Make sure Hamas doesn’t get what it wants

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 03.08.2025

French Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron didn’t have to wait long for it to come. Razi Hamad, a senior official in Hamas’ political bureau based in Qatar, rushed to take credit on behalf of Hamas for the Palestinian statehood recognition initiative. In an interview with *Al-Jazeera*, he claimed this development was “one of the fruits of the October 7 attack” and clarified that “resistance weapons are the essence of the Palestinian issue – we in Hamas are committed to this and will not hand over even a single empty bullet.”

For those having trouble remembering, this is the same Hamad who, days after the massacre, explained in media interviews that Israel is “a state we want to bring down” and promised: “The Al-Aqsa Flood is only the first time. There will be a second, third, and fourth time. We have the resilience and capability to fight and pay the price.” It’s hard to understand why the long arm of Israeli security mechanisms hasn’t reached him, but it’s still not too late.

Hamas draws encouragement from the success of the “hunger in Gaza” campaign and the responses it generated worldwide and in Israel. They are also pleased with the connection made between the Palestinian statehood recognition initiative and the war in the Strip. The timing of its launch, as well as the connection some Western leaders created between it and the situation in Gaza, turned this initiative in the public’s eyes into a political achievement for Hamas. Suppose we add to this the easing of military pressure and the pipelines opened to flood the Strip with food and civilian supplies. In that case, we can understand the arrogance displayed by the terror organization.

Hamas’ demands

When this is how things stand, and when Israel’s leadership is under attack from all sides, they see no reason to be flexible. Threats to open the gates of hell against them provoke laughter. In contrast, the growing pressure in Israel, especially after the publication of videos of starving hostages, creates the impression among them that Israeli stubbornness is cracking.

Despite upheavals in negotiations throughout the months of war, the four basic demands Hamas set as conditions for returning all hostages have not changed: international guarantee for a complete and absolute cessation of fighting by Israel; withdrawal of IDF forces to October 6 lines; opening of border crossings and creating conditions that would enable the Strip's reconstruction; and release of terrorists imprisoned in Israel according to an agreed-upon formula. If Israel responds to these demands, it will end the war without achieving its goals and will not only leave Hamas as the central power factor in the Strip but also enable it to rearm and strengthen again, paving its way to take control of the West Bank as well – where it already enjoys great popularity.

Apart from the possibility of ending the war on Hamas' terms, Israel faces two additional alternatives: conquering the Strip and imposing temporary military rule, or continuing efforts to free some hostages through a combination of pressure and negotiations, without giving up on toppling Hamas and its disarmament. The Diplomatic-Security Cabinet will need to decide between the three alternatives.

Avenues of action

In its current approach, Israel first seeks to ease international pressure even at the cost of reducing pressure on Hamas. But this leads to stagnation of the situation on the ground, leaves the initiative in Hamas' hands, strengthens its confidence, causes confusion on the Israeli side, and also doesn't provide an answer to the hostage issue.

Israel has additional means at its disposal, even in the current interim situation, that should be activated. For example, striking Hamas leadership abroad, which continues to enjoy immunity and conduct political activity uninterrupted. Neutralizing them could also damage Hamas' post-war reconstruction efforts. Another action: complete severing of internet, networks, and communications in Gaza. These are the tools through which Hamas maintains its governance. Through them, it consolidates its situational picture, transmits information and instructions to the public.

In addition to this, accelerating the establishment of the humanitarian city and promoting US President Donald Trump's initiative for voluntary migration of the population – this is the real solution to Gaza's fundamental problems and also an

answer to the desire of tens of thousands of residents, as various surveys show. This is the move Hamas fears most of all.

In light of the deliberate starvation of the hostages, and despite the assumption that Hamas has an interest in preventing their deaths, Israel must set a real price tag and clarify that the death, God forbid, of any hostage will trigger automatic activation of drastic measures such as expelling hundreds of Hamas operatives (whose names will be published) and their families. This, too, should be included in the basket of measures.

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