

The truce lasted long enough

written by David M. Weinberg | 01.12.2023

It is neither easy nor politically correct to say so, but the serial truces Israel has accepted to obtain hostage releases from Hamas have run their course. At this point, their long-term disadvantage outweighs the immediate advantage achieved. Therefore, it is time to reengage the enemy in full-scale combat until its complete destruction.

Every Israeli man, woman, and child saved from the savagery of Hamas captivity is of course a joyous achievement, a moral priority that the State of Israel could not ignore even if it meant giving momentary victory to the barbarian captors. But the escalating cost of freezing the war against Hamas makes it imperative that Israel now revert to all-out assault on the enemy.

The repeat "pauses" in the war that Israel has agreed to are extraordinarily dangerous on many levels. First, the IDF has lost momentum in prosecuting its ground campaign against Hamas, a crushing offensive that was grinding Gaza into rubble and throwing Hamas military forces off-kilter.

The senior-most IDF commanders in the field whom I met this week in the Gaza envelope are taking good advantage of the pauses for reequipment and reorganization but are also struggling with the challenge of keeping their troops sharp and focused.

Worse than this is the fact that the enemy is reorganizing and getting resupplied and refueled. Worse yet still, Hamas has risen from its underground bunkers to conduct detailed surveillance of IDF formations deep inside Gaza, marking every IDF nighttime depot, troop headquarters, supply route, and so on.

There is significant reason to fear that at the moment the battle is reengaged, Hamas terrorists will pop out of terror attack tunnels inside the operational bases the IDF has built in Gaza. They will attempt, G-d forbid, to capture more Israeli soldiers or kill as many as possible.

Furthermore, after losing control over northern Gaza and widely seen to be on the run, Hamas is now displaying renewed near-sovereign control over Gaza. It is again demonstrating management of Gazan civil affairs including distribution of

the food, water, and medical supplies flowing in from Egypt.

It is openly flaunting its fighters in full uniform and black/green celebratory colors in the ghastly nightly torture show of releasing Israeli hostages, to the whooping adulations of hundreds of “innocent, uninvolved” Gazan civilians.

Instead of erasing Hamas’s control of the Gaza Strip – which is a key goal of Israel’s war effort – the hostage-negotiation horror show into which Israel has been dragged is reinforcing Hamas’s control. Instead of making it clear that Hamas is not a “partner” for anything at all in Israel-Palestinian futures, the hostage-release horror show is bolstering Hamas claims of a central role in Israel-Palestinian futures.

One outrageous, inflammatory example of this could be seen in videos of the 200-plus trucks of humanitarian aid that convoyed into Gaza every day this week. Somehow, wondrously, every single truck was draped with brand-new banners of the Hamas movement, proclaiming the splendid achievements of the current “Al Aqsa War” replete with pictures of the golden Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar.

Wouldn’t it have been more appropriate for Israel and the oh-so-concerned-about-Gaza-civilians international community, which funded and provided the truckloads of aid, to prevent the glorification and fortification of Hamas in this way?

At the same time, Hamas is gaining military steam and deepening its sway in West Bank politics. The IDF indeed is operating aggressively every night in Judea and Samaria to interdict Hamas terrorist assemblies, seize armories, destroy weapons factories, and arrest or eliminate Hamas operatives, but by all accounts, the pauses in the Gaza battle only add luster and motivation to Hamas fortunes beyond Gaza.

Then there is Qatar, the ferocious, two-faced financial backer and patron of Hamas that now is adding to its swagger and stature as hostage-release mediator. Israel is making a gargantuan mistake by playing into Qatar’s game. Israel (and the US) never should have agreed to negotiations in Doha, only with representatives of Qatar in Israel or a third country.

Instead of sending the Mossad chief to indirectly negotiate with Hamas chiefs in Qatar, Israel should be sending Mossad operatives to assassinate Hamas leaders

in Qatar. Instead of strengthening Qatar's heft in the region, Israel (and the US) should be acting to crush Qatar's hoist.

This again is an example of how the long-term disadvantages of truce and tortuous drip-drip hostage release outweigh the immediate advantages offered.

At this point, the only additional hostage-release deal that Israel should consider is a deal for the release of all Israeli hostages in one fell swoop, a deal that can and will come about only when Hamas is under the fiercest and most crushing weight of IDF attack. Only when Sinwar and his henchmen are truly on the brink of elimination and Gaza is about to be pulverized into oblivion for eternity - only when Israel truly threatens real "humanitarian disaster" in Gaza - might Hamas be willing to make a grand deal.

(What the price of that deal might be, in terms of letting Sinwar and his gang flee Gaza alive or in terms of letting the worst Palestinian terrorists out of Israeli jails and expelling them en masse to, say, Turkey - well, that is another, difficult discussion.)

THIS IS THE PLACE to reassert Israel's legitimate war goals, which have been badly undermined, alas, by this past week of horrifying Hamas hangdogging and hesitant, humiliating (although humane) Israeli responses.

Israel legitimately seeks to eliminate Hamas rule in Gaza, to kill or expel all Hamas fighters and their supporting administrators from Gaza, to destroy all components of military threat in and from Gaza, to reduce Gaza neighborhoods from which Hamas operated to rubble (as a matter of principle and not just for military advantage - and no, this is not a war crime), to create a new security buffer zone inside Gaza and along its entire perimeter (including the Philadelphi corridor on the border with Egypt) that Israel would control indefinitely, and, of course, to facilitate the return to normal, peaceful life of the 40+ Israeli farming villages and cities in the Gaza envelope/northern Negev.

And yes, Israel also seeks to secure by force the release of all Israeli hostages held by Hamas and its terrorist allies - as many as possible, without any more poisonous pauses or tortuous truces.

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