

Israel must ensure regional de-escalation efforts don't lead to nuclear concessions

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 30.08.2024

“Diplomacy complements the field, and the field complements diplomacy. Together, we will move forward in such a way that the country’s national interests, complete security, and national dignity are fully realized,” summarized Abbas Araghchi, Iran’s new Foreign Minister, encapsulating Tehran’s approach to the conflict with Israel and Middle East developments.

In a series of interviews this week, Araghchi reiterated Iran’s commitment to supporting all “resistance” groups. Like other regime spokespersons, he vowed that the “Zionist terrorist action” resulting in Haniyeh’s death would not go unanswered.

The anxious anticipation of Iran’s response is taking a toll on Israel psychologically, socially, and economically - a price Iranian officials claim is intentional. Some analysts justified the delay, citing the need to complete investigations into the intelligence breach that enabled the assassination in Tehran, allow for Gaza ceasefire negotiations, and meticulously prepare operational plans to achieve precisely the desired effect - no more, no less.

Amid this turmoil, diplomatic exchanges between Doha and Tehran persisted. Mohammed Al Thani, Qatar’s Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, made an unusual visit to the Iranian capital, meeting with President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Araghchi. Media reports offer little insight into their discussions about “regional arrangement.” Particularly unclear are the concessions Iran seeks from the Americans, beyond the credit it’s already partially receiving for linking its response against Israel to Gaza ceasefire talks.

While information is scarce, indications suggest that returning the Iranian nuclear issue to the negotiating table is being considered. Statements by Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on the possibility of interacting with the enemy were

interpreted as a signal of willingness to renew negotiations with the US on the nuclear issue. Choosing Pezeshkian and Araghchi for these key positions further signals this shift in approach. Iran seeks an agreement that would ease sanctions and improve its economic situation. For its part, the Biden administration seeks to prevent a regional war, which could complicate matters ahead of the elections, and attempts to derive political and diplomatic gains from the regional situation.

A State Department spokesperson said this week: “We will judge Iran on their actions, not words. If Iran wants to demonstrate seriousness or a new approach, they should stop nuclear escalations and start meaningfully cooperating with the IAEA.” We should welcome this stance, hoping it is not just an opening move in negotiations. To some extent, it forms part of the undeclared talks. The subsequent threats by Iranian spokespersons, reiterating their commitment to respond to Israel, should be seen not only as an expression of true intentions and an attempt to preserve national dignity but also as part of indirect negotiation tactics with the US. Naturally, Israel must prepare for all response scenarios without making lenient assumptions.

Israel cannot afford to be caught off guard by talks - if indeed they are taking place - on an issue so crucial to its future. Now is the time to examine these matters through direct dialogue with US administration officials and formulate its position accordingly. Iran, too, recognizes the urgency from elements in the Biden administration to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough. We must not pay an unbearable price for this.

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