Disarmament is the key to a new regional order

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 30.01.2025

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Trump are set to meet in Washington next week. The significance of this meeting cannot be overstated. Beyond the message it conveys by taking place just two weeks after Trump's inauguration, and being his first meeting in this term with a foreign leader, the meeting's objectives and expected outcomes are of critical importance. The two leaders will engage in strategic coordination on a wide array of bilateral and regional issues with far-reaching short- and long-term implications. The directives stemming from this meeting will guide the efforts of the political and security establishments in both countries.

Netanyahu will arrive at the White House with a long list of thanks for the steps and decisions Trump has already taken in his first days in office. In addition to the hostage deal, this list includes the decision to unfreeze the delivery of heavy bombs and bulldozers to Israel, sanctions imposed on the International Criminal Court in The Hague, the reversal of sanctions that the Biden administration had placed on Israeli organizations and individuals, the halting of US funding to UNRWA, and, of course, the invitation extended to Netanyahu for this visit.

Trump, who has already demonstrated in his early days that he is unafraid to break conventions and paradigms, will seek a clear Israeli stance on his initiative to resettle Palestinians from Gaza in other countries. While he will understand Israel's official silence on the matter, he will emphasize that Israeli support is a prerequisite for his administration's efforts to explore this course of action.

The core of the visit will focus on two major issues – Saudi Arabia and Iran. However, it will quickly become evident that everything is interconnected, making it difficult to separate these matters from those concerning Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, and Lebanon.

Regarding Saudi Arabia, its demands for a defense pact with the US and for civilian nuclear capabilities appear solvable. The obstacles to normalization are tied to the issues of Gaza and the West Bank. Netanyahu will be asked to prioritize between resuming military operations in Gaza and completing the next

phase of the hostage deal, as well as advancing negotiations with Saudi Arabia. Any formula that aims to achieve all three goals must also take into account the element of timing and its implications.

Another hurdle is Saudi Arabia's demand for the opening of a "political pathway leading to a Palestinian state." Netanyahu will likely make clear that in the wake of October 7, any talk of a "Palestinian state" would be a reward for Hamas. Moreover, the Palestinian Authority itself indirectly supports terrorists and struggles to combat terror even in the areas under its control, as evident in Jenin and Tulkarem.

Returning to Gaza: Statements from senior US officials that Hamas will not rule the Strip are important, but they require two presidential clarifications. First, the fight must not be limited to toppling Hamas rule; the more crucial objective is the complete demilitarization of Gaza, eliminating any military capabilities or future threats to Israel. Second, the US must not support any governance model that allows Hamas to operate from behind the scenes under its protection. Israel has already seen this play out in Lebanon, and the lessons remain fresh.

Above all, there is Iran. The US must immediately change its approach toward Tehran. The Biden administration's diplomatic overtures toward Iran have only emboldened the regime and weakened America's regional standing. In Tehran, these gestures were interpreted as weakness and as an insurance policy against the use of force. At the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency warned that Iran is "stepping on the gas pedal" in its uranium enrichment efforts. Iran poses a threat to global peace and stability, as evidenced by its recent missile attacks on Israel. However, Israel's successes and Iran's domestic turmoil provide reason for optimism in the just fight against the regime.

Trump is determined to advance regional peace, but he will not be able to achieve this without addressing the Iranian issue. He must set a deadline for diplomatic efforts, especially ahead of the upcoming "snapback" mechanism deadline in October, and continue building on the progress he made at the end of his first term.

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