Strategic warning: Escalation ahead

written by David M. Weinberg | 11.01.2025

What does American backing for Israel mean in the current wars? Hopefully, the scope and depth of American backing will improve dramatically in the move this month from President Joe Biden to President-elect Donald Trump.

From the day that Hamas savagely attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, the Biden administration has backed Israel in its counterattack to rout Hamas and end its rule in Gaza. The US has given Israel weapons and diplomatic support, blocking dozens of anti-Israel resolutions at the UN, as well as providing negotiation services in the attempt to obtain hostage release.

At the same time, however, Washington unpardonably has insisted that Israel fuel Gaza (read: Hamas), literally and figuratively, every step of the way. It has forced Israel to supply an enemy in wartime with hundreds of thousands of tons of goods ranging from cigarettes and flour to fuel.

Everybody but everybody knows and admits (even UN chiefs and fierce anti-Israel "humanitarian" NGOs) that Hamas has absconded much if not most of the supplies trucked in by Israel, which it then sells to its "own people" (i.e., poor Palestinian civilians) at exorbitant prices – to fuel the Hamas war effort, to keep itself in power, and to continue to torture Israel as Israeli hostages die out, probably day by day.

Washington has also counterproductively restrained the Israeli military. It has been annoyingly mistaken every step of the way, riding Israel's brakes. Don't invade Gaza City, said Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan – speaking in Biden's name. Don't take Shifa Hospital. Don't enter Khan Yunis. Don't take Rafah or the Philadelphi Corridor. Don't try to move civilian populations from the battle zones. Don't use large-diameter or heavy ordnance bombs. Don't, don't, don't…

The net result of the delays and restraints imposed by America has been the grind in which the IDF now finds itself: A house-by-house slog through Hamas hideouts that is drawing precious blood with Israeli soldiers needlessly falling almost every

day – without there being a decisive result.

In the operations in northern Gaza since October aimed at clearing terrorists from Jabaliya, Beit Hanun, and Beit Lahiya – again – more than 80 soldiers have been killed. Tragic and outrageously avoidable.

And, sure enough, despite Israel's (unfortunately shackled) effort, Hamas retains administrative and terrorist capabilities in northern Gaza, as well as in southern Gaza cities like Rafah, where the IDF was forced by America to tiptoe through the tulips; not to mention the fact that the IDF has not yet operated in 30% of Gaza.

In short, Biden wanted Israel to win the war but simultaneously undermined Israel's ability to do it

All this is part of Biden's mania for regional de-escalation. After Iran fired hundreds of missiles toward Israel last April and October (assaults that fortunately were scuttled by Israeli, US and other forces), Biden warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the US "would not be involved" in any Israeli counteroffensive against Iran.

His spokesman said "We don't seek a wider war in the region. We don't seek escalated tensions in the region. We don't seek a wider conflict. We don't seek a war with Iran." More "don'ts."

America went on to assure its European and Mideast allies and the Iranians that it "was not involved" in Israel's intensive campaign of strikes against Hezbollah missile depots and military installations; "not involved" in the Israeli strike on senior Hezbollah commander Ibrahim Aqil; "not involved" in the beeper bombing of Hezbollah operatives; "not involved" in the assassinations of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran or Hezbollah chieftain Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut, etc.

Each time, the US predictably prattled that the US "was not involved," and that it "does not want to see an escalation."

You get the picture: America has not sufficiently backstopped Israel with American commitment and power in the confrontation against Iran and its terrorist proxies. Rather, its de-escalation mantra has hemmed-in and handcuffed Israel.

Like the Obama administration, the Biden-Harris administration all along and

even since October 7, still has sought to reset the region through conciliation with and concession to Iran, not confrontation. It has postured the US less as the leader of a regional coalition against Iran's so-called "axis of resistance," and more as a mediator between it and Israel.

The problem is that you cannot defeat evil, never mind truly crush Hamas alone, by posing as a mediator and fetishizing de-escalation.

FORTUNATELY, the neutering by Israel of Hezbollah and the collapse of the Iranian-backed Assad regime in Syria, as well as the stripping naked of Iranian air defenses by the IAF (a strike, once again nonsensically opposed by the US), makes space for a different policy. Even Blinken belatedly admitted this week (in a self-congratulatory New York Times interview) that Israel has wrought a "Mideast transformation." No thanks to him.

This now allows for an even more decisive reset of the regional strategic architecture; a reset that will neutralize the Iranian nuclear juggernaut and counter Iran's hegemonic march across the region.

With President-elect Donald Trump returning to the White House in ten days' time, there is reason to believe that he will give Israel room to maneuver, meaning the American backing or active collaboration necessary to truly cut Iran down to size, something that blessedly might lead to regime change in that country.

This also entails freeing Israel from the burden of fueling Hamas – what the international community naively (or mendaciously) insists on calling "humanitarian aid" to Gaza when it is far more than that. I expect that after January 20, Israel will act to deny Hamas of this supply lifeline.

The IDF will completely clear northern Gaza of civilians and re-direct civilian supplies to southern Gaza only, use massive ordnance to eliminate residual Hamas terrorist cells and infrastructures, and finally clear the way, perhaps, for Palestinian governance that is not under the Hamas thumb.

One hopes and assumes that we will not hear from Trump administration officials the insidious Kamala Harris qualifier "but" – which conditions Israel's legitimacy and strips it of the ability to defeat its enemies.

Israel “could” defend itself

OUTGOING VICE President Harris allowed that Israel “could” defend itself, “but how it does matters.” Repeatedly she said: “Israel has the right to defend itself, but too many innocent Palestinians have been killed, children, mothers…”

Each time, she went on to proclaim that Israel could fight “only” if this leads rapidly towards a two-state solution “where the Palestinians have security, self-determination, and the dignity they so rightly deserve.”

Since no one in Washington has a recipe for defeating an enemy that hides behind and beneath civilians without causing significant collateral damage, and nobody in the region any longer believes that swift establishment of a full-fledged Palestinian state would truly bring stability or peace – Kamala’s “but” and “only” lingo effectively neutered the IDF and weakened Israel.

Again, one hopes and assumes that Trump, incoming Vice President JD Vance, and Secretary of State-designate Marco Rubio will adopt an entirely different tone and more resolute policies. I suspect that is what Trump means when he says that if Hamas does not immediately release all Israeli hostages “all hell will break loose in Gaza.” Handcuffs off.

Readers should consider this article a strategic warning. The current interregnum in intense combat in Gaza, as well as what appears to be a pause in confrontation with Iran, is about to end.

Hostilities are about to escalate – yes “escalate” – purposefully and usefully so. Israel’s use of force will be overwhelming – necessarily so. The international community can and will scream about the need for “immediate” ceasefires, but Israeli leaders will ignore global received wisdom – appropriately and defiantly so.

Published in The Jerusalem Post, January 2, 2024