Israel braces for long wars of attrition

written by David M. Weinberg | 05.06.2025

Why has the US under President Donald Trump failed to broker an end to the Russia-Ukraine war, an end to the Hamas war against Israel and the hostage crisis, an end to Houthi assaults on Israel, and an end to the Iranian nuclear bomb program?

Because Trump and his team have the wrong paradigm in mind. They approach everything with a pragmatist, transactional perspective. They see everything through dispassionate business eyeglasses. They think that America's enemies do the same.

Worse still, Trump thinks that the weighty economic power of America and the force of his own HUGE personality will bend adversaries to his will.

But what if America's challengers are motivated by deeper, darker purposes? What if Russia, Iran, Hamas, and the Houthis (and even the Chinese) are driven by ideological ambitions that go far beyond the calculations of economic and other cold-neutral self-interest? What if these actors are prepared for decades of war against the West, and specifically against Israel, no matter what "great deals" Trump offers them?

The latest example of such American miscalculation is the reported Trump administration proposal to shoehorn Iran's program for enrichment of uranium to atomic-bomb levels into some wacky offshore consortium of Middle East countries including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Turkey alongside the US. This would somehow dilute or restrict Iran's near-bomb-ready nuclear colossus.

But of course, Iranian dictator Ayatollah Khamenei defiantly has rejected this idea, for ideological reasons. "National independence means that the Iranian nation stands on its own feet; it means not waiting for a green or red light from others," he declared.

Iran's resolve to forge its own path without foreign interference "defines its sovereignty," he said. "We can" is a revolutionary principle taught by Imam

Khomeini, he bellowed. He proceeded to call US proposals rude, insolent, arrogant, destructive, and "deviating from the motivations and sacrifices rooted in our people's faith."

Khamenei ranted on about Zionist "crimes," with the usual formulas about Israel as a cancer in the Middle East that must and will be eliminated by Iran, and he insisted that Iran is developing all means to do so. "By definite divine decree, the Zionist regime is collapsing. God willing, the day [of its demise] is not far off."

In short, no pragmatic deal offered by the US to Iran nor any further Western sanctions against it are going to knock the Islamic Republic off its radical path, even if it bends a bit to mollify Trump for a bit. Ingrained ideological commitment for the long-term trumps short term accommodations to Trump.

The algorithm by which America and Israel's adversaries operate is attrition; long wars of attrition, informed by an ethos of sacrifice and eschatological visions of zealous, crushing victory.

AFTER OCTOBER 7, all Israeli leaders and most of the Israeli public recognize this; that the set of rules by which the worst actors in the Middle East operate are ideological, attritional, genocidal; not accommodational or transactional.

For example, Israelis understand that beyond whatever temporary accords might unfortunately be necessary to obtain the release of a few more Israeli hostages held criminally and viciously by Hamas, there are no long-term accommodations with Hamas. It must be rooted out from Gaza, Judea, and Samaria – and this means a decade (or more) of bloody warfare at varying degrees of intensity.

It means "managing the conflict" through the determined use of force in a proactive, preemptive, and persistent manner. It means no establishment of any runaway, radical, revolutionary Palestinian states.

And if there are any accommodations and reconciliations in the broader region to be had, they run through the Abraham Accords prism which purposefully and smartly sidelined the Palestinian issue.

(This is also why it is so nonsensical of France, Saudi Arabia, and others to resuscitate delusions of Palestinian statehood, specifically now. This is a recipe for devastating disappointment and escalated conflict. And of course, for the

isolation of Israel – which may be the point of the whole French-Saudi exercise.)

Similarly, Israelis understand that beyond whatever interim accords might be possible with the new Al-Jolani regime in Syria and the Aoun government in Lebanon, the IDF itself must and will continue to regularly interdict threats to Israel over the borders with these countries. Israel will not sit back for a decade or two, merely gathering intelligence on emerging threats until the threat reaches monstrous proportions (as Israel unfortunately did versus Hezbollah).

The same goes for Judea and Samaria. Nobody is under the illusion that any Palestinian "authority" can or will counteract the build-up of Iranian backed Islamic terrorist armies in these areas – which directly threaten Jerusalem and central Israel. Only the IDF can and will; thus, the full-scale Israeli military operations in places like Jenin, Tulkarm, and Nablus to resolutely rout out such threats. This is likely to be a permanent feature of Israeli policy. President Macron should take note.

The same goes for Iran. The IAEA is warning that Iran already has enriched enough uranium at near-bomb-ready levels for 6-8 nuclear bombs, and that its advanced centrifuges could do so many times over within three months' time. Thus, Israelis know that complete dismantling or military destruction of this apparatus (as well as Iran's ballistic missile empire) is necessary soon.

Half or cosmetic measures based on "trust" that purport to put the Iranian nuclear juggernaut to bed are insufficient. Especially if they ignore the missile threat and Iran's other hegemonic incursions across the region. Any such boondoggle of an American accord with Iran will force to Israel to act against Tehran on its own.

THE ENEMY wars of attrition against Israel, like the drawn-out and purposefully never-ending negotiations for hostage release, have an additional, central purpose. This is the ripping to shreds of Israeli society from within – the exacerbation of political and religious-social divisions; the exhaustion of Israeli citizens and fighters; and the sapping of a will to fight on.

Alas, this enemy strategy is highly effective. Israel is indeed increasingly drained and divided (not to mention highly taxed and exasperated with the country's leadership); although not crushingly so.

I am certain, as detailed above, that most Israelis understand the long-term ideological and civilizational nature of the battles ahead and are girding themselves for them. This, irrespective of what political changes may be wrought by an Israeli election campaign over the next year and regardless of what mistakes of accommodation/surrender might be made in the coming weeks by Western leaders.

Israelis have every reason to believe that the State of Israel can successfully reset the regional strategic architecture in positive directions – as it did once through the Abraham Accords; as it has in going a long way toward crushing Hamas and Hezbollah (which also sped forward collapse of the Russian- and Iranian-backed Assad regime in Syria); as it has in stripping Iran of its air defenses, and more.

The question is: How does one advance a deeper, more mature, more resilient, and more patient appreciation of threats and responsibilities in the Middle East among Western leaders? How does one assist them in growing a spine and backing Israel along its long path toward security and prosperity?

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