

The truce lasted long enough

written by David M. Weinberg | 01.12.2023

Repeat pauses in the war are extraordinarily dangerous on many levels.

Hamas Massacre Proves Iran is Existential Threat

written by Dr. Raphael BenLevi | 01.12.2023

For the past two decades there has been a debate raging within Israel regarding the nature of the threat posed by a nuclear Iran. Some have argued that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose an existential threat to Israel, while others believed that it would indeed be severe, but not necessarily existential.

For many years, Benjamin Netanyahu led the 'existential threat' camp, drawing an analogy between Israel's current situation vis-a-vis Iran, to that of Europe in 1938, facing Nazi Germany. In this view, Israel stands before a fateful decision: will it act to confront its enemies on time despite the immediate costs, or will it hesitate and allow another holocaust?

Others in Israel's security establishment and political leadership rejected this analogy as wild and inappropriate to the current situation. Leading among them was Ehud Barak. Though he cooperated with Netanyahu in taking a strong stance against Iran as defense minister from 2009-2013, he consistently opposed the idea that they were dealing with an existential threat. As he relates in his 2018 autobiography:

"I was especially upset by Bibi's increasing use of Holocaust imagery in describing the threat from Iran... We're not in Europe in 1937. Or 1947. If it is a 'Holocaust,' what's our response: to fold up and go back to the diaspora? If Iran gets a bomb, it'll be bad. Very bad. But we'll still be here. And we will find a way of dealing with the new reality."

This seemingly semantic debate has very real policy implications, including the extent to which Israel should be willing to go in order to prevent Iran from crossing the nuclear threshold. If this is an existential threat, then Israel must be willing to do everything in its power to prevent it - including, if necessary, taking action that carries the risk of a broader regional war and even if it means acting in defiance of the preferences of a US administration. But if it is a major threat, but not existential, then there are limits to what Israel should be willing to do, such as not acting without at least American acquiescence; weighing the value of a strike against the price of a war with Hezbollah and direct Iranian missile strikes; and ultimately, considering that instead of a costly war, Israel might shift toward a policy of attempting to deter Iran from ever using its newfound weaponry.

The Face of Evil

The massacre of October the 7th, however, should settle this debate once and for all by clarifying for all sides what existential threat really means. Because it seems that even those who claim a nuclear Iran would constitute such a threat - Netanyahu himself included - have not taken themselves seriously enough, nor acted accordingly.

Before October 7th, we had trouble believing that the genocidal evil that we witnessed that day really existed. We may have said that it exists, we may have recited slogans saying that it exists, but we didn't entirely understand the meaning or the significance of it. We didn't really internalize that there are, in fact, people who would happily give their lives just so they could murder Jews; people for whom their greatest dream is to "destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—on a single day," no matter what the cost.

Yes, we knew that this was possible in theory, as a matter of history. Certainly, in the country founded in the shadow of the ashes of the Holocaust, Israelis remember that the Nazi's were willing to risk it all to murder just one more Jew. But with the passage of time, we forgot that this was a real thing. The clarity of the lessons learned has been eroded over time, to the point which when it became a practical issue again, we didn't really know what was required.

But now, after October 7th, we have again witnessed the face of evil. We have

encountered it anew and must internalize its meaning anew. The meaning is that we can no longer claim that Iran is animated primarily by national interests, or that its threats are mere rhetoric, not to be taken seriously. We can no longer claim that Iran couldn't possibly risk the survival of the Islamist regime by undertaking a nuclear attack on Israel, or that it would never risk the destruction of entire Iranian cities that would result from an Israeli counter-attack. Rather, the meaning is that it could and it most likely would.

The Price of Error: National Annihilation

The Hamas massacre must make clear that people who are consumed by Islamist ideologies, be it the Sunni or Shiite versions, really are willing to commit collective suicide if they could only take Israel down with them. And if we do not recognize this truth and instead continue to believe that our enemies hold the same value system as we do, we will pay the price for this strategic failure, and the price is national annihilation. Because if Israel fails to see this threat with clarity and act appropriately, there will be no more politicians to apologize for the blunder and resign, and there will be no one to demand a committee of public inquiry and no one to report the findings to. This is the meaning of existential threat; it is the type of threat that forces us to choose whether to continue existing or not.

For years, Israel has wrestled with the question of where precisely is the red line beyond which decisive action is imperative. Twenty years ago, some said the very existence of clandestine uranium enrichment facilities justified action. Later, it was the accumulation of any highly enriched uranium, meaning to 20% purity. By 2012, Israel's red line was the accumulation of 250 kg of 20% enriched uranium. According the most recent IAEA reports, Iran currently has over 500 kg of 20% and an additional 128 kg and counting of uranium enriched to 60%. As of the outset of 2023, Israel's new red line has apparently become a point just short of military grade, meaning 90%. At each juncture, the question was raised: "why act now if we can continue to deter Iran from any further progress?"; "there is still time to act before they have enough for a bomb, and then some more time before they can weaponize it." Iran now has anywhere from a few weeks to a few months between it and an operational weapon, given a decision to break out. Perhaps this was good enough before October 7th. Today, it should be considered well beyond the red line.

Now is the time to revisit the roots of the so-called 'Begin doctrine'. It was Menachem Begin, who lived in a generation which had not yet forgotten the reality of genocidal evil, who wrote in 1978 the following passage and applied it in practice just a few years later: "The lesson today and for the future is: First, if an enemy of the Jews comes and says that he desires, with all his heart and blood, to destroy them - do not dismiss him, do not disparage him, do not doubt him. Rather you must take his intentions with completely sincerity, and take his utterances with all the gravity they embody. Believe him. This enemy wants to destroy the Jews. You must prevent from him the power to destroy them. You must prepare yourself every day for the time of action, but you must never again say: 'They don't really mean it.' "

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The Day After in Gaza

written by Dr. Raphael BenLevi | 01.12.2023

Installing the Palestinian Authority in Gaza would inevitably lead to the re-emergence of a terror state.

Understanding the psyche of Hamas massacre masterminds

written by Ruth Wasserman Lande | 01.12.2023

Although it momentarily serves the Iranian goal, Hamas has its own interests.

Guns for grandmothers

written by David M. Weinberg | 01.12.2023

Arming Israel's citizenry is part of a broader struggle to reshape Israel's strategic realities

What was - shall be no more: Israel must shatter Hamas' hopes of a return to the Oct. 6 reality

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 01.12.2023

Hamas likely believed that had Israel subscribed to small-scale approach, they could build on the success of October 7 and effect a change that would result in a new "equation" between the organization and the Jewish state.

Hamas' grave miscalculation on how Israel would react

written by Brig. Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser | 01.12.2023

Hamas likely believed that had Israel subscribed to small-scale approach, they could build on the success of October 7 and effect a change that would result in a new "equation" between the organization and the Jewish state. Meaning, the release of the imprisoned terrorists, lifting the blockade, and stopping the

normalization process between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Don't you dare!

written by David M. Weinberg | 01.12.2023

Israeli leaders have no mandate to scale-back the assault on Hamas. The war cannot and must not end until Israel has achieved its legitimate military objectives in full.

Gazans must be free to leave

written by Dr. Raphael BenLevi | 01.12.2023

In order to succeed in its mission of destroying Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Israel has no choice but to reconquer the entire enclave and eradicate all elements of the Hamas movement. Because of Hamas's strategy of embedding itself within the non-combatant population, completing this mission will necessarily bring great devastation to the civilian infrastructure in Gaza. To shorten the time and extent of this devastation, Gazans must be allowed to seek temporary refuge outside of the densely-populated territory.

Currently, Israel has called for noncombatants to evacuate the northern Strip around Gaza City and move towards the south. But in order to root out Hamas, Israel will have to conquer southern Gaza as well. Otherwise it will become a new base for Hamas to continue its genocidal war on Israel.

The humanitarian implications are already grave, but will certainly worsen once Israel turns south. Preventing Gazans from leaving will cause a large number of civilian casualties, which is precisely what Hamas wants.

There are already thousands of Gazans seeking to escape the warzone, but are

trapped by Hamas and the Egyptians' refusal to open border crossings. This is unjustifiable and must be changed. Forcing Israel to carry out its mission in the difficult environment of urban warfare amongst a large noncombatant population will inevitably result in the deaths of more noncombatant Gazans, extend the length of the war and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis.

Wars in densely-populated urban areas inevitably result in large numbers of displaced civilians. Naturally, many of these people seek temporary refuge outside of the warzone. In past decades, this has been allowed to occur in numerous cases, which sometimes involved the displacement of hundreds of thousands and even millions of people.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, for example, over six million Ukrainians have escaped the country. Adjacent Poland has received 1.2 million Ukrainians and provided them with shelter and food. Additional countries have likewise accepted vast numbers of Ukrainians, including a million in Germany and half a million in the Czech Republic.

During the Syrian civil war, which has been ongoing since 2011, 6.7 million Syrians have left Syria. In this case as well, adjacent countries and others in the region have given them refuge, including 3.2 million in Turkey, 789,000 in Lebanon and 653,000 in Jordan. Even Egypt has taken in 150,000 Syrians. Additional Middle Eastern and European states have accepted hundreds of thousands. Notably, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have offered resident status to 120,000 and 100,000 Syrians, respectively.

Why, then, are no Gazans permitted to flee and seek temporary refuge elsewhere?

First, Hamas itself is cynically holding them hostage in order to use them as human shields. It wants these people to die so their bodies can be paraded in the international media to build pressure on Israel to stop short of its mission of destroying the terror group. Forcing these people to remain in Gaza would be playing right into Hamas's hands.

Second, as noted, Egypt is refusing to let them out. It has claimed that it cannot accept additional refugees and is concerned that Hamas terrorists will cross into Sinai. These may be reasonable concerns, but they can be addressed with external funding, close vetting of the fleeing Gazans, establishing tent cities for the displaced and allowing passage to third parties.

An additional reason given by Egypt, which is entirely unreasonable, is that if Gazans are allowed to leave, it may undermine the long-term goals of the Palestinian national movement. This is unjustifiable. It should be up to Gazans to decide whether they want to sacrifice their lives for national goals, not Egypt. If Gazans seek to leave, this is their choice. They should not be blocked by Egypt due to political considerations.

Therefore, an international initiative should be established to assist Gazans who are seeking temporary refuge in other countries. Once the war is over and Hamas has been eradicated, they are free to return. But forcing them to remain in the warzone will play into Hamas's hands, risk their lives, extend the time it will take to complete Israel's mission and deepen the humanitarian crisis.

Some countries bear a direct responsibility for Hamas's actions and should be held accountable by requiring them to be part of the solution. Turkey, Qatar and Iran have been actively supporting Hamas for decades. They should take in the majority of the displaced. Additional countries that could host displaced Gazans are North African countries like Algeria, Libya and Tunisia; South America, where Chile already hosts a large Palestinian population; European countries; and Canada. Arab countries that are not supportive of Hamas, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, may be open to providing resources to help their Arab brethren. There is already a grassroots movement in the Russian Caucasus to host Gazans. The UAE is working to bring 1,000 injured children to Emirati hospitals.

Anyone who truly cares about the plight of Gazans should join the initiative to let them out and offer to host the displaced. Israel is not responsible for current conditions in Gaza. That responsibility rests with Hamas, along with all the countries that have aided it over the years. The idea that in all other warzones noncombatants are permitted to flee and offered refuge but Gazans must stay and serve as human shields for Hamas is nothing but a cynical ploy. It seeks to exploit Gazans as tools of war and will lead to unnecessary loss of life.

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Refugees at home

written by David M. Weinberg | 01.12.2023

Half a million Israelis have been made refugee in their own homeland, an astounding and ultimately unacceptable dislocation.