

Rethinking the region

written by Ruth Wasserman Lande | 29.12.2023

Eighty days have passed since the horrific events of October 7 and we are now in the second month of the IDF's ground operation in Gaza which they are carrying out with significant achievements, while simultaneously maintaining a high ethical standard consistent with international law.

Nonetheless, it appears that the Hamas is nowhere near surrendering, nor even willing to negotiate the release of Israeli hostages still held in Gaza. It is hence our duty to closely examine why this is so and whether Israeli policies should be recalculated accordingly.

Recently, a delegation of senior Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) officials visited Egypt and met with President Abdel Fattah Sisi and his men, following a long period in which it had seemed that Qatar had the lead in everything concerning the negotiations for the abductees. Following the visit, Cairo announced a new, three phase road map regarding the hostages, the cessation of fighting, and the question of the continuity of Hamas rule.

It appears that for the two terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, as well as for Hamas's Qatari patron, it was important to honor Egypt. The important question is: Why? Is this an attempt to once again put Egypt center stage while promising that Gazan citizens will not be allowed to cross the border into Egyptian territory, in exchange for a certain degree of freedom of maneuver for the Hamas leaders through the Philadelphi Corridor?

October 7 obliges us to re-examine every aspect of our policies. We must toughen Israel's position somewhat - first, as far as the supervision of the Philadelphi Corridor is concerned. It is crucial to increase supervision of the Egyptian soldiers posted on the border and to put an end to the bribes they receive from Hamas.

No tunnels - whether for smuggling or for terror - should be allowed to remain, and there should be a clear Israeli military presence on the Gazan side of the border, to make sure that there is no future reconstruction.

The official Israeli position towards Egypt was and remains extremely respectful and cautious, as it should.

However, following more than four decades of peace between the countries, the time has come to demand a fundamental change in Egypt's educational curriculum and in the messages that are conveyed to the Egyptian public, most of whom still hate Israel. Although elementary schools in Egypt have already made significant changes, with blatantly antisemitic and anti-Israel material having been removed from textbooks, this is not enough. It is important to also speed up the process in middle and high schools, and to start monitoring antisemitism more closely in universities, as well as in the professional syndicates throughout Egypt, such as the lawyers and the teachers unions.

The time has come for the Egyptian regime to become proactive and systematic in this, even as the "street," which is highly hostile to Israel, exerts pressure to be "anti-Israel," an attitude which is often contrary to its best interest. Fair practice and mutual tolerance in education must be demanded. Respect begets respect.

Jordan, for its part, is collapsing under the burden of the Syrian refugees who have settled within its borders in recent years. The Iranian militias have been trying, rather successfully, to make a name for themselves in Jordan for several years and are shamelessly encouraging the smuggling of drugs and munitions to and from Lebanon and Syria.

The regime in Jordan is weak, fears for its stability, and relies significantly on Israel and the US. The countries of the region that aspire to regional stability, including Israel, have every interest in supporting the Hashemite Kingdom, despite its frequent blatant accusations against Israel, yet perhaps a slightly different angle needs to be adopted by Jerusalem.

Perhaps it is time to support the leadership in Jordan, as well as its people, by helping to rehabilitate the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in refugee camps on Jordanian territory. These serve as terrorist nests that threaten not only Israel but also the stability of the Jordanian regime itself.

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, in Judea and Samaria, and in Jordan, have been held in a huge number of refugee camps for years by the United Nations and the international arena. Imagine what could be done with all the funding endlessly invested in maintaining those camps. How many sustainable sources of income could be derived from it? How many employment opportunities created? How many lives rehabilitated? How much terror activity diverted into productive

action?

Moreover, in Jordan even more than in Egypt, the incitement and intolerance to Jews, Israel and the West apparent in educational material are appalling, disseminating hatred and vengeance. It is high time that the Israeli and the American continued support for the kingdom be linked to a fundamental change in the curriculum.

Another important anchor is Qatar. Evidently, it must be characterized as a terror-supporting country unless it obliges Hamas - immediately and without conditions - to return all the Israeli abductees. Sounds impossible? Quite the opposite! It requires the mobilization of all Israeli decision-makers, as well as all the Jewish influencers and the help of Israel's non-Jewish friends in the US, and just a little bit of courage. The US has the leverage.

One last thought: If humanitarian aid stops coming into the Gaza Strip, Hamas will surrender, as it will no longer have the food and the medicine which it steals from its own people nor the fuel with which to power its continue military resistance. As long as supplies continue to pour in, Hamas will continue to fight and will refrain from releasing the abductees until it may be too late.

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