Time to target Hamas leadership around the world

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 26.01.2024

The overarching goal of Israel's military operation against Hamas is to reestablish the deterrence that collapsed on October 7. Without fully achieving the goals defined for the war, Israel may find itself facing an existential threat from its various enemies, who are following its every move. This could result in Israel no longer projecting the same status based on its perceived military strength. It is vital to reiterate this in light of recent events, and light of the public debate on the path forward.

The challenge facing Israel is a function of time constraints. To achieve the goals under current conditions, the IDF will have to act methodically for a protracted period. However, time is critical when it comes to the abductees. Assuming it is not possible to influence the intensity of the fighting or renew the blockade of Gaza, the political-security leadership is faced with the question of how to increase pressure on Hamas and shorten this timeframe.

Among the options, it seems that systematically targeting Hamas leaders residing abroad, alongside continued fighting in Gaza, would serve Israel well in advancing this regard and help achieve additional goals.

Such action would clarify to the organization's leaders that there is a price to their dithering. Moreover, such activity would help disrupt Hamas' ability to govern and coordinate between its different wings, thus frustrating its attempt to reassert its control over the Gaz Strip

Without an effective command center abroad, after it suffers devastating damage to its military and governing capabilities in Gaza, and following the decimation of its infrastructure in the West Bank, Hamas may lose its status as a movement with regional influence, even if it continues to wield local influence as an organization on the run. Israel and its neighbors have a shared interest in seeing this through. The US should pursue this goal as part of its efforts to shape a new regional order.

While Hamas leaders in Gaza live underground and their voices are not heard,

Hamas' Political Bureau members abroad are presenting the movement's policies and promoting its interests. They are replacing the hiding leadership in media appearances, on social networks, at conventions, and in policy discussions.

Their activity does not end there: They participate in policy formulation and advocacy and are responsible for raising political support and resources necessary to build the organization's capabilities and operations in different areas. Some fulfill operational roles – from regional coordination for terrorism purposes to directing specific activities in various arenas. Saleh al-Arouri, who was recently assassinated, was one of those. He was a known figure in the public discourse, but there are more like him.

Khaled Mashaal, Ismail Haniyeh, Mousa Abu Marzook, Basem Na'im, Sami Abu Zuhri, Izzat Rishq, Osama Hamdan and Zaher Jabarin are among them.

The Hamas overseas command's activity is a force multiplier for Hamas, and it has a critical contribution to the organization's regional influence, especially given the difficult conditions limiting its activity from the Gaza Strip or the West Bank.

The key role this command plays, as well as its efforts to drag Israel into a multi-arena regional war, make it incumbent upon Israel to take determined and methodical action against it until it is fully neutralized – especially after the monstrous massacre on October 7 it was so proud of, and after the unambiguous wording Mashaal provided regarding Hamas' absolute commitment to destroying the State of Israel (from the river to the sea, from Rosh Hanikra to Eilat).

It is hard to ignore the symbolic timing of the judgment rendered by The International Court of Justice's decision at The Hague and International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The Genocide Convention, drafted on the ashes of the Holocaust of European Jewry, was intended to ensure "Never Again".

Israel, was by the successors of the Nazis – Hamas – in ways reminiscent of the horrors of the Holocaust. But now it finds itself defending itself against accusations of genocide.

Hamas, which defined the Holocaust as "an invented story without any basis," continuously commits war crimes and has tried to justify its actions in an 18-page document whose sole purpose is to deny the horrors of its people, discredit Israel,

and smear it with mud.

The State of Israel fights many battles all the time on different fronts. The most important of them is the battle for the truth. The claims used against Israel change faces, shapes, and wordings, but their purpose is one: to undermine the legitimacy of the state, its agencies, and its actions. If, after the monstrous massacre, we are still required to respond to ridiculous claims against us, one can only imagine what our image is under normal circumstances.

The massacre and the war have brought us back to basics, made clear that we are still struggling for our existence, and demonstrated Israel's duty to ensure, once again: Never again.

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