# Despite pressure – military operations will shape reality

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 23.10.2024

The visit by Secretary of State Antony Blinken appears to be a final effort by the US to secure a full ceasefire before the upcoming elections. However, the chances for this are not high. Israel has not yet settled its score with Iran over the ballistic missile attack on October 1. Furthermore, Israel's accusations toward Iran for the drone strike on the Prime Minister's residence in Caesarea have increased the stakes.

In Lebanon, although Hezbollah has taken significant blows, it is showing signs of recovery, and its confidence is growing. It is difficult to imagine Hezbollah forgoing further retaliation for its losses or accepting Israel's terms for a ceasefire. In Gaza, while Israel has scored a significant achievement with the elimination of Yahya Sinwar, the effects are not immediate, and much work remains to be done—particularly in securing the release of hostages and achieving all of Israel's war objectives.

Given the signals Iran has been sending about its reluctance to be drawn into a regional war, and following its negotiations via Qatari mediation to renew nuclear talks with the U.S., it is possible that Blinken will attempt to craft an agreement that would limit Israel's operations in a way Tehran can tolerate without military retaliation. In exchange for this and for humanitarian arrangements in Gaza, Blinken is likely to assure continued U.S. military aid to Israel and support for its stance regarding Lebanon.

It can be assumed that Blinken has not given up on the idea of pushing for a comprehensive ceasefire through a deal in Gaza, using a "Biden Plan" format. This would frame the elimination of Sinwar and the implementation of humanitarian measures in northern Gaza as a victory image. However, at this stage, Hamas remains committed to the positions set by Sinwar, making such a ceasefire unlikely.

Given this situation, significant political shifts are not expected soon. Military activity will continue to shape the reality on the ground. Israel will persist in dismantling the threat that Iran has built around it, weakening Iran and its

regime in the process, and seizing opportunities to halt Iran's nuclear ambitions. Simultaneously, Israel will continue to target the remaining military capabilities of Hamas and its efforts to reestablish governance in Gaza.

## Against Iran

The Iranian attack on Israel demands a response, but Israel need not rush. The current delay is fraying Iranian nerves, and the growing internal criticism of the regime is a positive byproduct of Israel's restraint.

Israel should maintain maximum ambiguity (even after reported leaks), prepare for preventive and reactive scenarios, and allow its actions to speak for themselves.

## Against Hezbollah

Israel's declared goal is to ensure the safe return of northern residents to their homes. The ongoing fighting is pushing Hezbollah out of threatening range, but a long-term solution is needed to maintain this new reality. The achievements of the Israeli military, which have placed Israel in a strong position for the post-war period, allow Israel to aim for Hezbollah's disarmament and the establishment of measures to prevent its rearmament.

Israel should continue striking Beirut to damage Hezbollah's assets and increase pressure on the organization from other Lebanese factions, who are alarmed by the destruction of the capital. Israel should stick to the stance that any agreement regarding Lebanon must be made under fire, taking advantage of Lebanon's severe crisis.

## Against Hamas

Increased military pressure in northern Gaza is necessary to prevent Hamas's recovery, deepen the damage to its remaining capabilities, disrupt its efforts to govern, and eliminate key figures who may be appointed as successors. This pressure will also provide justification for factions willing to compromise on the issue of hostages.

It is difficult to assess the chances of success for the proposal to create "humanitarian bubbles" secured by an American company, though it clearly

carries significant risks. Nonetheless, Israel's agreement to this proposal may be a reasonable price to pay to maintain a positive relationship with the Biden administration, especially as it is a temporary and reversible measure.

Additionally, there is a need to increase pressure on the decision-makers in Hamas's overseas leadership and on Qatar, which hosts them. Qatar can no longer attribute delays to Sinwar and his partners. Israel should also intensify efforts to strike Hamas's military and organizational infrastructure in the West Bank, preventing coordination channels between those on the ground and the overseas command and targeting key figures involved in driving terrorist activity.

As the Simchat Torah holiday of 5785 approaches, one Hebrew year after the horrific massacre, Israel continues to demonstrate to the Western world how to confront Iran's proxies, whether in Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, or the West Bank. The task is far from over, with many challenges ahead. These include the complete removal of threats, preventing their resurgence, and confronting the head of the Iranian snake.

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