Washington must let Israel get the job done in Gaza

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 12.01.2024

The statements coming out of the White House in which it claimed the US was not calling for a ceasefire in Gaza at this point could not undo the harsh impression left by Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Israel. So too was the attempt to put the normalization talks with Saudi Arabia back on the agenda.

The Biden administration understands full well the importance of achieving a resounding victory over Hamas in Gaza. It would like Israel to get it done quickly. However, it has been asking many things from Israel – and by doing so it has only prolonged the path to victory and has been imposing a burden on Israeli shoulders.

Washington has been pressuring Israel to scale back the fighting, significantly increase the scope of humanitarian aid (knowing that most of it reaches Hamas), and launch a process with the UN(!) that will allow the return of the residents of northern Gaza to their homes. All this only exacerbates the operational challenges facing our forces. It also provides a backwind for Hamas by having its leaders hope that they will be able to drag Israel into a war of attrition that will end in an "arrangement."

What's more – the administration's demands also make it harder to secure the release of the captives by alleviating the pressure on Hamas and allowing it to harden its stance.

One cannot sweep under the rug Hamas' tunnels by wishing them away with "regional integration." Likewise, its many arms and the large military force that remains in the area will not simply disappear. The damage Israel has inflicted on Hamas so far is painful but not fatal. After the events of October 7, this cannot suffice.

Even if it takes a long time to achieve the goals – there should be no compromise on that. Even those who struggle to define Gaza as a "Hamas state" understand that as long as there is a strong, organized, and armed core of the terrorist organization there – it will be the central power broker and everything will call

the shots.

Jerusalem will have to continue maneuvering between the desire to maintain Biden's support and assistance (for which it deserves appreciation) while heeding the demands it has put forth, which constrain Israel.

It would not be right to allow the residents of northern Gaza to return to their homes before the tunnel network beneath them was destroyed. If that happens, the area will be rehabilitated and serve as a base for terror against us. Withholding permission to return northward can also serve as leverage to pressure Hamas on the issue of the captives.

As for the saga of humanitarian aid, it is not too late to establish a "de-escalation zone" in Gaza where such aid can be received and provided – and only there. Likewise, it would be wise not to open the Erez Crossing, which will only add more responsibilities to Israel and increase pressure on it.

The job will have not been completed without dealing with the Rafah area. If the free flow of weapons from Sinai to the Gaza Strip continues, the area will have not been demilitarized and the efforts to locate weapons within Gaza will be in vain. All other arrangements have failed miserably and one should not set their hopes on such.

Israel must end this war with a resounding victory. It is important to drive home this message in Washington so that it too understands that this is a prerequisite for any initiative that seeks to change the regional reality. Reaching this goal serves the interest not only of Israel and most of its neighbors but also of the US in the fight for a new world order.

Hamas will not be satisfied with a ceasefire

Against the background of reports on new proposals for a prisoner exchange deal, it is worth listening to public stances such as the one attributed to senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan, who rejects the option of exiling senior Hamas officials from Gaza and sets the end of the war as a condition for any deal.

It is hard to assume that Hamas in its current state will be satisfied with a "ceasefire and all prisoners for all hostages." It is more likely that it will try to extort Israel so that it pledges not only to withdraw from the entire strip and

refrain from assassinations but also to rebuild Gaza. If that happens, Hamas will have emerged from the war after having launched a successful surprise attack, surviving the Israeli retaliation, securing the release of its prisoners, and establishing a mechanism for rebuilding its capabilities.

Continue targeted killings

Israel will likely reject any proposal that leaves Hamas as the central player in the strip that lacks demilitarization or imposes restrictions on IDF activity. To change the deadlock it is vital to increase pressure on Hamas and Qatar in all areas and push them into a reality similar to the one that led to the previous deal.

Hezbollah's response to the assassination of senior Hamas official Saleh al-Arouri in Beirut is the best evidence of the effectiveness of the targeted killings. It was clearly evident that it rattled the organization.

Eliminating the senior ranks is a vital part of the conflict. It is intended to disrupt command and control, hamper the enemy's conduct, and frustrate its plans, as well as remove efficient and experienced players from the arena, deter those who act against us, and send a message to their sponsors. It also helps break the enemy's morale.

Al-Arouri's assassination dealt a morale blow to Hamas, severely compromised its capabilities, and provided proof of the seriousness of Israel's threats to pursue terrorist leaders wherever they are found. Carrying out the assassination in the heart of Beirut made it clear that there were no longer any "safe havens." The subsequent operations showed that this was not a one-off fluke on Israel's part.

Israel's capabilities, which enabled precise targeting, are now supposed to have Hassan Nasrallah and Ismail Hanieh lose sleep in trepidation. This will add to the already strong impact of the destruction images coming from inside the Gaza Strip.

Escalation dynamics

There is an escalation dynamic in the tit-for-tat between the IDF and Hezbollah. Even if neither side wants it, it can lead to war. This is not to say that we should show restraint or moderate our responses, but that we must be prepared for the possibility of conflagration.

Here, too, this is an unavoidable war. Hezbollah entered a war it has no business entering. It saw it as an opportunity to strike at us alongside Hamas, assuming that Israeli society is fragmented and weak.

The two organizations now see a people rising like a lion, a cohesive society that stands up against those who seek its soul, an army that has gotten its act together quickly and is operating a terrifying war machine, and a home front that conveys resilience and determination to continue until victory is achieved.

Faith, heroism, and unity

The horrors and failure of October 7 showed our true mettle: Our collective DNA interwoven with faith, heroism, and unity. The stream of stories and testimonies about this has not stopped. Our enemies now see this too.

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