

“We wish them [Israelis] death and they bless us with life. I am ashamed to be Iranian.”

by Hugh Fitzgerald



When Prime Minister Netanyahu made his YouTube video on June 10, offering to help the Iranians with their water problem, it was a masterstroke. For he accomplished several things at once.

First, he reminded the Iranians that Israel has no quarrel with them, but only with the noxious regime that has been engaged in expensive aggression abroad, not least against Israel: “The Iranian regime shouts: “Death to Israel!” and in response, Israel shouts, ‘life to the Iranian people!’” Throughout his brief talk, he made sure to distinguish between “the Iranian people” and the cruel theocracy that rules them.

He spoke directly – and repeatedly – to the Iranian people, distinguishing between the malign government of Iran, and the people it brutalizes. This is how he put it:

“The Iranian people are the victims of a cruel and tyrannical regime that denies them vital water. Israel stands with the people of Iran, and that is why I want to save countless Iranian lives.”

Second, he had a legitimate reason to remind Iran and the world that Israel is a world leader in the use of water, from desalinization plants, to drip irrigation (which both irrigates and provides targeted nutrients to individual plants according to their monitored needs), to the recycling of waste water. Indeed, he began his talk by dramatically pouring and then drinking what one presumes was recycled water – for in Israel, as he noted, 90% of the water is recycled. If Israel can be of benefit in that area, in what other areas might the “Start-up Nation” possibly be of help? And what people, other than those in Iran, might benefit from Israeli expertise even if their governments remain resolutely anti-Israel?

Third, he reminded Iranians, and the world, that Iran’s water problem has become catastrophic. Netanyahu explained that Iran’s own meteorological organization has said that nearly 96% of Iran suffers from some level of drought. Having explained Israel’s achievements in water management, he offered: “Sadly, Iran bans Israelis from visiting – so we’ll have to get creative. We will launch a Farsi website with detailed plans on how Iranians can recycle their waste-water... We will show how Iranian farmers can save their crops and feed their families... The people of Iran are good and decent. They shouldn’t have to face such a cruel regime alone. We are with you, we will help so that millions of Iranians don’t have to suffer.”

“The hatred of Iran’s regime will not stop the respect and friendship between our two peoples,” concluded Netanyahu.

Fourth, in making his public offer, Netanyahu was encouraging Iranians to comprehend both the incompetence of their own regime, that has allowed the water problem to become a national scandal, by their own water experts' admission causing 96 per cent of the country to suffer from some level of drought (a fact that the Iranian regime no doubt would have wished not to have publicized), and the malevolence of a regime so full of hate for Israel that it would rather reject aid of obvious benefit to its people than have any peaceful and cooperative dealings with the Jewish state – even if those dealings were limited to viewing a site where Iranians could learn about whatever it is that Israel's water experts have to teach about recycling of waste-water.

Fifth, by letting the Iranians know that Israel had established a Farsi-language website that can directly provide know-how to them as to the best ways to conserve or use or recycle water, Netanyahu was letting them know how to bypass the Iranian government, speaking directly to people who, after all, have a great interest in, and need for, such waste-water management. And there is nothing the Iranian government can do to shut down that site, or prevent its citizens from visiting it.

Sixth, the offer seems already to have been taken up by many Iranians. In just the first five days it was online, Iranians racked up 5 million views of Netanyahu's appearance, 1.6 million of which were on Netanyahu's own social-media channels.

Even more significantly, nearly 100,000 Iranians joined the Israeli government's Farsi-language Telegram account within 24 hours of the video going live.

What could the Iranian government do? It cannot "jam" YouTube the way the Soviets used to jam Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. Word spread throughout Iran about Netanyahu's video, and the official media could not ignore it, so they did what

they always do when Israel is involved: they denounced the offer. Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian told reporters that Iran was not in need of any external help to solve its water crisis, adding that “the prime minister of this regime [Israel] or anyone else who claims to have the ability to manage water resources is aware that Iran is a country that has a proven record going back thousands of years in the field.”

Actually, that statement is not entirely false. It is true that ancient Persia had a system of qanats – a network of vertical shafts into gently sloping tunnels that allowed water from aquifers to be used for irrigation and for drinking. But the Energy Minister was wrong to think that a system thousands of years old, however impressive it may once have been, is up to the task today; clearly, by the Iranian experts’ own admission, it has not, for almost all of Iran has suffered drought.

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Barham Qassemi also attacked Netanyahu, saying that Tehran had no need for a “trickster” to solve its water-shortage problem. The word “trickster” must have rung hollow to Iranians: here was a world leader, the object of Iranian scorn, repeatedly offering help in water management through nothing more devious than a website that would share information.

Netanyahu’s offer appears to have been watched by millions of Iranians who have chosen to ignore their government’s malevolence. And while the Tehran regime rejected Israel’s offer, Iranian Internet users bravely leveled criticism at their own government.

One user commented, “We wish them [Israelis] death and they bless us with life. I am ashamed to be Iranian.”

Another posted: “God will bless Israel and Netanyahu. I’m sure that Iran and Israel will once again be allies.”

Every Iranian, city-dweller or farmer, who benefits from Israeli know-how in water management, will be that much more likely to feel, if he does not dare to express, similar sentiments. And there is nothing at all that the regime in Tehran can do about it.

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