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Mr. Netanyahu, before you bomb Iran, say goodbye to everyone you know

When the war is under way, it won't matter why you insisted on pursuing this; whether it was a bluff that went ballistic, or a tragic thirst for a place in history.

By Bradley Burston | Aug. 13, 2012 | 9:19 AM | 11

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At the local shopping mall, as I took a number to receive shoebox-size personal protection kits against weapons of mass destruction, I found myself thinking about farewells.

And about Benjamin Netanyahu.

I found myself thinking about war with Iran, the war which, if it starts soon, will be Netanyahu's war. I found myself relating differently to everyone I met, everyone I know, everyone I love. The way you might if you were saying goodbye.

The way you might if their entire future, and yours, were in the hands of one man. And one decision.

The day I waited for my family's anti-nerve gas atropine and for masks against chemical and biological warfare, the prime minister asked for air time from Israel's major television channels in order to lay out his position on Iran, and to emphasize that he has yet to make a decision on whether or not to bomb.

Before he decides, he should spend a few moments with the people with the numbers in their hands. He should see what's in their eyes. He should listen to the gravity in their humor. He should look straight at the infants and the old people and the women in their eighth month, and at the people his own age, already bereaved and broken by wars that have taken their parents, their siblings and best friend's children, and, in recent years, even their grandchildren.

This is one of the things that line of people is telling him:

Mr. Netanyahu, before you bomb Iran, say goodbye to everyone you know. Say goodbye to everyone you love. You know you won't be able to protect all of them from the retaliation that will surely come. Everyone you know is a target. Everyone you love is in range.

Some of the rockets with high explosive warheads will get through the missile shield. And even if you and a few of your loved ones are sealed into the most sophisticated shelter yet devised, not one of you is immune. When it's over, when you get back to the surface, this will be a different country, and someone you care about may well have been torn dead by a rocket warhead, or crushed under the weight of a building.

Your son's best friend, your wife's whole family, the families of your cook, your driver, your bodyguard. The guys you grew up with. Their children, and theirs. Say goodbye to them, every last one of them. Now, before you give the order. Before it's too late.

The moment you give the order, there will be nothing you can say to them. To us. We won't listen, nor should we.

It won't matter then, all these arguments we have over why you insist on pursuing this. Whether it was a bluff that went ballistic, or a tragic thirst for a place in history. We won't have time then for talk about how the elections for the American president figured in your decision, or how you related to, or did not, the opinions of spymasters and generals and diplomats.

When it all comes down, we won't be able to spare the strength or the time to despise you for what you did to all of us. We will be too busy then with the instruments of grief and the debris of loss.

At the mall, they give out no numbers to get the chance to tell you what they think. The people I was standing with think you've got this one all wrong. Most of the people in lines all over the country feel the same way. Listen to them now. You have the power to be their judge, jury, and executioner. The least you can do is look them in the eyes and ask if they have any last words.