

Israel's twilight zone: Jewish State needs decisive action, from Gaza to Iran

written by David M. Weinberg | 27.04.2025

Being “in between” is never comfortable. The nebulous, indeterminate space between one place and another, one time zone and the next, one period and a new era, one approach and a wholly different policy – often is marked by hesitation, confusion, and blunder.

In Jewish tradition and religious law, this is called *bein hashemashot* (literally, between the suns or between days), meaning the “twilight” period between sundown and full nightfall, which is marked by the clear emergence of stars in the sky. It is a time where halachic decision-making is indeterminate and confusing. Things can go any which way.

The State of Israel finds itself in such a strategic moment: In a murky twilight zone with critical security clocks ticking on all fronts, from Gaza to Iran. And political clocks in Washington and Jerusalem, too. A time where things might go in one or more of several directions, with ferociously clashing and contrary implications.

Israel stands at a crossroads between renewed full-scale warfare and complete cessation of warfare in Gaza; between decent and disastrous ends to the hostage saga; between massive military assault on Iran's nuclear bomb infrastructure and diplomatic dealing that once again lets the terrorism sponsor off the hook; between solidification and disintegration of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition government; and between cold and hot civil war in Israeli politics.

The muddled situation cannot hold for too long on any of these fronts. If forceful foreign decision-making, force majeure, or forced errors do not sort things out, Israel will have to determine its fortunes by bold action. Indeed, the entire strategic balance of the region for decades going forward is on the scales, making this an even more acute inflexion point.

Holding the most influential and simultaneously ambiguous set of cards is US President Donald Trump. He is resupplying Israel with colossal amounts of needed weaponry with which to annihilate Hamas, supporting depopulation of Gaza (“humanitarian resettlement” of Gazans), and urging Israel to “get the job done.”

Conversely and contradictorily, he wants “all hostages released immediately” and the war “to be over fast” – and the only way to do this is to lose the war and let Hamas live on to fight another day.

He swears that he will bring a swift end to Iran’s hegemonic ambitions and abilities with military demolition of Iran in the offing. Then he backpedals to “nice” negotiations with the Islamic Republic toward a deal that may preserve Iran’s latent nuclear weapons capabilities, which will facilitate simple reconstitution of its bomb program in the future, and which may not push back against the other elements of Iranian power (missiles, proxies, terror networks).

Such juggling or perhaps purposeful opacity of policy is fine for a while. It may even be crafty for a truly short while. But it is not clear to me that Trump fully comprehends the urgency of the moment and the very brief window of opportunity that exists for definitive action.

Does he understand that enemy strategy, from Khan Yunis to Tehran to Moscow, is to drag things out while strengthening its own offensive abilities and disordering American-Western-Israeli systems?

This is my greatest fear: That overextension of the current *bein hashemashot* period, this imprecise twilight zone, will drive further fragmentation on the strategic and political levels. That hesitation in confronting enemies and hubris in coddling enemies will lead to collapse in US-Israel ties and to breakdown in Israeli society and politics – which of course is exactly what the enemy is hoping for.

In the meantime, there are signs of dissolution everywhere. In Washington, pro-Iranian and isolationist forces are disseminating lies about the “disaster” that would result from US military action against Iran (Tucker Carlson: “Thousands of Americans would almost certainly be killed at bases throughout the Middle East.”) This eats away at Trump’s maneuvering room versus Iran.

Trump's negotiator Steve Witkoff talks about namby-pamby interim deals and many months of talks ahead, and retracts America's redlines regarding Iranian uranium enrichment every time he opens his mouth. This gives Iran what it most wants - more time to "break out" toward a nuclear bomb - as well as a shot of confidence that it once again can bamboozle over-eager American envoys.

What happened to Trump's declared two-month deadline for a deal with Iran "or else there will be bombing, and it will be bombing the likes of which they have never seen before," or his warning to hold Iran responsible for Houthi attacks from Yemen?

And thus underway is a dangerous decaying of America's deterrent power.

Protests against Netanyahu continue

In Tel Aviv, anti-Netanyahu protesters are calling for an end to his "war criminal" leadership and "illegal" wars, and are demanding that the legal system usurp power from the Israeli government by declaring the prime minister "unfit" for office. Any next decisions Netanyahu might take in war and peace already have been deemed illegitimate by the increasingly (rhetorically) violent opposition campaigns.

The government is again pushing controversial legal reforms, it could fall this summer over the haredi draft issue, and it anyway only has one year on the clock until mandatory elections.

The IDF finds itself trapped between the contradictory goals of freeing hostages, crushing Hamas, facilitating food supply in Gaza, and facilitating the exit of Gazans. It must keep many reserve troops at high-level for Gaza deployment and to handle an all-front escalation in case of fuller confrontation with Iran. But it has no clear instructions about unleashing its full force.

And thus underway is a dangerous decomposing of Israel's political stability and military coherence.

It is true that in grand strategic perspective, Israel is in a much better place now than it was 19 months ago - with Hamas on the defensive, Hezbollah decapitated, Iranian air defenses eviscerated, the IDF bulking up, and so on.

And it is also true that with a little more patience, Israel could yet emerge even more strategically ascendant in the region. And that preserving Israel's strategic alliance with America and delicate relationship with Trump may demand additional forbearance.

But it is hard to be patient with any degree of comfort in the twilight zone. Indecision is unnerving, vacillation is disheartening, and dillydallying is destructive, especially on the home front. Daybreak or nightfall will soon be upon us, and willy-nilly it will be time for forthright, audacious moves.

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