

Getting strategically “unstuck”

written by David M. Weinberg | 04.08.2024

October 7 (Hamas’ invasion of Israel) and April 14 (Iran’s missile attack on Israel) demand that Jerusalem free itself from stale strategic paradigms. The targeted killings of Iran-backed terrorist leaders on July 30/31 suggest that Israel is indeed doing so.

They suggest that Israel is getting strategically “unstuck.” Israeli political and military leadership seems to finally realize that Israel has no choice but to confront across-the-board Iran’s 40-years-long and rapidly escalating war against it. Would the rest of the West awaken to this reality - *halevai!*

The screeching strategic reality is that Iran has catapulted to stratospheric plateaus its hegemonic drive to dominate the Middle East and suffocate Israel. It is doing so through Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis; through its massive missile attack on Israel directly from Iranian soil; and through its looming breakout to nuclear weapon capacity.

Just by way of example, remember that Hezbollah (Iran) still has 180,000 missiles, rockets and UAVs in Lebanon aimed at Israel, and northern Israel has been depopulated and devastated. This can no longer be waited out or ignored.

Yes, the remarkable intelligence and operational capabilities demonstrated this week in the two pinpoint assassinations of key enemies (note: enemies of the West as well) is an important marker in the effort to restore Israel’s deterrent posture after the collapse of October 7.

But the justified, successful kills do not change the overall strategic picture, nor will the strikes alone sufficiently vitiate the grand Iranian region-wide assault on Israel (and the West). If anything, the assassination in Beirut of Fuad Shukr, Hezbollah’s chief of staff, draws nearer the date of activation of the terrorist group’s arsenal. So be it, along with the necessary Israeli campaign to crush Hezbollah.

Understand: The worst possible thing is that a perception of Israel as “being stuck” takes root in Tehran and/or around the world. The unhealthiest situation involves Israel being “stuck,” not moving forward, in crushing Hamas in Gaza, in

confronting Hezbollah in Lebanon, in suppressing terror cells in Judea and Samaria, in targeting IRGC emplacements in Syria, and in sabotaging nuclear facilities in Iran.

Being stuck is also a situation where Israel is diplomatically or militarily hampered in every direction by well-meaning but weak allies; by allies who fool themselves into thinking that Iran (with its Russian backer) is not already engaged in WWII against the West; by allies who prioritize temporary quiet over sustainable victory. This is an unacceptable, perilous position for Israel to be in.

Alas, Israel's strategic goals have become too limited in recent decades, hamstrung by the failed Oslo peace process with Palestinians and the failed Obama peace process with Iranians. These gambits emphasized quiet, co-option, deflation, and survival, at the expense of principle, dominance, and victory. They bought about cowering postures instead of appropriately necessary offensive ones.

As a result, even at this very moment Israel is being pressed by its fainthearted friends to abandon its goal of liquidating Hamas; to instead prioritize humanitarian provisions to the enemy population; and to acquiesce in the release of Palestinian terrorists and butchers (including the "Nukhba" marauders of Hamas).

Israel also is being pressed to absorb Hezbollah's continued blows and to settle for another worthless, airy-fairy diplomatic "settlement" that will only perpetuate the Iranian threat from southern Lebanon, and to refrain from "escalatory retaliation" to whatever response Iran now dishes out to the July 30/31 assassinations.

Were they to be adopted, these policies taken together amount to a grand strategic defeat for Israel. They constitute a straitjacket that puts Israeli survival - yes, Israel's very survival! - at risk; that brings into question its power to persevere as an independent nation in the Middle East. Were they to be adopted by Jerusalem, these policies inevitably would crash Israel as a resilient, buoyant society and a prosperous, leading economy that contributes so much to the world.

The Biden administration's ongoing campaign to delay, dissuade, and eventually preclude further military conquest in Gaza; and to delay, dissuade, and eventually preclude further confrontation with Iran - accompanied by persistent threats to

deny Israeli diplomatic backing and weapons if Jerusalem does not heed Washington's warnings - are formulas for grand defeat. And as such, they must be resisted.

President Biden's reported advice to Israel (after April 14) - to "take the win," as it were; to suck-up its indignation; to rely on Western sanctions against Iran alone as "smart retaliation"; and in general, to "avoid escalation" - is dangerous advice.

And, compounding the American failure to deter Iran from directly attacking Israel, Biden and his Secretary of State Anthony Blinken have now hampered the likelihood of any strategic win against Iran by yet again piously (and foolishly) declaring that America seeks no confrontation with Iran, and that Washington had nothing to do with Israel's targeted strikes on terrorist leaders. This is strategic insanity of grandiose proportions!

When America fears escalation more than Iran does, the path towards grand Western defeat is clear. If Israel fears escalation more than Iran does, Tehran will march all the way to Jerusalem with even greater and grander attacks.

ALAS, there is a great disconnect between the way Israel sees the current war(s) and the way they are viewed abroad. The gap is enormous, serious, and terrifying.

Around the world, most leaders view the current conflicts as dangerous conflagrations (with a terrible humanitarian cost) that need to be ended quickly, with a swift return to diplomatic agreements (whether regarding the Palestinians, or Iran, or whatever).

However, for almost all Israelis, it has finally dawned on them that the country stands before a long war of attrition; a war for existential survival; a war at the cusp of a "clash of civilizations," of "Western civilization against barbarism" (as Netanyahu said Congress last week); of a decades-long war that, with ups and downs, pauses and shaky ceasefires - must escalate in order to crush the Iranian juggernaut.

That is the lesson Israelis have learned from mostly turning a blind eye in recent decades to the military buildup on Israel's southern and northern borders under the auspices of Iran. Turning this back cannot be done in a short time. Security will come through long battles (like the ten-month-long slog through Gaza, still unfinished) and eventual unequivocal defeat of Israel's enemies, not hollow

diplomatic agreements or guarantees.

Therefore, while Israel can and will negotiate here and there for respites and breaks in the conflicts (and hopefully for freedom for the Hamas-held Israeli hostages), the overall vector is one of long warfare against Iran and its proxies. Patience and resilience are needed for a long struggle.

Israel's enemies certainly understand things this way. Iran's Khamenei, Hezbollah's Nasrallah, Hamas' (now demised) Haniyeh, and the Houthis' Abdul Malik al-Houthi explicitly have declared the current fighting as the beginning of a long war of attrition which they intend to pursue for as long as it takes until Israel's elimination.

THE WAKE-UP call for Israelis is multi-level. It begins with discovery of the IDF's hollowness and weakness (evident by the failures of October 7, and lack of preparation for long, hard war against Hamas and Hezbollah) and the failed diplomatic paradigms held by a broad spectrum of Israel's political leaders. It continues with the shock of omnipresent antisemitic and anti-Israel protests worldwide.

But most of all, the wake-up call for Israelis lies in their discovery that the Western "liberal" mindset is incapable of recognizing the need for WWII-style crushing military "victories" over enemies who openly declare themselves on jihad with genocidal aims against Israel and the West, with every intention to grind away at it relentlessly "forever."

For most Westerners (including many Jews and some Israelis), this presentation of the situation (that a "forever war" is underway) is anathema - because it involves the inevitable use of escalating military force rather than constant diplomatic compromise - and because it is, well, scary.

And because prevailing in this struggle requires deep ideological commitment and willingness to sacrifice for principle, which are traits so lacking in today's Western post-religious, post-ideological, heavily materialistic world. And because nobody likes to be told by Jews that principles and liberties have to be defended.

Israel can no longer be hemmed in by such frailty. Perhaps the strikes of July 30/31 are the beginning of Israel's emancipation from the impossible military and diplomatic handcuffs that Washington and others have sought to slap on

Jerusalem.

Published in The Jerusalem Post, August 2, 2024 and Israel Hayom, August 7, 2024.