal Amir's case, he had a brother who was an expert in weapons and munitions and served to accelerate the execution of the plan.

The continuation of the civil track intersects with the world of social media. That is where the pool of potential "facilitators" who cannot be controlled is found. They undergo a lengthy and intensive process of indoctrination. This indoctrination only has to influence one mentally disturbed or unbalanced person enough to prompt him to pull the trigger. The stage that follows such a political assassination is civil war.

Writing all this doesn't make me feel any better, but at least later on I won't have to take myself to task for having remained silent.

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*Shabtai Shavit was the head of the Mossad.*

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