

Alas, the US is “not involved”

written by David M. Weinberg | 30.09.2024

This week, White House national security spokesperson John Kirby denied any US “involvement” in Israel’s intensive campaign of strikes against Hezbollah missile depots and military installations. And he urged “de-escalation.” The Pentagon deputy press secretary Sabrina Singh similarly emphasized that the US military has “no involvement” in Israel’s Lebanon operations.

Last Friday, Kirby assured Israel’s enemies and the oh-so-concerned world that there was “no US involvement” in the Israeli strike on a senior Hezbollah commander, Ibrahim Aqil. “We’ll let the IDF speak to their operations. I am certainly not aware of any pre-notification (to the US) of those strikes.”

White House Middle East czar Brett McGurk offered lukewarm acceptance of Israel’s targeted assassination of Aqil. (After all, the US had a \$7 million bounty on his head for his role in the 1983 bombing of the US embassy in Beirut.) But he followed-up quickly by distancing the US from Israel with a “that said” modifier. “That said, we have disagreements with the Israelis on tactics and how you kind of measure escalation risk.”

When pagers belonging to Hezbollah operatives in Lebanon exploded two weeks ago, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller also averred to every willing listener that America was “not involved” and had “no advance knowledge” of the operation.

“We’re collecting information in the same way that journalists are across the world to gather the facts about what might have happened,” he blathered. Miller added several additional sentences of protest to make sure that nobody could think - nobody at all G-d forbid - that Washington was on board with the beeper blasts attributed to Israel.

After Israel eliminated Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Teheran, John Kirby predictably prattled that the US “was not involved,” and “we don’t want to see an escalation.” Defense Department spokesperson Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said, “We’re trying to send a message, which is we’re looking to de-escalate the situation.”

After Iran fired hundreds of missiles towards Israel on April 13 (an assault that

fortunately was scuttled by Israeli and US and other forces), US President Joe Biden warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the US “would not be involved” in any Israeli counteroffensive against Iran.

Kirby, once again professing US innocence and peaceful intentions, was particularly verbose: “As the president has said many times, we don’t seek a wider war in the region. We don’t seek escalated tensions in the region. We don’t seek a wider conflict. We don’t seek a war with Iran. And I think I will leave it at that,” he added.

When Israel nevertheless conducted a limited retaliatory strike on a radar facility inside Iran, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken declined to confirm reports that Washington was notified of Israeli plans shortly before the attack. “I’m not going to speak to that except to say that the US has not been involved in any offensive operations. Our focus has been on, of course, making sure that Israel can effectively defend itself, but also de-escalating tensions, avoiding conflict,” Blinken said.

YOU GET the picture: America is not really backstopping Israel with American commitment and power in the confrontation against Iran and its terrorist proxies.

Instead, the Biden administration repeatedly swears on the graves of American mothers and before every international forum that it is “not involved” in Israeli military operations. And it is discombobulated by a de-escalation mantra that is hemming-in and handcuffing Israel.

This is based on a fanciful American dream that a hostage deal and an end to Israel’s assault on Hamas will lead to quiet with Hezbollah and the Houthis, calm in the West Bank and Jordan, and new US understandings with Iran. And magically also lower oil prices on global markets.

Alas, the Biden-Harris administration is still seeking to reset the region through conciliation with and concession to Iran, not confrontation. That is why Washington once again is quietly negotiating with Iran (reportedly in Qatar and Oman) over contours of a new nuclear deal, a deal that will launder Iran’s massive violations of all previous nuclear accords and allow it to remain a near-nuclear-weapons state.

This completely ignores the fact that Iran does not hide its overarching

revolutionary and genocidal ambitions: to export its brand of radical Islamism globally, to dominate the region, to destroy Israel, and to subdue the US.

THE PROBLEM is that you cannot defeat evil by “riding the brakes” (per Prof. Gil Troy) or by “fetishizing de-escalation” (per US grand strategist Prof. Edward Luttwak).

What is needed is US determination to neutralize the Iranian nuclear juggernaut, to counter Iran’s hegemonic march across the region, and to thwart Iran’s proxies. Needed is a strategic reset based on overwhelming American power, on the presentation of a credible US military threat against Iran, at least. Not on weak-kneed US protestations of non-involvement in Israel’s wars, or soft understandings between Washington and Teheran.

In this regard, “de-escalation” is the wrong goal. From Israel’s long-term perspective – especially after the October 7 attack, Hezbollah’s entry into the war, and Iran’s attempts to ignite a third intifada in Judea and Samaria – escalation of the confrontation with Iran is inevitable, and at this point even preferable.

Indeed, it has dawned on Israelis and their leaders that this country faces a decade or more of a war of attrition against Iran and its proxy armies, and that an escalation in strikes on these enemies is necessary, not something to shy away from.

Israel cannot live with an Iranian “ring of fire” around its neck. Washington should not countenance this either. If there is a path to peace and stability in the Middle East, it requires enhancing the firepower of America and its allies, not redoubling the pursuit of “de-escalation.”

Alas, “Biden’s mania for de-escalation has prevented Jerusalem from deploying its assets to maximum effect in the current wars,” writes the intrepid American analyst Dr. Michael Doran. Worse still, “the Biden administration has postured the US in this war less as the leader of a regional coalition against the ‘Axis of Resistance,’ and more as a mediator between it and Israel.”

IN THE MEANTIME, Washington wags along with global media elites have reversed causality in their commentary on the wars that Israel is fighting. According to them, it is Israel that has “escalated tensions” with the Palestinians, “escalated conflict” with Hezbollah, “risked escalation” with the Houthis in

Yemen, and may yet initiate a “major escalation” with Iran.

Notice the pattern: Wherever Israel defends itself against aggression from these bad actors, it is accused of “escalation.” Much like its equally annoying cousin “disproportionate,” the term “escalation” is a synonym for “unacceptable” Israeli self-defense.

On his Substack blog called “Clarity,” former Israeli ambassador to the US Michael Oren goes one step further. He draws attention to worrying new diplomatic language that essentially guts Israel’s ability to defend itself.

Vice President Kamala Harris, for example, allows that Israel can defend itself, “but how it does matters.” Israel can defend itself, but only if it does not kill too many of the bad guys. Israel can exist, “but we must have a two-state solution.... where the Palestinians have security, self-determination, and the dignity they so rightly deserve.”

Harris’s new boilerplate subjects Israel’s right to self-defense and sovereignty to conditions (like a ceasefire and a hostage deal and “urgent” Palestinian statehood), few of which realistically can be met in the medium-term future.

And as Ambassador Oren notes, the biggest “but” pertains to the way Israel defends itself. The implication of Kamala’s “but” is that Israel must remain defenseless unless it can defeat terrorists without causing large numbers of civilian casualties.

“Israel has the right to defend itself, but too many innocent Palestinians have been killed, children, mothers...” the Vice President exclaims. Since no one in Washington or elsewhere in the world has a recipe for defeating an enemy that hides behind and beneath civilians without causing significant collateral damage, this “but” effectively neuters the IDF.

The “how it does matters” condition also is rapidly gaining prominence in relation to the fight against Hezbollah in Lebanon. The liberal media already is accusing Israel of wreaking excessive damage to Lebanon and its civilians, and risking – you guessed it! – the feared and condemnable “escalation.”

Israel must wage war against this “but.” It is an insidious qualifier which conditions Israel’s legitimacy and strips Israel of the ability to defeat its enemies.

Published in The Jerusalem Post, September 27, 2024 and Israel Hayom,
September 30, 2024.