The US peace plan’s dangerous implications

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 16.02.2024

The recent reports that a fast-track peace plan is in the works that will include a set timeline for establishing a Palestinian state, should surprise no one in Israel. As far as Washington is concerned, the Gaza war is an opportunity to herald a new Middle East with regional integration and a Palestinian state being at its core.

For President Joe Biden and his administration, pursuing this will is necessary because of domestic politics because of the ongoing criticism from within the Democratic party over his support for Israel in the war, as well as in light of his deteriorating standing in the polls.

In the months remaining until the presidential election, Biden’s people will try to present the initiative as an achievement in foreign policy and as a move that prevented a slide into a regional war, brought the countries that leaned towards the Chinese-Russian axis back into the American-Western orbit, and strengthened the US position in the Middle East, without embroiling it in war.

Even before we look into the implications of such a plan, the US needs to address the question of its feasibility.

Are the conditions in place so that it could be set in motion? Washington understands that it will not be possible to promote such a plan without first stopping the Gaza war. Ending the war is also necessary to resolve the crisis caused by the Houthis in the Red Sea and to extinguish the flare-up with Hezbollah on the northern front.

However, Israel’s leaders will not be able to end the war without three conditions being met: the return of the captives; the toppling of Hamas; and Israeli security control of the strip, which will prevent Hamas resurgence.

For the US, to address all this, there is a need for the deal it is currently pressing for. Such a deal would allow the return of the captives in exchange for ending the war and bringing in an “upgraded Palestinian Authority” that would manage

civilian affairs in the Gaza Strip, and that would supposedly be a sufficient sign of the collapse of the previous regime. The Americans, it seems, have already prepared an "incentive package" to overcome anticipated opposition from some of the players.

The main carrot Israel will get is the launch of a normalization process with Saudi Arabia. As for the Palestinian Authority, in addition to its upgraded status, it will receive diplomatic backing, resources, and a mechanism that will enable the rehabilitation of devastated Gaza.

For Qatar and Hamas, the carrot is that the war machine will become idle before it completes its job. This is in addition to the direct gain Hamas is still hoping to reap from a deal.

The plan not only ensures the survival of Hamas and preserves its remaining military, organizational, and governmental capabilities; it will also allow the organization to claim the title of having delivered to the PA and the Palestinian people, through the barbaric massacre and war crimes it committed, the highest political achievement in its history.

With the high levels of support it enjoys among the Palestinian public, this is the sure way for Hamas to seize power in the West Bank as well.

A Palestinian state established thanks to Hamas is a prize for terror. It will boost the "axis of resistance" and serve as the ultimate validation of the doctrine preached from every platform by zealous Islamists: Israel can only be defeated by force.

Initiating such a plan damages the main goal Israel seeks to achieve in this war – restoring deterrence. As Israeli security forces exact an ever-heavier price imposed on Hamas for this purpose, Israel's friends overseas have given Hamas an unprecedented political achievement.

The Palestinian Authority, which did not condemn the massacre, leads the political struggle against Israel and encourages terror activity through its payments to terrorists, continues to enjoy Washington's sympathetic ear.

Were it not for the intensive activity of the security forces in cities and refugee camps in the West Bank, thwarting Hamas terror and disrupting its networks, it is

doubtful whether the PA could have been able to stand up to it. When this is the PA's situation in the West Bank, talk of upgrading its status is detached from reality.

As for the incentives offered to Israel: With all due respect for normalization with Saudi Arabia, the Gaza war returned Israel to its core values, to the realization that it is still fighting for its existence. It must be made unequivocally clear that Israel will oppose the US initiative. It must continue to destroy Hamas' capabilities, complete the job in Rafah, increase pressure to return the captives, and not let the background noise hurt internal solidarity. This is not just a realistic and sober approach – it is also the moral call Israel has to answer as it seeks to counter evil.

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