Biden is rewarding Hamas

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 08.09.2024

While Israeli officials continue to debate the cabinet's decision to oppose withdrawing IDF forces from the Philadelphi Corridor, Khalil al-Hayya, Hamas's deputy chief in Gaza, reiterated that this issue is merely one of several demands his group has put forward as conditions for a deal. "We stress that any agreement must encompass a full cessation of hostilities, complete withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, including the Philadelphi Corridor and the Rafah crossing, unimpeded return of displaced persons to their homes, aid and relief for Palestinians, Gaza's reconstruction, and a prisoner exchange," al-Hayya stated.

This stance isn't new. What stood out in its presentation was the self-assurance displayed by the senior Hamas official, during a week when he and his associates were expected to be on edge, fearing repercussions for the killing of six hostages. However, the reaction to this in Israel and the United States prompted an opposite response from them. From their perspective, not only did they avoid consequences for the heinous act, but through it, they managed to escalate tensions and internal disagreements in Israel, while also prompting Washington to consider presenting a framework defined as a "final offer, without room for negotiation" ("Take it or leave it"). They swiftly capitalized on the public outrage over the hostages' deaths through a media campaign warning that this would be the outcome of Israeli military pressure, while taking a firm stance on their negotiation demands.

Hamas assumes that a final American proposal will inevitably come at Israel's expense. The primary pressure to reach an agreement is already being applied to Israeli leadership. Hamas faces no consequences for prolonging the process, and as long as it holds hostages, it can always resume negotiations from where they left off.

President Joe Biden has promised that Hamas would face consequences for the hostages' deaths. At the very least, he can be expected not to reward Hamas. Pressuring the Israeli government to yield to Hamas's demands would be tantamount to rewarding the terror group. Instead, the logical step would be American support for Israel's justified position. Such backing might even help advance negotiations.

It’s time for the United States to fully leverage its influence over Hamas. One approach is to push for the removal of the group’s leaders from Qatar. Washington should demand this from Doha. This leadership bears equal responsibility as the Gaza-based leadership for the October 7 terror attack and subsequent war crimes. It’s the same leadership that is currently urging its operatives in the West Bank to carry out suicide attacks. Demanding the expulsion of Hamas leadership from Qatar and imposing personal sanctions on its members is the minimum expected from the US. Israel will find ways to hold the ringleaders accountable.

From Israel’s standpoint, its next moves in Gaza should serve three objectives: further degrading Hamas’s remaining military capabilities, undermining its governing capacity, and increasing pressure to facilitate the release of hostages. To achieve these goals, Hamas must be entirely stripped of control over supplies entering Gaza. This is the group’s lifeline and the primary means of maintaining its authority. It’s also worth considering further dividing the Strip beyond the current partitions.

Another strategy worth exploring is the one proposed by former National Security Council head, Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Giora Eiland: evacuating northern Gaza’s residents, sealing it off as a military zone, and halting supplies to the area. The drawbacks of this proposal lie in the opposition it’s likely to face from the US and the international community, as well as the significant forces required for implementation. Naturally, it could be executed in other areas to varying degrees. Nonetheless, its numerous advantages warrant serious discussion.

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