The only choice Israel has

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 20.10.2023

“A War of Annihilation” – this is how James Mattis, who served as the US Secretary of Defense in the Trump administration, referred to the fight against ISIS in Mosul, Iraq. Between 2016 and 2017, the war in this region during those years was the most intense conflict in a built-up area since World War II. The destruction caused in Mosul was similar in its magnitude to what the Allies inflicted on Dresden in February 1945.

At the end of the battle in Mosul, the UN estimated that over 80% of the city, the second-largest in Iraq, was uninhabitable. A similar experience occurred in Raqqa, Syria, another stronghold of ISIS that was targeted by the U.S. military, which also ended with the label “unsuitable for human habitation.” This is the real corollary that should come with the statement that “Hamas is ISIS.”

On October 7, the Holocaust survivors’ state was attacked by the new Nazis. Their heinous plan and cruelty were on full display for the whole world to see. In this war, Israel has no choice. It must act as the Allies did in their war against the Nazis.

It’s time to dispel the myth that “the Gaza population is a victim of Hamas, which imposed itself on them.” True, not everyone there supports Hamas. There are many who do not share its ways, but the level of support for it undermines the claim that “Hamas does not represent the Palestinians.”

In the 2006 elections, Hamas won the largest share of the vote, with significant support (43%) and representation in more than half of the legislative council seats. The fear of similar results led to the postponement of elections since then.

Opinion polls over the years have indicated its popularity in the general public and especially among the residents of Gaza. Hamas represents the Palestinian ethos at its core: negating the idea of a sovereign Jewish state in the area between the sea and the river. While its military force may number “only” tens of thousands, it enjoys widespread support from the population.

These things need to be stated to balance Israel’s expectations, both on humanitarian issues and regarding the intensity of the fighting, especially

considering the cynical exploitation by Hamas of Israel's restraints and sensitivities.

Moreover, the overthrow of Hamas' rule and the destruction of its military capabilities, both defined as the goals of the Gaza war, mean that apart from dismantling of Hamas' command and control structure, we must also deal a crushing blow to its order of battle, its leaders, commanders, and field operatives. These individuals are well-entrenched, using the population as shields or taking cover in buildings that are considered immune from Israeli attack.

After the horrors we have seen, nothing should surprise us regarding their ruthlessness. We must assume that they have boobytrapped everything they could. In this reality, the challenges of warfare are numerous and complex.

Under these circumstances, it is expected that the state's authorities, its institutions, and its citizens will support the military's efforts by lifting various constraints. It is important to emphasize that there is no dilemma when choosing between adhering to international law and minimizing the risks to our forces.

The circumstances under which Israel entered the war in Gaza exempt it from dealing with what will happen in Gaza after the war. The reason for this is simple: Israel has no other choice. It must respond with overwhelming force, and let the chips fall where they may.

Any other response could potentially leave it under existential threat. Every other scenario is less severe than that. The question of what will happen after the war should concern us less than the question of what will not be present: There will be no Hamas rule, no military or terrorist capabilities threatening the State of Israel, and Gaza's humanitarian needs will not be Israel's concern.

The efforts Hamas invested in the documentation, photography, and dissemination of their horrors can shed light on one of the goals of the attack on Israel: breaking Israelis' spirit. Indeed, they sought to murder Jews for the sake of murder, to kidnap in order to use captives as human shields and bargaining chips, to carry out complex attacks to project strength and leave a historical mark, to humiliate, document, distribute – to shock and frighten the Israeli society and instill terror and fear in every Israeli.

Viewing Hamas videos or distributing them may serve their purpose. The

resilience of a united Israeli society in the face of this monstrous threat and the strengthening of the people’s spirit will thwart their efforts and allow us to eliminate the forces of evil.

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