



Swords of Iron: There Is No “Political Hourglass,” But Clear Decisions Are Required

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Unlike during previous conflicts, Israel is not constrained this time by a “political hourglass” and it would be wise to remove this concern from the table if a decisive outcome in the ground operation against Hamas is to be achieved. The ability to maintain this situation over time is in Israel’s hands. Seven clear decisions, detailed below, will be required to strengthen Israel’s hand, along with the establishment of mechanisms necessary for their implementation.

Hamas’s surprise attack on October 7, 2023, fundamentally changed Israel’s strategic situation. Premises based on past events are not applicable to the new situation and hinder strategic and moral clarity. One of these outdated premises is the focus on the “political hourglass,” meaning the continuous assessment of international limitations on Israel’s ability to conduct military operations.

This fundamental change is driven by several factors.

First is the nature of the enemy. Hamas has revealed its true face. It is not just a terrorist organization, as it is labeled on numerous lists worldwide. It is an entity that conducts crimes against humanity and is committed to genocide. Experts in the field argue that as in the Srebrenica massacre of 1995, even if its execution of the destruction of a people was local and not absolute, Hamas’s intentions and actions meet this criterion.

That being the case, Israel has both the current circumstances and historical experience to justify destroying the organization's ability to conduct terrorism and to bring its leaders to justice for their genocidal intentions. This is a justifiable war of self-defense such as has not been seen since World War II.

The second parameter is the approach of the United States. Its leadership has a clear understanding of the nature of the enemy and the context of the threat. For them, this is a "9/11 moment." The historical commitment of the United States to the existence of Israel was established for just such moments. While not everyone in the diverse and polarized American society agrees, the mainstream supports Israel and its actions, with President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken at the forefront, committed to Israel's security and future. The American commitment to the defensive war to destroy Hamas's capabilities is so high that the United States has made the unprecedented moves of deploying forces in a threatening and aggressive posture against Hezbollah and other members of the coalition with the Iranians in order to deter them from interfering with the targeting of Hamas and the transfer of vital ammunition to Israel. The political and military leadership of the United States are serving as top advisors to the Israeli political and security leadership guiding them in the making of the decisions that will be required to eliminate Hamas.

The third parameter is the scope of the conflict. Iran and Hezbollah have been closely monitoring the extreme miscalculation displayed by the Hamas leadership in Gaza over the course of the surprise attack. They are not willing to waste strategic assets that exist primarily to protect their own survival and operational capabilities in order to save Hamas, especially when there is an American threat looming over them. In this situation, decisive action to destroy Hamas's capabilities will deter Iran and Hezbollah from interfering in the conflict. The anticipated demonstration of strength by the IDF against Hamas in Gaza should cool Nasrallah's eagerness to test Israel's capabilities, especially when it comes to risking the organization's senior leadership.

The fourth parameter is the regional situation. Moderate Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and others, express public disagreement with Israel's approach for reasons of internal security and public opinion. They also have genuine concerns about the actions that will be required. However, a demonstration of Israel's military strength and the rehabilitation of its image after the surprise attack will bolster the national security of these states, which rely on

Israel's proactive approach to regional threats as part of their defense posture. Therefore, despite their public statements, they support a decisive outcome against Hamas.

The fifth parameter is the international public arena. The war in Ukraine caused shockwaves in Western public opinion, especially in Western Europe. The concept of a war of conquest and destruction was abruptly returned to their consciousness. Europeans realized they could once again find themselves in a reality they thought they had left behind after World War II. In non-democratic states like China and Russia, humanitarian issues are viewed through the lens of national interests. The near-total international indifference to the mass displacement of the Armenian population by Azerbaijan a few weeks ago is a clear reflection of prevailing global apathy toward military actions that are anything less than genocidal. Although Israel has always been singled out negatively and discriminated against in terms of the use of force and its right to defend itself, the connection between the updated world mindset and the genocidal course of Hamas changes the picture.

The sixth parameter is the economic one. Israel's economy will be significantly impacted by the war, but it is expected to recover, as it has done after previous conflicts. There won't be the kind of "lost decade" that followed the Yom Kippur War due to serious mistakes made by the government at the time. One factor that will facilitate the recovery process is that the Israeli economy will be more stable than before the war: The divisions surrounding legal reform have weakened the Israeli economy, but a state of recovery from a painful war will lead to the acceleration of renewed growth.

As a result of all these parameters there is no "political hourglass" in this war, and this concern should be set aside so as not to hamper the military campaign to destroy Hamas's military capabilities and end its genocide-driven rule.

Having said that, there are seven clear Israeli decisions that must be made and effective mechanisms activated to maintain this situation over the time needed to achieve the strategic goals. **The required decisions are as follows:**

The first is about determination: Israel needs to set the clear goal of defeating Hamas in a ground operation and stick with it until completion. Any hesitation or readiness to negotiate, including on the issue of hostages, will be seen as a loss of strategic and moral clarity. Unlike in previous conflicts, Israel's determination to achieve its military objectives increases its freedom of action rather than

diminishes it. A final military resolution against Hamas - not just a superficial degradation of Hamas's capabilities and presence - should be completed within weeks.

The second decision concerns the humanitarian response: As part of the military operation, Israel must adhere to the requirements of the Fourth Geneva Convention for dealing with occupied territory. It must ensure the provision of basic needs for the population, even if some of them go to Hamas. Israel should work to return those Gazans who temporarily fled to their places of residence after the clearing phase. Israel must ensure that government facilities, institutions, and mechanisms serving the population are not destroyed during the conflict and that there is continuity in employment and salary payments.

The third decision concerns planning for the day after: Israel must build - together with the United States and international and regional partners - mechanisms that will grant the civil services in the Gaza Strip the funding and administrative structure they need to function (for example, a joint Palestinian-regional-international directorate). We must not make the mistake the Americans made in Iraq of eliminating existing civil mechanisms just because some of their people were supporters of the enemy. This cost the Americans a decade of hard fighting until government mechanisms were rebuilt.

The fourth decision concerns visibility: Humanitarian and post-conflict actions should be well-presented and well-articulated. High-ranking government officials should avoid making extreme statements about collective punishment. The international community will be more likely to discount Deputy Minister Ben Gvir's and others' extreme language only if the main message from Israel's decision-makers, both in the political and military spheres, is consistent, clear, and temperate.

The fifth decision should be to engage in dialogue with Saudi Arabia and Egypt, as they will be key players in stabilizing civilian services in Gaza in the aftermath, especially given the lack of capabilities of the Palestinian Authority. Egypt has legitimate concerns as it doesn't want two million Palestinian refugees in the Sinai. It is possible that an international agreement can be reached with Egypt similar to what the European Union did with Turkey regarding Syrian refugees, involving temporary accommodation in exchange for economic assistance. Essential

negotiations with Saudi Arabia about Gaza's future will be part of the discussions and intense peacemaking effort immediately after the end of the main fighting.

The sixth decision is about the scope of the conflict: Israel should avoid unnecessary adventures initiated by Hezbollah and let the Americans take the lead in that area. Israel should be fully prepared to inflict a severe blow on the organization if necessary, but this should be done in collaboration with the United States should Hezbollah become as brazen as Hamas in Gaza.

The seventh decision is about bringing the leaders of Hamas to justice. The top leadership of Hamas - those who are implicated in crimes against humanity and genocide - should be brought to trial at a special court in Jerusalem. This should serve as the moral centerpiece for all other efforts.

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