Iran the puppet master must be held accountable

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 05.04.2024

On October 7, the earth shook in Israel from the shock and horror of the monstrous surprise terror attack and its terrible scale. Added to the trauma were feelings of national humiliation at the trampling of our honor, and astonishment at the catastrophic failure of the country's critical systems – all while we were still commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War surprise attack and studying its lessons.

Images of the murdered and kidnapped victims from the Nova party near Kibbutz Re'im left us stunned. We have yet to fully process what happened. It's unclear if we'll ever understand how and why this was allowed to occur. The investigation process will take years, with official conclusions unlikely to end the controversy and alternative narratives that will develop around it.

Yet amidst our shock, grief, and sorrow, the hidden core of the Israeli DNA reemerged from the horrors, like a diamond purified from ash and able to sparkle again.

Our enemies, expecting to find a shattered and weak state, were surprised to see a nation rising like a lion – a society uniting against those seeking its demise. Our young, tenacious fighters dispelled all concerns about Generation Y. Our army rapidly regrouped, operating like a well-oiled war machine. And our civilians at the homefront have projected fortitude, supported the combat, and have shown forbearance until the enemy's complete defeat.

The reality is still unfolding – in Gaza, the northern border, on the world stage, and domestically. Israel still bleeds. The kidnapped have not returned, the fighting continues, the casualty and bereaved family lists grow longer, devastated towns await rebuilding, and the displaced cannot resume normal lives.

Israeli society transitioned directly from the inferno in the southern communities to the combat zones of Gaza and the north. It is still processing events.

The war upended a series of basic assumptions and old paradigms, causing many

to re-examine the nature of the state. It forced us to look at our seminal moments as a people and society and to once again accept that we continue to fight an existential struggle despite having convinced ourselves that those days are over.

One released kidnapping victim recounted in a media interview how her captors suggested she not return home to a community near Gaza, saying: “It’s not worth it for you…we’ll just do it again.” These are the faces of our enemy. The face of evil.

After the October 7 massacre, defeating Hamas in Gaza became an existential necessity for Israel. With all due respect to our friends across the pond, this is not comparable to America’s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, fought thousands of miles from home, which some use as a basis for comparison to the Gaza battle.

Our geographic proximity makes it highly prohibitive not to act. But it’s not just that. Enemies, friends, and those on the sidelines in the international community and the Middle East are watching events in Gaza closely. This war’s outcome will largely dictate how supportive they are of Israel.

We must remind the US and the West that while Israel is the one fighting this war, it is not just Israel’s war. It is being waged against those who view Israel as the spearhead of Western civilization. This is a war over the global and regional order, against the radical axis that has united two rival camps – Shiites and Sunnis – solely due to their shared desire to annihilate Israel and weaken Western influence.

Israel must act resolutely to achieve all war aims, unconditionally and as soon as possible. Discussing operational plans with the Biden administration leaves it no choice but to oppose the operation, as it would not want to be seen as approving actions that could harm uninvolved civilians – which despite best efforts, cannot be guaranteed. If so, we should re-evaluate the need for such joint discussions and at what level they should take place.

The struggle against Hamas must be defined as a perpetual mission – total war against the terror organization wherever it exists. Much has been said – but not enough done – about targeting Hamas’ overseas leadership. The stalemate in negotiating a hostage deal underscores the need and provides legitimacy to eliminate Hamas’ leadership abroad, wherever they may reside. Those hosting them should bear the price of supporting this terror group – they certainly cannot claim such strikes are illegitimate.

Regarding the northern arena, the decisive moments vis-a-vis Hezbollah are nearing. Israel cannot continue ceding its sovereignty in the north, with residents at the mercy of Hezbollah’s whims. Removing the threat posed by the organization is a goal that must be

achieved by force if necessary. Maintaining that security, once achieved, should also be done by the IDF. When the clash comes, Lebanon too will pay a price for serving as a base for terrorism against us.

This is, first and foremost, a struggle against Iran, which has long ceased being just a regional issue but is now a global one. The US needs to lead the effort against Iran, in partnership with its allies. Not just on the nuclear issue, but also on arms proliferation, sponsoring proxy forces, and driving terrorism.

It's time to shatter the Iranian model where the puppet master bears no responsibility for the puppets' actions. The Biden administration's vision of regional integration, despite its advantages, cannot provide a solution to the Iran problem. We should not delude ourselves about that.

Israel after October 7, will not return to its former self. It will be wounded, pained, and scarred, but more connected to its core values, aware of the fragility of its existence, more sober, moderate, and cautious – in security policy, foreign relations, and, hopefully, in its internal struggles.

Israel is once again waging a battle over its physical existence and sovereignty, its legitimacy as the nation-state of the Jewish people, its independence and self-reliance on security, and over its diplomatic standing and economic condition. And yes, perhaps even to a larger extent given what we see these days, it is waging a battle for its unity as well.

The goal we must strive for is fortifying Israel as a united, strong, secure, prosperous Jewish and democratic state that engages in partnership with its neighbors and serves as a regional linchpin for peace and prosperity –rooted in moral, diplomatic, security, and economic strength.

As the people who will soon celebrate over 3,000 years since their national exodus to freedom, we are accustomed to looking at events through a wide prism. Our nation has endured grave tragedies throughout its existence – destruction, exile, massacre, genocide, holocaust, and defeat – yet it has never descended into the depths of despair. It never retreated from its beliefs, and its spirit has never been broken. We have always known how to turn every crisis into an opportunity, and every failure into a catalyst for renewal. With God's help, there is no doubt that this time will be no different.

Published in Israel Hayom, April 7, 2024.