The dilemma of victory: Israel, Hamas, and Trump’s role in Mideast peace

written by Prof. Zaki Shalom | 04.11.2025

In recent speeches, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has emphasized that the second stage of the Trump-Netanyahu framework – disarming Hamas – can proceed in one of two ways:

“By peaceful means,” namely, that Hamas voluntarily lays down its arms; or by force, if Hamas refuses to disarm peacefully.

It is worth recalling that in the first days after the Hamas attack, the prime minister made it clear that Israel was in a state of war, not merely another “round” of hostilities. In subsequent phases, he repeatedly stressed that the objective of Israel’s military action is complete victory: “My main expectation,” he said in January 2024, “is complete victory. Nothing less. There is no substitute for victory.”

What is victory?

“Victory” in war, certainly complete victory, is not an abstract notion. It has clear parameters: unconditional surrender; regime change; alterations of the constitutional order of the defeated entity; constraints on its ability to rebuild military power; and a transformation from militant, militaristic conduct to a commitment to peace. Such were the outcomes of the First and Second World Wars.

In the current war against Hamas, after more than two years of intense fighting, Israel has not yet achieved victory – certainly not “complete victory.” It is doubtful, in our view, that the defense minister’s emphatic declaration this week that “we have defeated Hamas” is grounded in reality.

Despite the heavy blows it has sustained, Hamas is far from accepting unconditional surrender. It continues to demonstrate resilience, retains control

over large areas of the Gaza Strip, and is treated as a legitimate partner for negotiations.

Under these circumstances, Israel finds itself in a tacit confrontation with the US administration. It appears that President Donald Trump's administration shares, to one degree or another, the approach of the "mediating states," which seek to prevent Israel from realizing a comprehensive victory.

Against this backdrop, Trump said in his speech to the Knesset on October 13, 2025: "Israel, with our help, has won all that they can by force of arms. You've won. I mean, you've won. Now it's time to translate these victories against terrorists on the battlefield into the ultimate prize of peace and prosperity for the entire Middle East. It's about time you were able to enjoy the fruits of your labor."

Israel has not achieved victory

In our assessment, under current conditions, achieving Hamas's disarmament "by peaceful means" may be viewed as an important Israeli accomplishment – but not as an Israeli victory. In that scenario, the "crown of victory" would, to a considerable extent and with some justification, be placed on Trump's head. Israel would emerge from the campaign feeling it had not fully achieved its principal objective: complete victory over Hamas.

The conclusion apparently taking shape within the Israeli government is this: To realize complete victory over Hamas, Israel must continue along the military path, against the backdrop of Hamas's refusal to honor its commitment to disarm.

Israel's relationship with the United States now depends, to a great extent, on Hamas's conduct. If Hamas persistently refuses to disarm, it is reasonable to assume that Washington will grant Israel authorization to resume the war, thereby preserving Israel's option of achieving complete victory.

By contrast, if Hamas agrees to disarm in a manner that satisfies the administration, Israel will face a difficult dilemma: whether to resume the war in order to impose a tangible defeat on Hamas – at the risk of a confrontation with Washington – or to end the war with "half its desire fulfilled" and turn to the path of peace in light of Trump's vision, which presently appears uncertain.

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