

Opportunities ahead, but challenges too: On Netanyahu's visit to Washington

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 06.07.2025

Three days ago in Ashkelon, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu articulated a vision of unprecedented opportunity that Israel cannot afford to squander. "Our opportunities are massive, we're not going to miss them. We won't fail them, we won't lose them, we won't miss this thing - both to defeat our enemies and ensure our future economically, nationally, internationally and energetically," Netanyahu declared with characteristic determination.

This message has echoed through Netanyahu's recent engagements across Israel's security establishment, from IDF general staff headquarters to the Shin Bet, from the Police College to Fire and Rescue headquarters, and in meetings with Magen David Adom personnel. The prime minister is systematically preparing for what could prove his most consequential diplomatic mission since returning to office.

Netanyahu's upcoming Washington visit - his fourth since reclaiming the premiership - represents a dramatic departure from typical diplomatic expectations. Rather than tempering hopes or managing expectations downward, Netanyahu is deliberately elevating the stakes. "Exploiting success is no less important than achieving success," he emphasized this week, a philosophy that will guide his approach to these critical talks.

President Donald Trump awaits Netanyahu as a leader basking in the glow of strategic triumph. Trump's decision to authorize direct US participation in devastating strikes against Iran's nuclear infrastructure not only demonstrated unprecedented bilateral cooperation but also fulfilled his campaign promise to avoid prolonged regional conflicts. The American president successfully navigated between decisive action and escalation prevention - exactly the balance his critics said was impossible.

This diplomatic momentum propels Trump toward his broader Middle East objectives established before inauguration - comprehensive war termination and

accelerated peace agreements. The convergence of military success and political opportunity creates a unique window for transformative regional arrangements.

The atmosphere surrounding next week's meetings combines urgency with opportunity, pressure with potential. Time constraints intensify as regional dynamics shift rapidly, while multiple strategic openings demand immediate attention. The agenda will encompass both tactical decisions and strategic declarations, celebrating shared victory while charting future cooperation.

American involvement in Iran operations has fundamentally transformed US-Israel relations, elevating the partnership to unprecedented levels. This development's impact on Israel's regional standing cannot be overstated, particularly given how it complements rather than replaces Israel's independent military achievements. The enhanced partnership promises expanded political dividends alongside military cooperation.

Yet enhanced partnership brings corresponding obligations, especially when American intervention appears to address existential threats through significant risk assumption. Trump's directive requiring Israeli aircraft recall from Iran missions following ceasefire violations illustrates these new dynamics. Such incidents preview potential friction points ahead.

Israeli accommodation on issues that might complicate Trump's agenda becomes increasingly reasonable given the transformed relationship structure. The principled response to such requests should remain positive, provided they don't conflict with Israel's fundamental interests.

However, forthcoming discussions could address core issues including Iran enforcement mechanisms, potential Palestinian Authority negotiations as Arab normalization prerequisites, Syrian security arrangements within broader political frameworks, and Gaza war continuation parameters. Trump's declaration that he will "be very tough with Netanyahu regarding ending the Gaza war" signals these complex negotiations ahead.

Netanyahu's primary challenge involves ensuring that reciprocal discussions remain within acceptable policy parameters while preparing for arguments that existing or future concessions enable greater flexibility on difficult decisions.

Gaza combat operations and hostage recovery

Current media reporting suggests meaningful progress toward a “limited arrangement” with Hamas facilitating ten living hostages’ return alongside 18 bodies. The proposed exchange involves 60-day ceasefire implementation, IDF combat zone withdrawals, expanded Gaza supply operations, and terrorist releases according to predetermined formulas. While specific details remain unclear, the arrangement’s most significant element appears to be American guarantees linking the ceasefire to complete war termination.

The American-envisioned conclusion encompasses several key components. First, comprehensive fighting cessation across all dimensions, with Israeli forces maintaining border positions and security perimeters. Second, complete hostage return – both living and deceased. Third, Gaza Strip governance through technocratic structures guided by Egypt, additional nations, and potentially the Palestinian Authority. Fourth, Hamas – though severely degraded – would lose official governmental control while maintaining substantial Strip influence. Finally, portions of Hamas leadership would face exile from Gaza.

Concurrently, voluntary emigration opportunities would become available for interested Gaza residents across multiple countries providing US commitments. Strip reconstruction would proceed contingent upon complete military capability dismantlement.

This framework appears theoretically sound for addressing Israel’s primary concerns. However, considering Hamas’s residual capabilities, continued high popular support levels, overseas leadership’s resource mobilization capacity, and demonstrated recovery patterns, such arrangements would likely enable rapid organizational rehabilitation. These factors become more problematic when considering Hamas’s leverage through remaining living hostages and Israel’s constrained military options.

Assumptions that civilian governance transfer to internationally-guided mechanisms would prevent Hamas rehabilitation ignore existing Strip power dynamics. Such frameworks would more likely provide Hamas cover rather than confrontation from international oversight bodies.

Given these scenarios, political leadership should maintain complete war

objective achievement while pressing Washington counterparts to target Hamas leadership operating from Qatar and Turkey, simultaneously advancing voluntary emigration initiatives.

Iran conflict's expanding scope

The Iranian confrontation has entered its opening phase rather than reaching conclusion. Operation Rising Lion successfully achieved all designated objectives, optimally accomplishing every feasible military goal within its operational parameters.

Iran emerges wounded, humiliated, and revenge-driven. Assumptions about Iranian passivity would be strategically dangerous. Alongside capability reconstruction efforts and operational lessons learned, Iranian leadership will pursue Israeli retaliation opportunities regardless of timeline requirements. Intelligence and security officials must operate assuming Iranian surprise attempts without restraint considerations.

The first issue requiring Israeli-American agreement is enforcement of Iran's activities. Israel must clarify that enforcement without agreement is preferable to agreement without enforcement.

President Trump has repeatedly declared that Iran will not have military nuclear capability. From Israel's perspective this is extremely important, but not sufficient. We must also talk about limiting ballistic missiles and precision weapons, through which Iran planned to achieve against Israel influence similar to that of non-conventional weapons.

Iran must not receive any relief or benefit to convince it to sit at the negotiating table. The international community still has the option to impose sanctions on Tehran through the snapback mechanism, and this should be activated.

Syrian strategic calculations

Syrian developments exemplify new reality dilemmas facing Israeli decision-makers. Israel confronts delicate strategic choices requiring careful balance between opportunity and risk. Excessive threat focus could eliminate rare opportunities for northern border reshaping and regional influence expansion. Conversely, "Oslo process" style concessions might enable dangerous Islamist

threats in critical areas.

Israeli experience demands cautious approaches, particularly regarding security deployment modifications for various scenarios. This caution becomes essential when engaging regimes led by jihadist figures whose Western-friendly presentations lack authentic testing and may represent survival tactics rather than genuine transformation.

Golan Heights status discussions remain completely unacceptable. The only acceptable modification involves Syrian regime de jure recognition of existing arrangements. The Golan Heights constitutes Israel's strategic eastern defense line. Golan Heights retention without peace agreements surpasses peace agreements without Golan Heights control.

Any agreements must guarantee Israeli aerial and ground operational freedom throughout Syria for minimum decade-long periods, including proactive operations against hostile establishment attempts. Syrian regime limitations must prevent agreements or alliance participation enabling hostile elements' Syrian establishment or operational bases across territorial, maritime, and aerial domains. These restrictions prevent Syrian transformation into corridors or focal points for threats against Israel from regional or extra-regional sources. Syria must also face restrictions on developing, producing, or acquiring strategic threat weapons including nuclear, biological, chemical, missile, and precision capabilities.

Israeli demands should include Druze community security guarantees while positioning Syria as potential Palestinian Gaza emigrant destination following Trump initiatives. Syria's suitability stems from Arab identity, regional proximity, and historical connections. Given expected extensive reconstruction requirements for millions of Syrian citizens, Palestinian Gaza integration wouldn't create exceptional burdens. These arrangements should integrate Israeli, American, and Syrian coordination frameworks.

Effective enforcement mechanisms must anchor all agreements. Accumulated experience demonstrates that agreements without enforcement lack meaningful value.

Strategic partnerships with conditions

Saudi Arabian peace agreement opportunities – representing the Arab world's most significant player – reach unprecedented accessibility levels. Iranian nuclear program strikes and “axis” dismantlement, including Hezbollah collapse and Assad regime disintegration, create new Middle Eastern realities where moderate Arab states recognize Israel as solution rather than problem against extremist Islam. Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 provides foundation for demonstrating this transformation.

However, Saudi-Israeli relationship establishment must never be conditioned on Palestinian Authority status improvements. Post-October 7 Israel cannot afford questionable adventure engagement. Abraham Accords removed Palestinian Authority veto power over Arab-Israeli relationship establishment, and this authority must not be restored. Palestinian statehood, regardless of border limitations, constitutes Israeli security threats.

Agreement, alliance, or economic profit considerations must not override strategic judgment. Saudi Arabian peace agreement significance cannot be exaggerated, yet not every price justifies such achievements.

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