

Do “they have a point”?

written by David M. Weinberg | 23.08.2024

The pro-Hamas mobs outside the Democratic convention in Chicago must not be legitimized. Biden and Harris should be calling them out, not coddling them.

An open letter to President Biden: Stop turning a blind eye to terror

written by Ruth Wasserman Lande | 23.08.2024

Destiny has placed you, at this particular time, in a position of power and at the helm. You currently hold the reins on the stability of our region and the protection of Western values.

The US must support any Israeli counter-attack on Iran

written by Asher Fredman | 23.08.2024

Steadfast American support for an Israeli operation against Iran and Hezbollah will send a clear message to the Islamic Republic and improve overall security in the region.

How much influence does the US really have over Israel?

written by Lahav Harkov | 23.08.2024

The pullout of the vast majority of the IDF's troops from Gaza in recent days has raised questions about whether Israel's military campaign is ending with a whimper.

Amid pressure from its most important ally and weapon supplier, the US, the operation in Rafah — where Hamas's remaining battalions are located — has not yet begun. But based on the remarks made by Israel's top generals and politicians, it appears as though it will go ahead. After IDF troops left Khan Younis on Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared: "We are but a step away from victory."

Yet members of his governing coalition remain sceptical, with far-Right minister Itamar Ben-Gvir responding that "if the Prime Minister decides to end the war without a broad attack on Rafah to defeat Hamas, he won't have a mandate to continue serving." Hours later, Netanyahu released a video in which he said "there is a date" for the operation.

The continued delay of the Rafah invasion also shows that Washington has greater sway than Israel's leadership is willing to acknowledge — at least publicly. Out in the open and in meetings with Israeli officials, the White House's criticisms have grown sharper and more threatening to the alliance with Israel. Indeed, the withdrawal of troops from Khan Younis came only three days after Netanyahu and Joe Biden spoke on the phone, with the American President saying that "US policy with respect to Gaza will be determined by [its] assessment of Israel's immediate action" to improve the humanitarian situation. He also called for an "immediate ceasefire". Netanyahu's office announced the opening of more crossings for humanitarian aid hours later.

A source familiar with Netanyahu's thinking confirmed that there are several motivations behind the troop withdrawal: giving a chance for a hostage release and ceasefire deal; calming the Americans down; the beginning of Eid al-Fitr; and preparing for invading Rafah, which he said Netanyahu plans to do.

The Biden administration's influence over the war effort in Gaza is apparent: the President and his Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, have taken part in Israeli war cabinet meetings and this week's increased aid is not the first time Israel has changed its plans after meetings and conversations with White House officials.

The danger is that if this withdrawal is part of a mini-ceasefire or a brief pause, the US will try to make it permanent, as Biden administration officials have said they hoped to do in the past. Then, Israel will be faced with the choice of either going it alone, without American support, or giving in, thus allowing for Hamas's remaining brigades in Rafah to continue posing a threat.

But it should also be noted that the US continues to supply weapons to Israel, and the Biden administration has yet to set additional conditions on its military aid, despite unprecedented backing for such a policy from within the Democratic Party. The President has not backed down from his support for the war aims of eliminating the Hamas threat and bringing home the more than 130 hostages remaining in Gaza.

What's more, influence does not mean omnipotence. Biden also demanded that Netanyahu "empower his negotiators to conclude a deal without delay to bring the hostages home" — yet the deal still fell through.

The question, then, is whether this influence is such that Israel will make any major changes due to US influence, such as backing down from eliminating the final Hamas battalions in Rafah.

Recent remarks from Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer, someone so close to Netanyahu that he has been nicknamed "Bibi's brain", indicate that Jerusalem is determined to push forward regardless of the pressure from Washington.

"If Israel does not take care of Hamas in Gaza after what it did on October 7th," Dermer said, "I truly believe that this country has no future because all the buzzards circling around this country are going to think that you can pick apart this carcass [...] That's why the determination to take them out is so strong, even if it leads to a potential breach with the United States."

Published in UnHerd, April 10, 2024.

The big chill sets in, once again

written by David M. Weinberg | 23.08.2024

Israel must resist America's fantasy framework for a swift, dangerously indecisive, end to the Gaza war.

Ramifications of the Deepening Rift between the US and Israel

written by Col. (res.) Prof. Gabi Siboni | 23.08.2024

America is undermining its own interests and sabotaging advancement of a regional architecture based on Saudi Arabia and the Abraham Accords countries.

Biden has failed to understand what this war means to Israel

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 23.08.2024

The Biden administration has not internalized that for Israel, the defeat of Hamas is an existential issue. It is not like America's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which were conducted thousands of miles away.

Biden Pressure on Israel Raises Chances of Full-Scale War

written by Dr. Raphael BenLevi | 23.08.2024

Instead of pressuring Israel to stand down, President Biden should show determination toward his enemies. Only firmness will prevent escalation.

Clarifying US relations with Israel

written by Dr. David Wurmser | 23.08.2024

The United States explained the purpose of Kamala Harris' trip this week to Dubai. Among the points were that the US will have conversations with Israel to "shape the next phase of the war" in Gaza. While this is clearly further pressure on Israel to avoid greater civilian casualties - a reasonable but unnecessary request since Israel has already gone to impossible lengths to protect Palestinian civilians — it also suggests how the US expects to leverage the course of this war to affect post-war outcome.

There has been confusion regarding the nature of American support for Israel. It was the consensus in Israel in the first weeks that the United States under the Biden team had two common goals: remove Hamas and help Israel focus on the south and avoid a two-front war immediately. True enough. But Israelis of all stripes projected their hopes further and welcomed the impression that the US now "gets it" the same way as has been seared into Israel's soul through the horror of October 7. Not only that Washington "switched its diskette" on Hamas, but on Palestinians, Hizballah and Iran. As such, American actions — including moving carrier battle groups and reinforcing US bases region-wide — were assumed first to be support on helping Israel survive initial attack and second to adopt a muscular, if not even threatening policy on Iran. In essence, Israelis believed that Israel and the US were traveling along the same line, or at least two closely tracking parallel lines.

The problem is they are not.

The United States and Israel travel on intersecting and not parallel lines. The distinction is important. Parallel lines never touch, but they always run together. Intersecting lines on the other hand, converge at one point but eternally diverge afterwards. The point of convergence between the United States and Israel has now yielded to the inevitable divergence, and the strategic implications could not be graver. Moreover, the vast chasm emerging is both on the issue of Palestinians and the larger threat of Iran.

The divergence is most evident through the increasing tone of statements coming from Washington about how to “shape” this war. There is a tension — strategic and moral — between a war narrowly focused on defeating Hamas and extending the Palestinian Authority, and a broader strategic war to change Israeli security on every border let alone advance a regional defeat of Iran and its proxies, which remain the ultimate source of the problem.

Israel’s population has undergone a traumatic paradigm shift. It fights this war informed by a broader and grounded understanding of the region and its dynamics that unfortunately indicts policy on the region that both Jerusalem and Washington had indulged for the last thirty years. Washington, however, proceeds as if nothing has changed. It remains in paradigmatic stasis. It still labors under the delusion that the exit to all this is a combination of some sort of Oslo 2.0 and JCPOA 2.0 (Iran deal). Hence its engagement with Abu Mazen and its cultivated restraint and lack of meaningful responses to nearly 80 attacks on US bases across the region and regional attacks by Iran’s proxies from Yemen to Iraq.

Because the US now focuses on “the day after” plans for Gaza, and because Secretary Blinken reportedly demanded that Israel not expand the geographic parameters of the war, it has essentially made support for Israel conditional — specifically as long as the goal of the war remains laser-focused on the removal of Hamas to facilitate restoring Palestinian Authority (PA) control over Gaza.

Stripped of all the noise, essentially this is less support for Israel than support for the Palestinian Authority via Israel, while ignoring Hizballah and Iran. The US is using this war — and all Israel’s sacrifice — to revive Oslo by making Palestine safe for Abu Mazen.

For the US, this is a war to save a paradigm in Washington. For Israel, it is a war

for survival against a vast Iranian threat and Palestinian irridentism. As long as the United States fails to appreciate the war in this context, then it bodes ill about the future of Israeli American relations.

Or does it?

In my many years as a senior US official dealing with Israeli officials, it always struck me that they regard State Department corridor messages as the definitive word on US policy for Israel. Yet, Americans strongly support Israel. Congressional support is strong and growing. No President can afford to abandon Israel as long as the American people view it as a close ally fighting darkness. The belief Israel is acting fiercely to defend its independence and freedom — alone if necessary - taps into classic American imagination in popular culture as the epic hero. The irony missed often by Israelis is that the more they act in deference to the State Department, the more they damage their brand in the American public's psyche, and the more they surrender popular support now and affinity in the long run.

The President does have a problem with progressives' pressure to confront Israel. As long as Israel defers to American demands, it yields the field to progressives to dominate cost-free. If however, this president is forced to choose, the Democratic leadership understands that the party will lose swing districts in the 2024 Congressional elections as well as possibly the White House. Progressives cannot deliver the floating center of American politics. They have nowhere else to go; centrist liberals do.

As such, Israeli deference is self-defeating. Israel suffers self-deterrence.

The stakes could not be higher. Israel must decisively win this war, secure its citizenry country-wide, strategically devastate Iran's regional reputation, and establish Israel as a powerful regional actor. The viability of the state depends on it.

Published in The Institute for A Secure America, December 4, 2023.

Honoring Henry Kissinger at 100

written by David M. Weinberg | 23.08.2024

His record regarding Jews and Israel remains controversial, but I think that on balance Kissinger deserves respect.