Sitting on shpilkes

written by David M. Weinberg | 22.02.2026

With critical security clocks ticking on all fronts from Gaza to Iran, residents of the State of Israel find themselves *sitting on shpilkes* – a Yiddish phrase for living on pins and needles, in a state of extreme uncertainty, in nervous anticipation.

We totter between reports of an imminent massive military strike on Iran (and the expected Iranian counterattack on Israel) and contradictory reports which suggest foolish diplomatic dealing that once again lets Iran off the hook.

We wonder who will prevail: US President Trump's ego or Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's eschatology? Trump's tenacity or Khamenei's *sitzfleish*? American super-power or Iranian expertise at rope-a-doping American presidents?

We speculate on the degree of damage the Israeli homefront will have to absorb in a war-to-end-all-wars with Iran and guesstimate what level of miraculous Divine interventions will have to kick-in to protect Israel as they did last June.

In the meantime, we try to book a haircut only to learn that our barber is on emergency call-up duty in the air defense reserves. We plan an expensive family event or a complicated professional conference half-expecting it to be cancelled, likely leaving us with a substantial financial hit.

We hold concert tickets for next week but are skeptical that the band or audience will be able to show. We plan a large Purim party but know that we may be drinking wine alone in our *mamad* (bombproof home bunker).

We book airline tickets for a Passover getaway, or make hotel reservations for a summertime vacation, and then buy every possible travel cancellation insurance at exorbitant fees because everything is a *safek*, at question, in doubt.

We fall into *bein hashemashot* (literally, between the suns). In Jewish tradition and religious law, this is the twilight period between sundown and nightfall, between one day and the next. It is a time where decision-making is indeterminate and confusing. Things can go any which way.

We fall into catalepsy, a psychological condition characterized by trance or

temporary paralysis. It is hard to function with any degree of comfort in this grey zone, this liminal space. It is nightmare time.

In short, the current moment of personal insecurity is unnerving. We all feel that willy-nilly it is time for forthright, audacious moves.

THE CURRENT period of defense and diplomatic ambiguity holds strategic danger too. The muddied situation cannot be too prolonged. The dillydallying is destructive.

Aside from the fact that Iran is using the time to advance its nuclear and missile programs and prepare its global offenses, the main danger here is fragmentation on the political level. Overextension of the current holding period could lead to collapse in US-Israel ties – which of course is exactly what the enemy is hoping for.

Already there are signs of dissolution in Washington. Pro-Iranian and isolationist forces are disseminating lies about the "disaster" that would result from US military action against Iran. Tucker Carlson: "Thousands of Americans would almost certainly be killed at bases throughout the Middle East."

Nasty wags like Thomas Friedman are accusing Israel of dragging the US into war – "spitting in America's face," and "playing Trump for a sucker and American Jews for fools."

(Tommy Friedman can always be counted upon to pop-up at critical moments to slander Israel and undermine US-Israel relations. This week he excreted from his bottomless cave of Netanyahu-hatred to accuse Israel of "threatening broader US interests in the Middle East and the security of Jews all over the world" because of its "morally reckless," "messianically driven," and "apartheidlike" approach to Palestinian issues and its "nonsense" about Iran. He managed to use the epithets apartheid, pariah, and ethnic cleansing regarding Israel six times one op-ed column.)

All this eats away at America's deterrent power and Trump's maneuvering room versus Iran.

BECAUSE of Carlson, Friedman, and their ilk, it is necessary to remind the global policy community of the necessity to truly end Iran's hegemonic ambitions and

threatening abilities.

Of course, regime change leading to a democratic Iranian government not guided by radical Islamic theology would be sweet. But since nobody knows how to bring this about in the near term, we need to be clear about the parameters of a deal "that would be just as good as if you won militarily" (– a phrase used recently by Trump).

Such a win would entail complete Iranian disarmament – full, permanent, and verifiable dismantlement, export, or in-place destruction of Iran's uranium and plutonium production assets; anytime-anywhere inspections; and an end to nuclear weapons R&D.

It would also mean termination of Iran's ballistic missile, cruise missile, and drone arsenals; an end to Iran's illicit nuclear and missile imports and exports; and especially to its nuclear, missile, and arms agreements with Russia, China, and North Korea. And an end to Tehran's longtime support for Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and other proxy forces.

All this would require super-invasive monitoring of Iran's bank accounts, uranium mines, mills, ore processing facilities, military and missile bases, ports and airfields, along with destruction of Iran's underground bunkers for nuclear activities and weapons storage.

In my view, the likelihood that Iranian leader Ayatollah Khamenei will agree to anything remotely resembling such an evisceration of Iranian sovereignty and supremacy – is nil.

After all, Tehran has spent four decades and hundreds of billions of dollars developing its military power and regional ascendancy, accompanied by considerable suffering ("sacrifice") of the Iranian people to this end. All this, based on deep ideological-religious conviction, on a dark eschatological vision that involves genocide against Israel and West and downright destruction of enemy civilization.

Which leaves the military option. Get on with it. Destroy Iran's key nodes of military power and revolutionary repression. Perhaps help Iranians free themselves from the ayatollahs. And free Israelis from suspense, from sitting on existential *shpilkes*.

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