Has Iran suffered a strategic misfire?

written by Dr. Yitzhak Klein | 30.10.2023

Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 was a considerable tactical success but a strategic failure, not only for Hamas but for the Iranian regime that funds, arms and trains Hamas. Israel now understands that the policy of temporizing with Iran's regional proxies is a mistake. Iran missed the opportunity to launch a coordinated, multi-front assault on Israel while the latter was un-mobilized and unprepared; with Israel now fully mobilized, the best opportunity for such an assault has passed, even if Hezbollah in Lebanon chooses to exploit the beginning of Israel's ground campaign against Hamas to open a new front to Israel's North.

For Israel however simply to level Gaza and eliminate Hamas would represent a "Tiktok victory," not the genuine strategic victory required to restore its prestige. For the latter kind of victory Israel must inflict severe forfeits upon Iran itself. That requirement must focus Israel's attention on Hezbollah, whose capabilities constitute the major Iranian deterrent against Israel. For Israel, *the road to Tehran must lead through Hezbollah.* Iran's strategic misfire will only have permanent strategic effects if Israel exploits to the full the opportunities it has created. The elimination of Hamas *and* of Hezbollah as a fighting force would represent a significant strategic defeat for Iran, and open the Iranian regime to further blows and strategic forfeits.

For the United States, Iran's attempt to physically eliminate the United States' most committed ally in the region ought to end the policy of appeasing Iran – bribing an aggressive, totalitarian regime to be nice. Rolling back Iranian influence and containing the Iranian regime's ambitions in the region reflect American interests as well as Israel's and the United States should continue to support Israeli action diplomatically and with resources when Israel turns its attention to Hezbollah and beyond. Ultimately it is America's interest to create a regional strategic alliance capable of rolling back and containing Iran's influence in the area while the United States makes major investments elsewhere.

1. **Introduction: Hamas' Attack Upon Israel**

The attack upon Israel by an Iranian-trained and –equipped Hamas terror brigade

on October 7 was a tactical success, deceiving Israeli intelligence and surprising the Israeli army (henceforth IDF). On the strategic level, however, it was a failure and may lie at the heart of a much wider Iranian strategic failure.

- Captured documents show that the purpose of the attack was to seize *and hold* a significant portion of Israel's south, penetrating 30 km to the Israeli military airbase at Hatzerim and constricting internal communications from the Tel Aviv area to Beer Sheva and points south.[1] These objectives were not achieved.
- Within 24 hours of the initial attack the attacking force disintegrated under Israeli counterstrokes, suffering extremely heavy casualties. While the attack itself was planned in exquisite detail, the forces responsible for executing it were revealed as incapable of reacting intelligently or in coordinated fashion to rapidly shifting battlefield circumstances.[2]

Even if the force from Gaza had succeeded in achieving its assigned objectives, it could not have held on to them for long in the face of the concentrated fighting power of the IDF. The entire attack made no strategic sense as an isolated incursion into Israeli territory. Had Iran's other proxy bordering on Israel, Hezbollah in Lebanon, joined the fight and aimed at analogous strategic objectives in Israel's north while showering Israel's rear areas with rockets and missiles, Israel's strategic situation would indeed have become dire. But Hezbollah did nothing in the opening hours of Hamas' assault and since then has confined itself to a few harassing pinpricks. This paper is a first-order attempt to assess the implications for the regional and global strategic balance.

2. Background: The Multi-Front Threat

Ever since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran has invested considerable resources in building up threats to Israel throughout the Middle Eastern region east of the Mediterranean Sea. These include (but are not limited to):

- First and foremost, Hezbollah, a Lebanese Shi'ite militia defined as a terrorist group by the United States and Israel. During the course of the Syrian Civil War (2011-present) Hezbollah was a mainstay of the defense of the regime of Bashar Al-Assad.[3] Thousands of Hezbollah fighters acquired extensive combat experience. Hizbollah's forces now based in southern Lebanon and southwestern Syria, on the Israeli border.

Hezbollah has long planned to launch a ground offensive across Israel's northern border in a manner similar to Hamas' terrorist assault at the start of the present war.[4] In addition, Hezbollah deploys a large number of rockets and missiles, some of them precision guided, dug in and hidden in Lebanon and Syria; the IDF estimates the number of such missiles as well over 150,000.[5] These missiles, if launched against Israel's rear, could inflict major damage on Israel's civilian and military infrastructure, destroying power stations, ports and airports, and interdicting the IDF's ability to mobilize and shift forces on Israel's internal road network.

- Hamas in Gaza, disposing of thousands of missiles and thousands of armed terrorists.
- Iranian-affiliated militia groups based in Syria and Iraq.[6] These militia groups also dispose of a fair number of missiles which can reach Israeli territory, as well as drones and remotely-piloted vehicles (RPVs).[7]
- The Houthi insurgency in Yemen. This group has also been equipped with missiles, drones and RPVs by Iran, which it has used to attack cities and infrastructure targets in Saudi Arabia and which have the range to reach Israel.[8]
- Terrorist groups among Palestinians in Judaea and Samaria ("the West Bank"), motivated by Iranian propaganda[9] and armed with weapons smuggled into the area by Iran.[10] The Israeli army has conducted several significant campaigns within Palestinian cities to root out some of these groups.[11] While Palestinian terror in Judaea and Samaria appears sporadic, it has the potential to surge in time of war and to interdict vital communications routes of the IDF, while exposing Israeli nationals in Judaea and Samaria to the kind of terrorist assault Israel's communities near Gaza suffered on 7 October.
- Domestic insurgents among Arab citizens of Israel. In 2021 Arab citizens of Israel in a number of Israeli cities with mixed Jewish and Arab populations engaged in violent riots in which Jews were attacked.[12] Several Jewish and Arab citizens were killed. Propaganda promoted by Hamas played, and continues to play, a role in encouraging Arab citizens of Israel to engage in violent rebellion.[13] In time of war armed Arab citizens could seek to block major communications routes which the IDF requires in order to move its forces. Such activity, had it emerged during the current war, would have complemented Hamas' plans to interdict

Israeli communications in the region near the Gaza Strip.

An additional element of the potential of a domestic uprising within Israel is the activity of criminal groups within Israeli Arab society. For years Arab criminal gangs have engaged in drug smuggling, protection operations, and other forms of organized crime, and the volume of these activities has increased markedly in recent years. Some of these groups have connections with Hezbollah as a source of illegal drugs, funds and weapons,[14] blurring the line between criminal activity and potential insurgency in wartime to the point of invisibility.

Israel's strategy in the face of the growing multifront threat posed to it by Iranian proxies has been largely defensive. Hezbollah and Israel fought a brief war in 2006 during which Israel inflicted considerable damage on Lebanese infrastructure, and has assumed that this has caused Hezbollah to refrain from launching an attack on Israel with all its resources, ground troops and missiles. In Gaza, Israel has relied on its ability to inflict damage on Hamas' military and, to a lesser degree, civilian infrastructure to deter rather than defeat Hamas. The proliferation of crime, tinged with malignant anti-Israeli religious sentiment among Israeli Arabs, has long been neglected by Israel and Israel is only now struggling to contain and eliminate it. The incursion of Saturday 7 October is widely considered in Israel to signal the bankruptcy of Israel's deterrence strategy, not only against Hamas but in general.

Iran and Hamas have steadily improved the military potential of all these threats. Together, they represent a complex and synergistic threat, compromising Israel's ability to respond simultaneously to assaults on its borders and within its interior.

But on 7 October this threat failed to materialize.

III. Israel Forestalls the Worst of the Multi-Front Threat

In order to maximize the effect upon Israel's security, the multi-front threat needs the essential element of *surprise*: Catching Israel's extensive reserve army unmobilized and preventing its members from reaching their staging bases, taking up their weapons, and proceeding to the border. This surprise was indeed achieved on the Gaza front. However in the crucial first 36 hours after the incursion from Gaza, no other element of the multi-front threat took action against Israel. Hezbollah neither assaulted Israel's northern border nor conducted effective rocket fire against Israel's rear. No mass, coordinated

assault against Israeli military installations or communications took place in Judaea and Samaria. Arab citizens of Israel took no exceptional measures to create disturbances within Israel. By the end of the first 36 hours, Israel mobilized over 300,000 reservists.[15] Israel deployed overwhelming strength not only around Gaza but on the northern border facing Hezbollah, including armored units and ample artillery; from that point on a serious ground assault on Israel's northern defenses by Hezbollah would have been tantamount to suicide. Second-line Israeli forces deployed at numerous points within Judaea and Samaria and indeed within Israel proper. The Department of Internal Security accelerated a plan to distribute 20,000 rifles and the same number of bulletproof vests to local rapid response teams,[16] consisting of superannuated military reserve personnel – generally perfectly healthy men in their late 30s and 40s with a background of military training – and refreshing their training to deal with local terrorist threats. In less than two days Israel became an armed camp, on its borders and within its interior, with its soldiers' defensive reflexes aroused and the soldiers themselves determined not to let an enemy take them by surprise again.

The ensuing ten days have produced no essential change in the situation. Gaza is surrounded and under aerial assault. No significant violent activity has emerged among Israeli Arabs, who must sense that their Jewish neighbors now possess the means, the motives and the mental preparation to react severely to any attempt to repeat the events of 2021. In Judaea and Samaria there has been some attempt to step up terror activity, but this has been met by aggressive, preemptive incursions into Palestinian urban areas by newly reinforced IDF forces.[17]

Most interesting has been the reaction of Hezbollah, or rather its failure to react. Since the war started it has confined itself to a few harassing activities across the border with Israel, mounting neither a significant attempt at incursion into Israel nor a significant rocket assault. Indeed, since the original tactical success of 7th October, the activity of Israel's adversaries has been largely confined to nuisance attacks. Of significant Israeli military or infrastructure installations, only one has had its function compromised.[18]

Hamas' assault upon Israel was carefully prepared by the Iranians over a long period of time. Hamas' forces were trained and armed by Iran. It is now known that in meeting in Beirut earlier this month Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps gave Hamas the green light to go ahead with the attack.[19] But Iran clearly

failed to mobilize the rest of its clients to take advantage of the surprise attack and join it. Hamas attacked, shot its bolt, and nothing remains to it but to face an armed and aroused Israel – alone.

Why Iran failed to launch a coordinated attack on Israel by all its proxies is, at this writing, a matter of speculation. One theory is that Iran and Hizbullah are waiting for Israeli ground forces to become inextricably involved in a ground assault upon Gaza, upon which Hezbollah will launch an extensive rocket and missile assault upon Israel. Such an assault would make most sense, however, as an attempt to interdict Israeli forces attempting to deploy on Israel's northern border, but Hezbollah has already missed that boat. The Israelis are on their northern border in strength, mobilized, supplied, and above all alert and prepared to execute such plans as they have prepared to suppress an attack by Hezbollah, on the ground or by missile.

Another theory is that Iran's control of its proxies' decisionmaking falls far short of complete. Hezbollah may have decided that it has no appetite for a confrontation with Israel. Israeli Arabs who might have been inclined to join in a multifront assault upon Israel appear to have decided that, under present circumstances, prudence is by far the best part of valor.

4. Strategic Implications of the War: The Region

Israel's Strategic Imperative

Let us first consider the war from Israel's perspective. Hamas' attack on 7 October signaled the collapse of Israel's theory of deterrence: That a combination of limited military operations interspersed with economic blandishments could domesticate Hamas and render its assaults against Israel bearable in terms of both extent and frequency. At the same time Hamas' attack has illuminated in frightening detail the true dimensions of Iran's multiple-front buildup of combat power around Israel's borders. Had all of Iran's proxies joined Hamas' surprise attack, Israel's survival would have been far from certain.

Hamas' assault constitutes a potentially mortal blow against Israel's military prestige. To allow Hamas to survive the war is not just a matter of revenge aborted; if Israel cannot eliminate such deadly threats to its security it will be marked indelibly within the Middle East as prey. Despite the limitations we have outlined above, Iran's assault on Israel would be marked with success and its

hegemony within the region would seem to many regional observers to be practically assured.

But Israel's destruction of Hamas is only a necessary, not a sufficient, step to restore its wounded military prestige. For Hamas is only a tool used by Iran to strike a deadly blow against Israel. Whether Hamas survives or not, *Israel cannot permit Tehran to launch such violence against her and emerge unscathed.*

This consideration must focus our attention upon Hezbollah in Lebanon. Distant as Iran is from Israel, its airspace is almost completely exposed to devastating blows by Israel's air force. It has some ability to launch conventionally armed intermediate-range missiles against Israel, but Israel is better equipped than any other party in the region, with the possible exception of the United States military, to defend against such attacks. Iran's deterrent against an Israeli assault is Hezbollah, with its hundred thousand missiles or more and its proximity to Israel's borders. Hitherto this deterrent seems to have been quite effective. Nonetheless, if it is an existential requirement of Israel's security that Hamas' assault lead to a riposte against Tehran, *Israel's road to Tehran leads through Hezbollah.*

The IDF has long maintained that it is fully prepared to deal with the threat from Hezbollah. In the light of the events of 7th October, one might be excused for taking such statements of bravado with a grain of salt. Certainly no Israeli leader has hitherto felt that it was worth putting the IDF's statements to the test. But the situation today is very different from what it was a month ago, a year ago, a decade ago.

- The IDF is readier than it has ever been to make good on its commitment, with its forces fully mobilized.
- The danger, indeed the folly, of Israel's previous strategy, of assuming that it can forever deter Iran from launching its proxies against Israel, is now clear. It would be folly to allow Iran to continue to develop Hizbollah's capacities, using no more than the methods – chiefly interdiction flights in Syrian airspace – Israel has used till now.
- Israel *has no choice* but to act against Iran. Therefore, whether Hezbollah chooses to launch an attack against Israel when Israel's ground operation against Gaza begins or whether Israel initiates its own attack against Hezbollah at a later time of its own choosing, Israel's preferred strategy

has to be to take the initiative and actively destroy the threat from Hezbollah.

Iran's Strategic Misfire

In failing to launch a coordinated, multi-front war against Israel, Iran seems to have lost its best chance to accomplish its aim of destroying Israel. The forces it deploys around Israel now confront an immensely larger, more powerful and thoroughly aroused Israeli army and nation. Iran's strategic misfire can result in the destruction of much of the regional military infrastructure it has built up patiently over many years. However, this outcome is entirely dependent on Israel exploiting to the full the advantages it has obtained by Iran's misfire, using its mobilized military power to take Hamas and Hezbollah off the board and inflicting on Iran punishment for its role in the massacre of 7th October. If Israel fails to do so Iran will be saved from the consequences of its own failure and free to create another 7th of October, this time in a more complete manner, at some time in the near to middle-term future.

The Regional Strategic Balance

The strategic balance in the region is deeply affected by the behavior of global actors, including the United States, China and Russia, and we shall discuss the relationship between the region and the United States' global interests in the next section. For the moment however let us consider the region as a self-contained strategic ecosystem.

The primary axis of confrontation in the region is between Israel and Iran. Israel added greatly to its wealth, power and prestige between 2003, the year when it began to emerge from a domestic economic crisis, and perhaps 2021, by which time Israel's status as a wealthy and significant global technological power – Israel joined the OECD club of rich countries in 2010 – was firmly established. Israel's growth during this period was an important factor in encouraging conservative Sunni Arab regimes to seek collaboration with her, some of them actually establishing relations with Israel in the framework of the Abraham Accords. Beginning in 2021, states in the region began to understand more clearly Israel's vulnerabilities: Its hesitation to act decisively against Iranian proxies or against domestic insurrectionists.

The policy of conservative Sunni regimes in the Gulf in the past few years can be described as vacillation, uncertain whether to band together with Israel against the threat of Iranian imperialism or to bandwagon with Iran as the rising regional power. The calculus of these regimes is of course affected by American policy as well, which since 2020 has been one of appeasement of Iran, a continuation of the policy of 2012-2016.

If Israel recaptures the strategic initiative, destroys the most significant elements of Iran's strategic encirclement and inflicts serious forfeits on Iran, it will do much to restore its damaged prestige. Iran's own prestige and regional power will in turn suffer a heavy blow, shifting the regional balance against it compared to the situation ex ante. This situation may allow Israel to continue the diminution of Iranian power in cooperation with other nations who, friendly or unfriendly, share an interest with Israel in rolling back Iran's presence in the region: Turkey, Azerbaijan, and of course the Gulf states.[20] A condition of this development is that Israel *strike while the iron is hot:* take advantage of the present relative weakening of the Iranian strategic situation now that the Israeli army and public opinion is mobilized, and resolve to take the initiative to eliminate both Hamas and Hezbollah.

As this is being written, Hezbollah has refrained from becoming deeply involved in the current war. If Hizbollah's reluctance to become involved continues, that is all to the good from Israel's perspective; it is to Israel's advantage to fight on only one front at a time. If Hezbollah does choose now to throw all its resources into an attack on Israel, then of course Israel will have to fight on two fronts simultaneously, though under much better conditions than if Hezbollah had joined Hamas in the surprise attack of 7 October. Even if Hezbollah refrains from attacking Israel, though, that does not mean that Israel enjoys the luxury of refraining for long from initiating a showdown with Hezbollah, at a time and in circumstances of Israel's choosing.

In Israel today there is much talk, if not necessarily in government circles, of the need to make an example of Hamas and of Gaza: To turn Gaza into an uninhabitable ruin and physically eliminate Hamas. Hamas has to be eliminated, and if the way to do this that is most economical of Israeli lives is to destroy every building in Gaza, then those buildings will have to be destroyed. But turning Gaza into an ugly ruin is a Tiktok victory, not a strategic victory. As far as the Iranians are concerned Hamas is a shruggable loss, and in and of itself does not represent

a significant shift in the regional strategic balance as long as Hezbollah and its strategic deterrent effect on Israel are in place. It is only once that strategic deterrent is removed, even at a high cost, that the vulnerability of Iran's position in Syria and indeed over Iran's own airspace will come into play and observers in the region and the world will note that a significant shift in the regional balance, against Iran, has taken place.

5. Global Strategic Implications

This is not the place for an exhaustive critique of American security policy since 2008. Suffice it to say that successive American administrations have displayed pathetic strategic amateurism, as if the perception of American loss of interest in one part of the globe – the Middle East in 2012-2016 and 2020-2023, Western Europe in 2017-2020 – will not affect the behavior of numerous states and the global balance of power. Nor can one pass over the folly of attempting to come to understandings with aggressive totalitarian powers until one first gives them to understand, through deeds not words, that their attempts at aggression will be resolutely rebuffed.

The previous comment is not meant to imply that the United States cannot or should not prioritise its investments, but that it cannot and should not be perceived as simply giving up on this or that region. The only sure outcome of such a policy is to invite aggression against American allies and the global economic and alliance system in which the United States has made an 80-year investment. Fundamentally, in the face of an aggressive global stance by the leading trio of aggressive totalitarian regimes, China Russia and Iran, an American policy of burden-sharing is appropriate: The United States will invest in deterrent and warfighting abilities to help nations willing to make similar investments themselves. While the response of some American allies has been dilatory – France clueless, Germany strangled by its own bureaucracy – others understand this issue very well: Poland, the Scandinavian countries, Japan, South Korea, Australia, India – and of course Israel.

The United States has neglected to maintain investment in its own military and in its global alliance system for two decades, and the result is that it will have to contend with a much higher financial and military burden in the next two decades. That is inevitable if it chooses to maintain its position as a global power. Iran's strategic stumble represents however an opportunity not only for

Israel but for the United States – *provided it is seized upon resolutely.* The policy of appeasing Iran must end. The United States must recognize that it is in its global interest that Iran's regional power be rolled back, its incipient nuclear weapons program eliminated, and other states in the region be motivated to bandwagon with the United States as against the aggressive Iranian regime. Doing so will be expensive in dollar terms, and to a lesser extent in terms of military resources, but less so than continuing the present foolish policy of appeasement.

The Biden Administration has taken two important steps in the right direction. One step is to call for providing Israel with $14 billion in additional military aid.[21] The other is the mobilization of the United States Navy to give Iran to understand that if it intervenes in Israel's current war it will have a military confrontation with the United States to deal with.[22] Will the United States make good on this threat? Nobody knows for sure, and that includes the regime in Tehran.

A viable American policy in the region will require a long-term, consistent and resolute commitment – to the right policy rather than just to money or arms. The United States must speak with an unequivocal voice: It must insist that containing and rolling back the Iranian regime's regional influence is the only acceptable way of dealing with this aggressive, totalitarian regime. As it has begun, so it must go on, supporting Israel unequivocally, diplomatically as well as with military supplies, as it performs what is in American interests as well as its own vital interest – destroying Hezbollah and setting back the entire Iranian agenda in the region. And it must encourage the formation of an Israeli-conservative Sunni security consortium, armed and trained to maintain a blockade of Iranian expansionist ambitions, while the United States proceeds with greater and more vital investments elsewhere.

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How Iran Intends to Assist Hamas in the War

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 30.10.2023

Supply of more weapons under the cover of humanitarian aid, and terrorist attacks against Israeli targets in the West.

Neutralizing Iran comes before normalization with Riyadh

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 30.10.2023

The Mossad chief's recent speech was not really aimed against Iran; the words were actually intended to clarify to the Biden administration precisely where Jerusalem's priority currently lies.

Biden buys calm from Iran until 2025

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 30.10.2023

This past May, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant revealed that Iran had accumulated enough uranium enriched to 60% and 20% purity for five nuclear bombs. He further said that "the Iranian nuclear program has reached its most advanced stage ever." When policymakers speak about the emerging understandings between Iran and the US, they have to take into account those two facts above everything else. These include Israeli officials as well as the members of the Biden administration, congress members and senators, and US public opinion influencers.

According to various media reports, US and Iranian officials have recently struck an unofficial deal that has three components: First, a mutual release of prisoners; the second, unfreezing Iranian funds at a sum of some $6 billion from South Korean and Iraqi banks (Iran's access to those accounts had been blocked due to the US sanctions, but now Iran would be able to use the money for humanitarian purposes); and third, Iran halting its enrichment progress: It has apparently committed not to go beyond 60% purity and not to accumulate more uranium of that grade.

By having these steps framed as "unofficial understandings," the administration

can theoretically avoid having to get congressional approval, which would have been far from certain under the current circumstances. Submitting a deal for approval might have made Iran front and center in the public discourse, so this path allows the White House to kick the Iranian can down the road to 2025 and buy some calm until his reelection campaign is over.

As far as Iran is concerned, it won't have to take any drastic measure as part of this deal, especially compared to what it would have had to do if it were to return to the original deal from 2015. Although it might not get all of what it could have gotten under that framework, nevertheless the new arrangement marks the first time it gets a de facto permission to reach 60% purity grade. Moreover, true to its conduct in the past, it would be able to renege on its pledge not to accumulate more such material and not to exceed this level.

The new understandings could cement Iran's stature as a nuclear threshold state with an American stamp of approval. Iran will maintain a breakout capacity that would allow it to easily shift gears to a military nuclear program. This reinforces the fear that the president – despite vowing to stick to a strategy of pre-emption – is actually now pursuing a policy of containment.

Even as Israel continues to bolster its operational capabilities, it should maintain its steadfast rejection of the concessions made to Iran as part of the unofficial deal. It should also insist that the US take concrete steps against Iran. Having Israel be a tacit participant in this effort to buy time on behalf of the Biden administration. Israel must formulate its position on this matter based on the outcome of the discreet talks with the White House.

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Iran's pincer war on Israel

written by David M. Weinberg | 30.10.2023

Operation "Bayit VeGan" was more than a two-day anti-terrorist raid meant to capture enemy operatives and weapons in the Palestinian city of Jenin. It was

another stage in Israel's ongoing and escalating war with Iran.

The mullahs of Teheran largely are behind the sophisticated and well-equipped military infrastructure exposed and destroyed by the IDF this week. Iran is funding the efforts of two radical Islamic militias, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to penetrate Judea and Samaria, expanding their bases of attack against Israel from Gaza to the West Bank.

As far back as 2014, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei began to openly advocate for "exporting the Islamic revolution" to hills of Samaria. He called for "serious planning to add the West Bank to the confrontation with Israel." "Gaza is the center of resistance, but resistance groups in the West Bank are the key that can bring the Zionist enemy to its knees," Khamenei said.

The notorious commander of the Iranian revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani (assassinated by the US in 2020), took-up the charge, making the arming of West Bank militias an Iranian priority.

Soleimani brought Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and his deputy Saleh al-Arouri to meet Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi in Teheran. Hamas official Osama Hamdan then bragged about a "new stage of resistance" in which Iran would back the creation of "20 to 30 new battalions of 2,000 militants in Samaria."

Last month, Khamenei hosted Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) leaders in Teheran. Islamic Jihad's Secretary-General Ziyad al-Nakhaleh, who participated in the terrorist summit, plainly told Iranian newspaper *Al-Wefaq* that anti-Israeli operations actions in the West Bank reflect directives coming from Iran.

"The arming of the West Bank, a directive issued by Iran's Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, significantly impacts the region," he said. "Efforts were made to implement this directive, including weapon smuggling and purchasing from Israelis. The aim was to bring about a qualitative shift in the Palestinian situation and enhance resistance actions in the West Bank."

Al-Nakhaleh continued: "In terms of practical support, it is important to clarify that the aid provided by the Islamic Republic to the Palestinian people is significant. The assistance includes security and military help, training, economic support, and humanitarian aid for the families of martyrs and prisoners… No other country in the world takes such a stance so explicitly, a testament to

Tehran's support for the Palestinian resistance factions, with strong ties between PIJ, Hamas and the Islamic Republic."

Al-Nakhaleh also saluted the significant economic assistance provided by Iran, "in addition to contributing to creating a resistance infrastructure in Palestine."

And where is all the money coming from? Well, Iran is getting tens of billions of dollars in sanctions relief from President Biden's administration. On behalf of Iran, Hezbollah and the Qods Force are invested heavily in drug production and distribution (Captagon pills and more) across the Middle East and Europe, and in money-laundering cryptocurrency schemes – as revealed two weeks ago by the Israeli defense and foreign affairs ministries.

IT IS PRECISELY the "resistance infrastructure" bragged about by Al-Nakhaleh that the IDF targeted this week. This was an Israeli effort to kill the terrorist cancer in early stages to prevent the "Lebanonization" of Jenin; before Palestinian terrorist cells in Samaria metastasize into a menace that surgical strikes can't overcome.

Israel cannot sit by and watch the West Bank (in Israel's center, adjacent to Israel's three key cities, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa) become another full-fledged base of Iranian military operations against Israel, like Gaza (on Israel's southern border) and Lebanon (on Israel's northern border).

Israeli analyst Dan Diker (president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs) points out that Iran now outflanks Israel on three sides. He calls this an "Iranian pincer movement" against Israel. From Gaza, Hamas and PIJ have targeted Israel with tens of thousands of rockets. From Lebanon and Syria, IRGC Quds forces and Hezbollah's proxy terror army have about 180,000 rockets and laser-guided missiles directed at Israeli cities. From both directions, these Iranian-backed forces have dug and sought to use terror attack tunnels into Israel.

Khamenei now uses the phrase "the unity of fronts" against Israel, meant to include Gaza, Lebanon, Jerusalem, the West Bank – and next, Jordan.

Destabilization of the generally pro-Western (and purportedly Israel-ally) Hashemite Kingdom long has been an Iranian goal. From Jordan, which straddles Israel's longest border, Iranian proxies could penetrate and further destabilize the West Bank.

And it may not be all that hard to do. Jordan is a perpetual economic basket-case, a rickety country with a disgruntled populace that also hosts millions of refugees including Syrians and Palestinians who still dream of destroying Israel.

Writing in *Foreign Affairs* magazine, Michael Knight notes that Iraq can be considered a model for what Iran wants to do to Jordan. Iraq is quietly falling apart, he says, with Iranian-controlled Popular Mobilization Units fully incorporated into the Iraqi army, and most Iraqi politicians too fearful to resist. Iraq has become an Iranian hegemonic success story, and Khamenei intends Jordan to be next.

In Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, Iraq (and Yemen), Western powers have been feckless and proved powerless in impeding Iranian advances. Remember UN Resolution 1701 ending the 2006 Second Lebanon War which mandated the disarmament of Hezbollah and the prevention of any armed forces south of the Litani River, except for the Lebanese army and UNIFIL? What a joke that resolution and that UN force has proven to be!

Remember the Palestinian Authority, established under the internationally backed and massively funded Oslo Accords, which was supposed to bring peace to Palestinians and Israelis alike; or at least good governance and basic security in the West Bank and Gaza? What a disappointment that corrupt, weak, and hostile "Authority" has become!

The only real power standing in the way of Palestinian terrorism and Iranian hegemonism is Israel.

Alas, no understanding of this reality could be found in media reporting on, or the reactions in most Western capitals to, the IDF operation in Jenin this week.

Instead, reporters and diplomats fluttered with namby-pamby statements about the need of "all sides" to reduce tensions, and then they plainted about terrible loss of life or the difficult (indeed!) humanitarian situation in Jenin – as if all this were occurring in a complete vacuum.

The average Westerner could have gotten the impression (from supposedly seasoned reporters and evidently expert diplomats) that Zionist stormtroopers landed from Mars and for no good reason raided the pastoral farmlands of Palestine. As if the IDF did not confiscate in Jenin thousands of illegal weapons

and discover dozens of underground military command posts with sophisticated technology that were directing murderous attacks on Israelis and making a mockery of vestigial Palestinian Authority control of a major Palestinian city.

As if Iranian-backed Palestinian terrorism was not the core problem, and Israel had no business defending its citizenry accordingly.

No wonder that Israelis have grown quite unreceptive to criticism of their defense policies by friends and foes alike.

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Beware another US sellout to Tehran

written by David M. Weinberg | 30.10.2023

Believe it or not, the Biden administration apparently is once again offering the mullahs of Tehran a sweetheart deal: the release of $10 billion or more in frozen Iranian assets and clemency for Iran's near-breakout nuclear advances of recent years, in exchange for Iranian release of American hostages and warmed-over pious Iranian pledges to freeze the Shiite atomic bomb program.

This, even though Washington would be freezing the Iranian nuclear program with 16 cascades spinning to enrich uranium to 60% purity, which is just shy of weapons-grade. In February, Iran was caught with some uranium enriched to 84% purity and was called-out for manufacturing uranium metal, a material used in nuclear weapon cores.

This month, intelligence photos showed Iran again digging tunnels at its Natanz nuclear site – supposedly deep enough to withstand an American or Israeli military strike. This tells us that Iran has what to hide, a clear sign that it has not given up on its quest for a nuclear bomb.

Nevertheless, US President Joe Biden may grant Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi

an end to all past and current International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) investigations into Iran's nuclear violations alongside the suck-up deal above.

Biden also seems happy to ignore Iran's other regional muckraking and hegemonic advances, including its harassment of internationally flagged merchant ships in the Straits of Hormuz, and its placement of "floating terror bases" (civilian ships converted into mini-aircraft and commando carriers) in the strategic waterway. The situation there is so bad that in protest the UAE last month pulled-out of a US naval alliance group meant to protect shipping in the Arabian Gulf.

John Hannah and Richard Goldberg of the Washington-based Foundation for the Defense of Democracies warned this week in a special alert publication that the above contours would be "a bad, even a desperate, deal made from a position of American weakness."

"It looks like the administration is reviving an idea out of the old Obama playbook because it's not willing to do what's necessary to stop Iran's program by restoring deterrence through coercive diplomacy. Biden is scared to death that if Iran keeps advancing its nuclear program, either the United States or Israel will be forced to make good on their promise to stop Iran militarily."

"From the administration's perspective, paying Iran off is the easiest way to hold at bay the worst-case outcomes of a nuclear Iran, on the one hand, or another major military conflict, on the other. And suspending sanctions to get there is a lot easier and less risky in their minds than doing the hard work and committing the resources needed to establish a credible US military option to destroy the Iranian program."

"But the price for America will be stabilizing and strengthening a terror-supporting Iranian regime now under pressure not only from sanctions but from profound domestic discontent and turmoil among its own population," they added.

Equally distressing, they warned, is that "Biden risks undermining American support for the war in Ukraine by asking Congress to approve billions of taxpayer dollars to support Kyiv while offering Iran billions of dollars to help resupply Moscow." (It has been well documented that Iran is supplying Russia with military attack drones and other critical technologies with which to clobber Ukraine.)

Given that Washington appears unwilling, even now, to place hard limits on the crucial elements of Iran's illicit nuclear weapons program (fissile material production, weaponization, and means of delivery/missile development), and is unwilling to apply maximum economic pressure (as President Trump did) or to present a credible military threat to Iran – it is no surprise that Israel is ramping-up its preparations for confrontation.

At the Herzliya Conference last week, IDF Chief-of-Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi said plainly, in a rare speech focused directly on Iran, that Israel may "take action" against Iran's nuclear facilities because of "possible negative developments on the horizon. We have the ability to hit Iran, and we are not indifferent to what Iran is trying to build around us." National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi added that "there is no place that can't be reached" (referring to the new Natanz tunnels).

THIS IS WHERE broader regional diplomacy comes into the picture and complicates Israel's calculations.

Washington expects Israeli acquiescence in the emerging US surrender to Iran in exchange for a series of other things important to Israel. These include US backing for Israel against escalated Palestinian assaults expected this fall in UN forums, toning down US criticism regarding settlement and security matters (at a time when the IDF is going to have to intensify its anti-terrorist operations in Judea and Samaria), an easing of US pressures on Israel in connection with domestic matters (like judicial reform), a warm Washington visit for Prime Minister Netanyahu (which is not just a political concession but rather is critical to Israel's overall deterrent posture), and most of all, significant American moves towards reconciliation with Saudi Arabia (which is critical to driving a breakthrough in Israeli-Saudi ties).

It is worth dwelling on the latter point because renewed close cooperation between Washington and Riyadh is central to the stability of the region and is the cornerstone of what should and can be Saudi entry to the Abraham Accords. In other words, the road to Israel-Saudi normalization runs through Washington.

It will take serious intent and deft maneuvering from America to get there, and there is good reason to doubt that Biden is prepared or capable of paying the mostly justified Saudi price for renewed close Saudi-US partnership. (This may

include a defense treaty, high-quality arms supply, a comprehensive economic agreement, and most controversially, US agreement to a Saudi civilian nuclear program. Israel may have a problem with parts of this package too.)

The further problem is that even an expensive package of US "concessions" to Saudi Arabia will not truly compensate for US capitulation to Iran (something we know from experience will only embolden the hegemonic ambitions of the mullahs). And this capitulation will make it more difficult for the Saudis to publicly embrace Israel (although the quiet security coordination between the two countries assuredly will continue to grow).

In the end, Israel must prioritize its most naked, existential security interests – which clearly are stopping Iran's nuclear bomb effort and scuttling Iran's attempts to encircle Israel with well-armed proxy armies. Accepting another ruinous US nuclear deal with Iran is not in accordance with these interests.

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