Ramifications of the Deepening Rift between the US and Israel

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The US fails to understand the current dialectic in Israeli politics, whereby harsh Israeli public criticism of the Netanyahu governement coexists with widespread consensus regarding the goals of the war against Hamas and the necessity of achieving them. By distancing itself from Israel, the only US "achievement" is damage to Prime Minister Netanyahu's political fortunes.

For the first time since October 7, the US recently abstained from vetoing two resolutions put forward for approval by the UN Security Council. While the two approved resolutions are non-binding, as they were not adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which authorizes the Security Council to enforce the resolution by imposing sanctions, nonetheless this is a dangerous and problematic precedent by the US with respect to the war against Hamas in general, and relations with Israel in particular.

Moreover, there are already countries for whom this resolution presented a golden opportunity. The President of Columbia Gustavo Petro, for example, has announced that he will sever diplomatic relations with Israel if it does not abide by the UN resolution.

The US abstention from vetoing the resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan,which makes no reference to the hostages, and the second resolution which includes a call for an immediate ceasefire and the release of the hostages without any preconditions, but does not stipulate that the ceasefire is contingent on the release of the hostages – indicates a fundamental change in the US attitude toward the goals of the war as defined by the government of Israel, and which the US fully and adamantly supported in the first months of the war.

This is not the first time the US has abstained from vetoing a Security Council resolution against Israel. Thus, for example, it abstained from vetoing Resolution 2334 against the settlements that was passed in December 2016, towards the end of President Obama's second term. However, that was at the end of a Democratic

US president's term in office, and also not in the midst of a war. Therefore, by any comparative measure, this is an unusual action on the part of the US in its severity and harshness, and may attest to the depth of the crisis between the two countries, and mainly between their leaders.

By abstaining, the US deliberately weakens Israel and helps create conditions for imposing an end to the war by securing a deal for the hostages realease and a long ceasefire, which its clear meaning is finishing the war, even at the cost of not achieving Israeli war goals, which again, were until now supported by the US.

Anyone that doubts the essence of the resolution that was passed due to the US abstention, and its problematic ramifications, needs only listen to how Hamas welcomed the resolution. The fact that Hamas celebrated the resolution affirms that it works in favor of Hamas, and consequently is bad for Israel and harms its vital interests.

There are those who attribute the US decision to internal considerations related to President Biden's election campaign, and to the need to appease the Muslim electorate and progressives following its low polling ranking and the criticism for supporting Israel. Some attribute this to deep frustration of the President and the Adminstration with Prime Minister Netanyahu, whom they view as foot-dragging and avoiding a discussion about the "day after," alongside a show of defiance against the US, including the President himself. It is reasonable to assume that these are indeed influencing factors. However, it appears that there are much more fundamental reasons. These pertain to an American desire for a diplomatic achievement that will advance its vision of a new regional architecture to counter the Iranian axis, prevention of the war's expansion into a regional war, and avoidance at any cost of direct confrontation with Iran which would draw US troops into conflict, in the sense of "boots on the ground."

The cornerstone of the US vision or strategy is the cessation of the war in the Gaza Strip alongside "rehabilitation" of the Palestinian Authority and its return to Gaza and advancement of the two-state idea. According to the US, cessation of the war also will allow for an end to fighting in the north against Hezbollah and advancement of a diplomatic arragement in the spirit of UN Resolution 1701. This will also enable renewal of the normalization process with Saudi Arabia, and will convince Iran to restrain its proxies, especially the Houthis.

Since halting the war in Gaza Strip is the cornerstone of the entire process, the US is willing to force Israel to stop the war even at the cost of short-changing Israel's war goals and forgoeing the full dismantling of Hamas' governing and military capabilities. The US assumes, at least so it appears, that Hamas will cease to be the sovereign power in the Gaza Strip with the return of the Palestinian Authority or the establishment of some other alternative governing structure.

It is doubtful whether US senior officials really believe in the feasibility of the return of the Palestinian Authority and in its ability to function as an effective governing body in Gaza. It can be assumed that senior officials also understand that the appointment of Mohammad Mustafa as the Palesitnian Authority's prime minister is a deception of sorts that will not lead to significant reforms in the Palestinian Authority. Therefore, it is difficult not to view the US decision to abstain from vetoing the UN resolution as reflecting something deeper, a move reminiscent of stopping Israel from destroying the Egyptian Third Field Army in the Yom Kippur War.

It seems that the motivation was the same in both cases: Preventing Israel from achieving full victory, so that it will continue to hemorrhage for many years, thus deepening its dependence on the US and establishing a reality based on patron-client relations. Perhaps we are now being exposed to a strategic, deep, cold, cynical and callous consideration whose purpose is to secure US interests even at the expense of Israel's vital interests.

If these are not the considerations guiding US action, then in that case they reflect a deep lack of understanding of processes taking place in the Middle East, and they will cause many in the region, including its close allies, to pay heavy prices.

The US decision constitutes a fatal blow to Washington's attempts to advance a regional architecture based on Saudi Arabia and the Abraham Accords countries. If the US abandons its main ally in the Middle East, what should its other allies understand about the US commitment to them?

The US tried to advance a three-way defense treaty with Saudi Arabia and Israel, however this dream now seems farther away than ever, with US allies in the Middle-East facing a broken dream, while Hamas may remain standing as the

governing body in the Gaza Strip. This will provide a strong tailwind to all elements of the resistance axis, with an emphasis on Iran, the leader of the resistance axis, as well as a tailwind to the Muslim Brotherhood and to other Jihad organizations in the region.

Iran is consolidating its power in the comfort zone the US essentially has created for it, clapping its hands in pleasure as it sees Israel becoming isolated from its allies and friends, which in turn enables Iran to continue to challenge the US through its proxies, and of course to move forward with its nuclear weapon project.

The US decision also has immediate ramifications for Hamas' motivation to advance a hostage deal. Hamas sees the growing pressure on Israel, so all it needs to do is to continue to delay its response and increase the price it demands. The US abstention and the pressure on Israel to avoid completing the operation in Rafah provide a huge tailwind to Hamas leadership in Gaza, and further consolidates the popular and political support it already has, in addition to providing a tailwind to the resistance axis not only in Gaza but also in Lebanon, and mainly in Iran.

The only US "achievement" here is damage to Prime Minister Netanyahu's political fortunes. Washington is deepening a rift with the prime minister, knowing that this may lead to elections in Israel and to establishment of a government more favorable to US ideas. This was well expressed by Vice President Kamala Harris, who drew a distinction between the prime minister and the government of Israel and the people of Israel; as well as by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, who in his speech in the Senate stated that Prime Minister Netanyahu has lost his way and then also called for new elections in Israel.

At the same time, Netanyahu's statement regarding an operation in Rafah – that he would proceed even without US approval – is problematic. Though his statement is logical, he shouldn't have exacerbated the crisis. Everyone knows that such statements are not helpful.

Overall, Washington errs in its understanding of Israeli society and politics – a matter which seems even complicated for us, Israelis. It fails to understand the current dialectic in Israeli politics, whereby harsh Israeli public criticism of the

Netanyahu governement coexists with widespread consensus regarding the goals of the war against Hamas and the necessity of achieving them. Israelis broadly oppose a return of the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip, and they have a deep lack of trust in the Palestinians and in the feasibility of a two-state solution. The majority of those who oppose Netanyahu also reject blatant US interference in Israeli politics and the attempt to impose an end to the war on Israel before the war goals are achieved.

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that US actions will not achieve their aims. On the contrary, US pressures may even increase support for Prime Minister Netanyahu. Netanyahu is likely to be perceived by the Israeli public as protecting Israel’s interests and national honor – even at the cost of escalating tensions with the administration.