

Don't rely on diplomatic efforts - prepare for defense and offense

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 09.08.2024

Analysis: Iran's revenge motive, Hezbollah's role, Gaza concessions risks, and the deeper roots of conflict challenge diplomatic solutions.

Sinwar replacing Haniyeh may help advance hostage negotiations and end the war

written by Prof. Kobi Michael | 09.08.2024

If Ismail Haniyeh represented a tougher stance in the deal negotiations compared to Sinwar's more pragmatic line, an obstacle has been removed, the author writes.

Time has run out for 'Gaza first, Lebanon later'

written by Dr. Raphael BenLevi | 09.08.2024

High-profile assassinations are only useful as an opening blow. Israel needs a solution for the continued devastation across the north.

Israel Reestablished Deterrence. It Should be Praised, Not Admonished

written by Arsen Ostrovsky | 09.08.2024

In the last 48 hours, confirmation of Israel's stunning elimination of arch-terrorists Mohammed Deif of Hamas and Fuad Shukr of Hezbollah, as well as the presumed elimination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Iran, will redefine Israeli deterrence and create a paradigm change in the Middle East, likely bringing the war with Hamas closer to an end.

Each of the three terrorists eliminated were the embodiment of evil, dripping with the blood of thousands of innocent civilians, both Israeli and foreign nationals, including Americans.

As leaders of Hamas, Haniyeh and Deif, were the masterminds of the October 7 massacre and decades of terror attacks in Israel. Shukr, the deputy leader of Hezbollah, was responsible for the Majdal Shams rocket attack last weekend in northern Israel, in which 12 children were murdered while playing football. He had also been directing Hezbollah's rocket attacks on Israel since October 8 and responsible for procuring the terror group's advanced weaponry.

In case it needs to be reiterated, the elimination of these arch-terrorists and murderers was entirely legal, just, and moral. The world today is a safer place without them and Israel ought to be congratulated for their elimination.

But what is the military and geo-strategic impact of these operations?

There is no denying that the brazen October 7 attacks and abductions by Hamas, as well as the ongoing rocket fire by Hezbollah, struck a massive arrow through the heart of Israel's much-vaunted defense and intelligence apparatus. In the last 72 hours, Israel not only regained its deterrence, but has taken it to a new level, with the potential to permanently alter the landscape of the Middle East.

The pin-point operations against Shukr in Beirut and Haniyeh, while asleep in an apartment building in Tehran on Day 1 of the new President's tenure, were daring, audacious, and brilliantly executed, with minimum to no civilian casualties and no harm to Israeli soldiers and assets.

That they were carried out great distance away from Israel under the noses of the Hezbollah and Iranian leaderships, and relying on such precise intelligence, will also cause enormous embarrassment to Hezbollah and especially Tehran, because Haniyeh's security was under their responsibility, underscoring that Israel can strike any target, at any time, effectively turning their leaders and military sites into sitting ducks.

This in turn ought to give them pause for consideration for any future military actions they might seek to undertake, knowing the possible response they might face.

There are those who now insist that the elimination of Haniyeh and Shukr will only escalate regional tensions. To them we ask: Where have you been the last 10 months?

Hamas initiated the massacre of October 7 and were joined by Hezbollah the day after, having since fired over 7,250 rockets at northern Israel from Lebanon.

Iran has meantime been pulling the strings from Tehran as the grandmaster of both Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as the Houthis, who joined long ago from Yemen.

If anyone has been escalating regional tensions, it has been the international community, which has been largely trying to pressure Israel into showing restraint or compromise, instead of demanding Hezbollah and Hamas, cease the attacks, disarm and release all the hostages, or that Iran reign in their proxies.

In doing so, the international community has only emboldened these terror groups and encouraged their regional patrons to escalate tensions further.

If anything, the world should thank Israel now, as the elimination of Haniyeh and Shukr ought to send a clear message to all the terror groups and their enablers that their actions come at a heavy price, and they should reconsider their involvement.

Israel's renewed deterrence can also have a positive impact on the hostage negotiations. Although there will be some uncertainty with respect to the negotiations in the short-term, in the medium term, it should place greater pressure on Hamas to accept a deal.

There is no denying that Hamas has been utterly decimated and embarrassed. Their leadership is destroyed, its military dismantled into a fraction of its former self, and Sinwar has never been so isolated. Although Hamas is unlikely to re-engage in negotiations so soon for fear of losing face and being seen as succumbing to Israel's overpowering, they will need to reach some kind of agreement, so as to have at least something to show and avoid the fate of Haniyeh and Deif.

Israel's audacious targeted operations this past week only underscore that the path to stability in the region and return of the hostages, will come from renewed Israeli deterrence and strength.

The article was written together with John Spencer.

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The dilemma: Saving hostages without saving Hamas

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 09.08.2024

For Israel, the passage of time cuts both ways. On one hand, it allows for consolidating gains, further degrading Hamas, and potentially securing more favorable terms for hostage release.

Securing Israel's borders is paramount, the public are right to demand it

written by Ruth Wasserman Lande | 09.08.2024

Long before the events of October 7, and even more so following them, there can be no legitimacy for the lack of significant and very stringent border security enforcement.

Israeli Control of the Philadelphi Corridor

written by Misgav Institute | 09.08.2024

This position paper was composed in the context of discussions within the Israeli security and political echelons regarding the future of the Israeli presence in the Philadelphi Corridor.

Security Risks and Moral Error in the Proposed Hostage Deal

written by Prof. Kobi Michael | 09.08.2024

• Key Points

- The proposed hostage deal for Israel is a strategic risk and a

moral and ethical error. The IDF's withdrawal from the Philadelphi corridor would allow Hamas to renew its military buildup.

- The return of hundreds of thousands of Gazans to the northern part of the Gaza Strip will bring thousands of terrorists with them. They do not need to bring weapons with them, as there are vast stockpiles of weapons in northern Gaza that the IDF has not yet located and destroyed.
- Statements by senior military officials regarding the IDF's ability to operate again in these areas as needed are presumptuous and disconnected from reality. To resume fighting, Israel would have to sacrifice the lives of its best soldiers and risk crisis with the US and the international community.
- Only continued military pressure by Israel can increase the chances that Hamas will bend and might release the remaining hostages.

Comprehensive Discussion Needed

The proposed hostage deal requires a thoughtful and thorough discussion, analyzing all the relevant implications. One must not entertain the thought that those who oppose the emerging deal do so out of irrelevant considerations, lack of interest, or insensitivity to the release of the hostages and their fate. The authors of this article addressed this issue in December 2023, discussing the tension between national security and personal safety in the context of the current war's goals. This logic remains valid today.

Prioritizing Collective National Security

Without addressing collective national security through achieving war goals, primarily the destruction of Hamas's military and governmental capabilities, Israeli society is doomed to face many more painful tragedies of this kind. These will not be limited to the Palestinian arena and will exact a high and painful toll on both national and personal security levels. Israel must prioritize its national security while expressing absolute commitment to freeing all hostages. The political echelon must clarify to the public, and especially to the hostages' families, the necessity of

adhering to war goals and at the same time work to create the military and political conditions that are crucial for fulfilling the mission and achieving military and political victory, which will ultimately lead to the release of all hostages.

Issues with the Emerging Deal

The proposed deal's problematic points include Hamas's demand that the IDF withdraw from Rafah and the Philadelphi Corridor, an area filled with underground tunneling infrastructure used for smuggling weapons and strengthening terrorist organizations in Gaza. (On August 4, Israel exposed a Hamas tunnel large enough for trucks to drive through.) IDF operations in this area are crucial in cutting off smuggling routes from Egypt and preventing the entry of weapons, thus thwarting the renewed buildup of Hamas and other organizations in Gaza. Attempts to monitor this through technology and cameras have failed, resulting in massive amounts of weapons passing through the Rafah crossing.

International Monitoring Failures

The attempt to incorporate an international entity into the monitoring and supervision system also failed, as the EU-BAM monitoring team abandoned the crossing following Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip. The operational pattern of BAM-EU resembles that of UNDOF on the Golan Heights after the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War and that of the UN peacekeeping force in the Sinai Peninsula in 1967 after the Egyptian army entered the peninsula. Similarly, the UNIFIL force deployed in southern Lebanon following the adoption of Resolution 1701 and tasked with its enforcement failed miserably. Experience demonstrates that international forces are unable to perform such tasks effectively and persistently, especially in the Israeli context.

Necessity for a Physical IDF Presence

Complete disarmament of Gaza is impossible without thwarting any attempt at weapon smuggling through Philadelphi as well as other crossings into the strip. To ensure no weapons can be smuggled into Gaza, it is imperative that IDF forces are present in the surrounding Gaza area. This is true in general, and it most certainly applies to the entire

period of constructing a barrier along the Philadelphi Corridor, until its completion.

Summary

The proposed deal is a strategic threat, as well as a moral and ethical mistake, by all indicators.

The deal includes several phases and demands the withdrawal of IDF forces from the Philadelphi Corridor, the Netzarim Route, and northern Gaza, and eventually also from the security buffer zone. Moreover, the phased hostage release plan is intended, from Hamas's perspective, to prolong the cessation of fighting indefinitely. Agreeing to this demand would mean that Israel forfeits all the remaining leverage it has to ensure the release of hostages and the destruction of Hamas's military and governmental capabilities.

Such withdrawal would enable Hamas to resume smuggling from Egypt, accelerate the process of military buildup, and maintain a real military threat to Israel. The return of hundreds of thousands of Gazan civilians to the northern part of the Gaza Strip would also allow the return of thousands of terrorists. The claim that armed militants will not be allowed back is deceptive, and statements about the IDF's ability to operate again in these areas are disconnected from reality.

Ending the war in the Gaza Strip is a cornerstone of the US regional strategic vision, which, in Washington's view, could also lead to a ceasefire in the north and a reconciliation with Iran and its proxies, thereby advancing the normalization process with Saudi Arabia. Thus, the US is adamant about this, and will attempt to prevent Israel from resuming combat once IDF forces exit the Gaza Strip. In addition, the presence of regional and international forces, along with Palestinian Authority forces, will complicate the operational reality in Gaza and hinder the IDF's ability to resume fighting against Hamas.

If Israel had accepted such a deal, Muhamad Deif, Aref Saleme, Rauhi Mushtawa and others would not have been eliminated and Hamas would have had more capacity to reconstitute itself rapidly. The fact that central figures have been eliminated increases the pressure on Sinwar and

facilitate conditions for a better deal and an improved security reality in the Gaza Strip.

Alternative Proposal

A more logical and moral alternative is an Israeli proposal or ultimatum for the release of *all* hostages in one phase, in exchange for the lives of Hamas leaders and remaining organization members in Gaza, who will be allowed to leave Gaza unharmed. Hamas will likely reject such a deal, in which case the IDF should conquer all of Gaza, establish military governance, and prevent Hamas from regaining control.

From day one, it was sustained Israeli military pressure that forced Hamas to be flexible, and it seems that only continued military pressure can increase the chances of recovering Israeli hostages and forcing a change in Hamas' position.

To prevent Hamas' resurgence, Israel must stay on Philadelphi

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 09.08.2024

Could an Israeli-Egyptian mechanism, with US involvement, effectively replace direct Israeli control? Historical precedent offers little room for optimism.

As fighting in Gaza winds down,

focus must shift to Hamas leadership abroad

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 09.08.2024

The time has come to target senior Hamas officials living abroad, who currently operate with relative impunity. Israel must maintain several points of leverage against Hamas to impede its recovery.