What was – shall be no more: Israel must shatter Hamas' hopes of a return to the Oct. 6 reality

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 17.11.2023

"The hand of the resistance is long and will reach anyone who tries to disarm it," former deputy speaker of the Hamas parliament, Ahmed Bahar, said in one of his famous speeches on the job in Gaza.

Bahar, a member of the founding generation of Hamas, and his colleagues in parliament were not there this week when Golani fighters arrived. In their place, next to the speaker's table, soldiers of Golani's 13th Battalion stood for a group photo to capture the moment before this structure too would turn into another heap of rubble.

The battalion, which lost 41 of its fighters during the surprise attack on October 7, added another milestone in the ongoing war to topple the Hamas regime.

No place to hide

At first glance, one could be forgiven for thinking that taking out the parliament building is just another symbolic strike, much like the targeting the home of Hamas political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh or raising the Israeli flag in a deserted position of Hamas. However, in the context of the ongoing military campaign, such action carries great significance.

First, this adds to hundreds of similar strikes, whose cumulative weight shapes a new reality. Second, it does not mark the end of the journey but only its beginning. Like the successful raids on the Rantisi and Shifa hospitals, here too, the IDF's action emphasizes Israel's determination and makes it clear to Hamas terrorists: Nowhere is safe.

Alongside taking control of command posts, intelligence facilities, and security installations, the IDF is intensifying attacks on the Hamas police force and local governing bodies. Neutralizing these Hamas organs is essential because it prevents Hamas from being in control or providing services to the public and

enforcing its rule.

It is crucial that Hamas' governing facilities not only be seized but also completely destroyed after being cleared. This is the way to disabuse Hamas' of its hope that Gaza will return to the days before October 7.

This must be done not only through military activity. Israel must destroy the Kerem Shalom and Erez border crossing, so as to make it clear there will never be a return to the situation in which Palestinians can enter Israel.

The same applies to the role of the District Coordination and Liaison, which still exists, and the Israeli involvement in supplying humanitarian needs to the residents of Gaza. Israel needs to do away with any practice that was in place in the pre-Oct. 7 reality. What was – shall be no more.

Pressure Qatar

The immediate goal of Hamas is to have Israel stop fighting while creating a channel that allows the terrorist organization to maximize its gains from the hostages it holds. Hamas is pinning its hopes on the Qatari mediation efforts, internal pressure in Israel on this issue, and international pressure on Israel regarding humanitarian issues.

The way it sees it, the surprise attack on Israel, along with being able to survive so far and the gains it will get for the hostages, will earn them "worldly glory" and undermine Israel's reputation as "undefeatable."

From Israel's perspective, the difficult conditions under which it entered the war left it no choice but to resort to the direct overthrow of the Hamas government and the destruction of its military capabilities. If this is not achieved, there will be consequences: Deterrence will have been lost vis-a-vis other enemies in a way that could pose an existential threat. Israel has achieved good results so far in the war, but they are not sufficient if it is to meet this challenge.

As expected, with the assistance of Qatar – whose main interest is to ensure Hamas' survival – Hamas has put out the bait and started waving with their assets to achieve their goals. While they are at it, they are trying to expunge the moral stain caused by their barbaric and inhumane action and also to increase internal divisions and pressures in Israel.

There is no worse job to be in right now than being an Israeli government official and security chief who has to decide on whether to sign off on a deal to release infants and their mothers in exchange for the release of terrorists and a several-day ceasefire.

It is almost beyond human to stay indifferent to the pictures of the abductees or the cries of their agonized family members. On the other hand, going for such a deal will come with a heavy price: risk to our soldiers.

Ceasing the fire will allow Hamas to assess the situation, reorganize, identify vulnerable points on the Israeli side, fortify, lay booby traps, and carry out attacks. Even the fuel that enters will greatly assist them. Hamas will start the next phase of the conflict from a much-improved position compared to its current situation.

Since the proposed deal does not include all the abductees, additional steps will be required until all of them are returned. Regarding this, it is worth remembering that what led to the current proposal is the pressure exerted on Hamas. Accordingly, if Israel wants to get more opportunities to secure the hostages while lowering the price of a deal and increasing its likelihood, it is crucial to continue with the military campaign while ratcheting up pressure on Qatar.

Not only has Qatar not paid a price for its continuous support for Hamas and hosting the leaders of the terrorist organization on its territory, but it has also been courted by the international community because of those ties and is taking advantage of the situation to boost its standing on the world stage.

It is time to change the policy towards Qatar by demanding that the United States act against it not only with "carrots" but also with "sticks," to reconsider its relationship with the sheikhdom – including by canceling or reducing economic, diplomatic, and military ties (one of the most important military US bases in the Middle East is less than 12 miles from where Hamas leaders hold their meetings), and imposing sanctions on all Qatari entities involved in supporting Hamas.

It is time to demand that Qatar immediately expel Hamas leaders from its territory. It's also time to have those people in Israel's crosshairs, for a potential targeted assassination.

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