

Crossroads in the Palestinian Issue: "The Return of the Repressed"

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People who prefer not to see Israel slip into one state with Judea and Samaria have to support dividing the territory into two states, where the Palestinian state includes the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Saying "no" to one state means saying a determined "yes" to two states. Thus, there is no escape from a political arrangement for dividing the territory into two states to ensure the existence of the State of Israel.

"The most important truths are likely to be those which society at that time least wants to hear."
W.H. Auden

In many respects, October 7, 2023 was a watershed moment. However, like every significant historical event, it demands to be examined from two angles: how is it different from the past and how is it similar? Is it a continuation of a preexisting situation or does it herald change? The return of the repressed, the Palestinian issue, to center stage also returns the substantial dilemma. Then, on "the day before," as now, on "the day after," Israel has only one choice with two options. The first is to continue managing the conflict in the same way, or rather, continuing the conflict with no management, aggravating and exacerbating it, although differently from what was in play before October 7. The second involves fashioning a careful, reliable political context for peacefully settling the conflict and the Palestinian issue in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The following explores the intelligence implications and consequences of each option with reference to the situation created by the October 7 attack and massacre. It is based on a strategic-net assessment and confronts both sides of the issue.

Preserving the misconception in other ways

In principle, the plan presented by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on February 23, 2024, for the day after Hamas, preserves the management of the conflict according to the circumstances which changed on October 7: "Israel will maintain the freedom to operate throughout the Gaza Strip for an unlimited time as necessary to prevent the renewal of terrorism and to eliminate threats from Gaza. There will be a security zone in the area bordering on Israel as long as required by security." As for the southern Gaza Strip, "Israel will close it along the Egyptian border to prevent the renewal of terrorism from the Gaza Strip. The southern closure will

operate as necessary, in cooperation with Egypt and with American assistance, to prevent arms from being smuggled into the Gaza Strip above and below ground, including through the Rafah Crossing." The civilian administration in the Gaza Strip and responsibility for public order will be based on "local residents with experience in management who are not affiliated with terrorism-supporting states or entities." The Palestinian Authority is not mentioned. In addition, the reconstruction of Gaza will be postponed until after it has been demilitarized and "the deradicalization all the religious, educational and welfare institutions in the Gaza Strip have begun." As for the long term, Netanyahu emphasized his opposition to the unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state, stating that "the permanent settlement will be reached exclusively through direct negotiations between the parties without preconditions. Israel will control the security of the entire area west of Jordan, including the cities, towns and villages surrounding the Gaza Strip."



Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in the Gaza Strip: a disastrous gap between the military effort and its strategic results and consequences. Photo: Avi Ohayon, Israeli Government Press Office.

stages is to create circumstances in order to dictate the political end-game, which will be postponed indefinitely. In the geopolitical circumstances in the Gaza Strip after October 7, there is a close connection between managing the conflict or the opposite – a political settlement, and the identity of whoever winds up filling the political void. Managing the conflict forces Israel to fill the void to keep Hamas from filling it. But at the same time, continuing to ignore a potential role of the reorganized Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip and weakening it in

A reorganized Palestinian Authority will not dare to return to the Gaza Strip while the conflict and occupation continue. So, the plan is as follows: both security and civilian life in the Gaza Strip should rest on the prime minister's program of a wide range of unilateral measures, including the dismantling of UNRWA, while the political solution, conditioned upon Israel's consent, is postponed to sometime in the distant future, while here Netanyahu rejects any unilateral move.

Thus, it can be assumed that his objective for the unilateral early



L.G. (Ret.) Gad Eizenkot layout for overall future solution to Gaza, will not work out, unless the war stops

the West Bank will pave Hamas' way directly to the West Bank, at least in terms of public support.

A political arrangement, on the other hand, will cause the reformed Palestinian Authority, with regional and international support, to establish a government for both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. However, a reorganized Palestinian Authority will not dare to return to the Gaza Strip while the conflict and occupation continue, and the same is true for Arab, Islamic and international aid. Every suggestion for creating a hybrid of managing the conflict with Palestinian, Arab, Islamic and international support (which was also offered by the Eisenkot Plan of March 29, 2024) is doomed to failure.

Those invited to help will not volunteer to help the Israeli occupation while the conflict continues and escalates. In effect, what Netanyahu is offering is a "peaceful occupation," like the format for Territory B in the Oslo Accords.

It is no wonder that no one will be found willing to discuss participating in an unreasonable and unrealistic oxymoron of the "peacefully occupied." Looking for local allies, such as the heads of the clans in the Gaza Strip, is also doomed to failure. Anyone who did not learn from the collapse of the attempt to form a "village associations" as a substitute for PLO supporters in the West Bank in the mid-1970s will quickly be bitterly disillusioned. The local ruling "bubbles," as they are called, will burst.

If before October 7 Israel wanted to prevent a political settlement by separating the Gaza Strip from the West Bank, now Israel, under

Netanyahu's stewardship, wants to join the two by in effect equating the status of the Gaza Strip as "occupied," similar to the West Bank, by keeping the local civilian ruling entities separate, thereby changing the management of the conflict after October 7. As before the 7th of October, that kind of management completely ignores the possibility of establishing a Palestinian state.



As Hamas today rests on the generation cauterized and tempered by the second intifada, when it comes of age, the current generation, burned and tempered in the Gaza Strip War, will shoulder the next campaign. Photo: Avi Ohayon,

The consequences of the return of the Repressed

The consequences of the continuation of managing the conflict, even in a different disguise, will be existential. In effect, the State of Israel will become responsible for 2.3 million Gazans living in a region hammered by catastrophe, to say nothing of the fact that the Gazans population doubles every 20-25 years. That will immediately turn Jewish Israelis into the minority in their own state: a large minority, but a minority nevertheless. Including Israeli Arabs, there will be, at this point, 7.3 million Arabs to 7.2 Jews. This will entail extremely

important implications for the country's economy, judiciary and culture, and poses a mortal danger to the State of Israel. Continuing the present management of the conflict leads to the creation of one state, where the Jews are in the minority, and the two populations confront each other in a kind of "Zero-Sum Game Society".

Here the return of the Palestinian repressed issue appears in all its urgency, and the conflict reverts to its historical roots for all of the Land of Israel/Palestine. Anyone who does not want to see Israel slip into one state has to support a partition into two states where the Palestinian state includes the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Saying "no" to one state means saying "yes" to two, there is no middle ground. It is the only way to ensure the continued existence of the State of Israel, and should not be regarded in any way as bowing to American interests. It is simply that in this case the interest of keeping the State of Israel alive merges with the vested interest of the USA.

The consequences of the move are existential. In effect, the State of Israel will become responsible for 2.3 million Gazans living in region hammered by catastrophe

[Left inset] Continuing the present management of the conflict leads to the creation of one state where the Jews are in the minority

The possible elimination of the Hamas leadership (led by Yahya al-Sinwar) and the occupation of Rafah and the entire Gaza Strip will not provide a response to the existential problem, but will keep Israel wallowing in the occupation and immersing it even further in the swamp of the Gaza Strip. In the custody of Israel, as occupier of the Gaza Strip, will remain the more than two million of needy Gazans (according to the March 2024 survey conducted by Dr. Khalil Shiqaqi's Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 80% of respondents in the Gaza Strip reported that at least one of their family members had been killed or wounded during the war, and 90% of the population had been displaced).

Just as Hamas currently rests on the generation cauterized and tempered by the second intifada, the current generation of Palestinians, burned and tempered in the blast furnace of October 7, when it comes of age, will shoulder the burden of the campaign against Israel as long as the management of the conflict does not change, and undergo a polarized transition to a political settlement.

Such an essential move is a frontal defiance of the entire world. It reinforces the "resistance axis" led by Iran and Hezbollah and worsens the risk of broadening the confrontation on Israel's northern front. The Iranian-led "unity of the fronts" strategy is liable to take shape and be implemented. If the conflict worsens it is liable to collapse the United States' greatest achievement in the Middle East, the peace agreements, stable so far, with Egypt and Jordan, and the normalization of relations between Israel and Arab states. Israel will be regarded by the entire world as responsible, or rather, guilty. The rulers of Egypt and Jordan will be exposed to growing domestic pressure to change their approach to Israel. As they weaken, Iran and its

"resistance axis" proxies will become stronger, especially in the wake of the weakening of Jordan, which for Israel is a bulwark against radiating Iranian influence from Iraq. Thus, a situation is created in which Hamas will be able to rehabilitate its status in both the Gaza Strip and West Bank by recruiting Palestinians thirsty for revenge and who have nothing to lose. Once again, after October 7, Israel and Hamas, each its own way, will return to their ill-management of the conflict, although somewhat altered and according to the new circumstances. This time Israel and Hamas find themselves in an "antagonistic accommodation" to prevent the return of the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip as part of "the day after." As in the days before the war, what binds them together is their rejection of a political settlement.



The 101 abducted and missing, photo: Headquarters of the families

Continuing and intensifying the same management of the conflict also paves the way for another intifada in the West Bank. No international actor, no country or organization, will volunteer to pull Israel's chestnuts out of the Gazan fire, and Israel will be forced to face its fate alone in the objective circumstances where the Iranian-led "resistance axis" becomes stronger and tension increases in the Palestinian arena. Israel may have to bow to the condition that the military aid it receives depends on preserving human rights and providing humanitarian assistance, with everything that implies. Biden's executive order from February 2024 set a precedent, and the distance from there to its adoption by European countries is short.

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The impotence of military supremacy

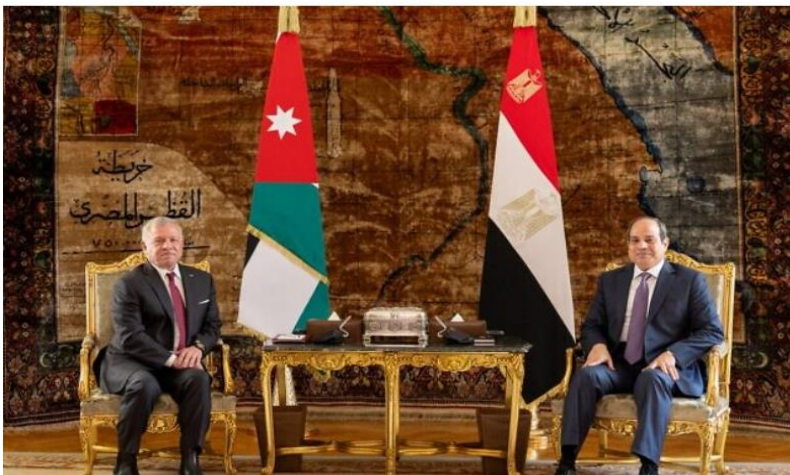
The consequences are piling up and are already evident, and lead to basic questions about the strategic implications of relying solely on military and technological supremacy in dealing with the Palestinian issue. The connection between achievements on the battlefield and translating them into strategy has been exposed as particularly problematic, and echoes what Hegel said about the "impotence of victory" because of its inability to turn victory into viable strategic assets. Israel's "escalation dominance," the result of its military and technological superiority, has not been translated into strategic achievements in the asymmetric confrontation of war in a heavily populated environment, reminding, for instance, of the precedences of United States' failures in Vietnam and Iraq, and those of Russia in Afghanistan.

The striking gap between the military effort on the ground and its strategic consequences and implications may, if the effort continues, severely damage the Israeli public's faith in the government and the IDF, and reinforce its doubts regarding Israel's survival. Continuing the existing management of the confrontation will have only one result: Israel will continue to fill the governance void in the Gaza Strip, giving credence to Israel's worst nightmare, that is, Hamas will survive, weakened but able to regroup and rehabilitate itself, while the Israeli hostages may not survive. On the other hand, a permanent ceasefire and ending the war with a prisoner exchange deal could be leveraged into a political context which would restore a reorganized Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip and promote a political arrangement of a division supported by a Sunni Arab-Muslim consensus, while pushing Shi'ite Iran and its proxies to the sidelines of the Arab-Muslim world. That would turn stopping the war, as demanded by Hamas, into a two-edged sword which would strike Hamas itself and balance its achievement of a prisoner exchange deal.

The merging of the various "resistance axis" arenas, Iran and Iraq to Israel's east, Hezbollah to the north and the Houthis in Yemen to the south, caused and fueled by the war, illustrates the centrality of the Palestinian issue. Iran's drive for regional hegemony profits greatly from the lack of a political solution for the Palestinian issue. The dangers of such a situation to regional and internal stability have become clearer to the Arab states, and the commitment to a political solution is greater mainly because of a negative vested-interest, to prevent the inherent potential damage to their stability and development, such as the Saudi Arabian focus on completing Saudi Vision 2030. The effective dealing of the Arab states, Israel and the United States with Iran's two main threats, its regional gamble, with the assistance of its proxies, and its nuclear bomb program, both of which somehow depend on putting the Palestinian issue at Archimedes' principle of the center of gravity, in complete contrast to the schematic logic of normalization with the Arab states, which pushed the Palestinian issue to the sidelines.

Therefore, the "unity of the arenas" lends the war in Gaza in particular, and the Palestinian issue in general, regional and global importance which extends far beyond their narrow borders, up to and including the Global Jihad organizations. The al-Qaeda websites keep hammering the need to exploit the Palestinian arena, especially the Gaza Strip, as an environment for chaos, from which benefit can already be derived. If in the past the organization considered the Palestinian arena as secondary and not yet ripe as a site for focus, it has changed its opinion in the wake of the current war.

It is also concerned, as is Sunni ISIS, that the war will increase the prestige of Shi'ite Iran and the "resistance axis," especially, through the influence of Hamas, its proxy in the Palestinian arena. This combination of dual threat, both from Israel and Iran, motivates the Global Jihad to elevate the priority of the Palestinian arena.



Regional leaders Jordan's King Abdullah the second and Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi. The worsening of the Israeli Palestinian conflict is liable to collapse Israel's peace agreements with them, which so far have been stable. (Photo by Jordanian Royal Palace / AFP)

The way out

In principle, the choice in the current circumstances is binary, either-or. Today the United States, the West in general and the Arab-Muslim world (with the exception of Iran) propose to Israel to solve the problem of the Gaza Strip within the general context of settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict throughout the Land of Israel based on the return of a reorganized Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip, and the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. That will result not only in a local solution for the Palestinians, but in a wider regional dimension of normalization between Israel and the Arab-Islamic states, which Saudi Arabia has already publicly stated, and create a political-security coalition which will include Israel as a key member.

The dominance of Saudi Arabia in the Arab-Muslim world will be able to help design Israel's place in the final arrangement in a way relatively easy for that world to digest. Hamas and "resistance axis" in general will find themselves isolated, their star dulled in Palestinian and general regional public opinion. They will be exposed as securely enslaved to the will of Iran and caring nothing about their own national interests, and Israel will no longer be isolated. Hamas, currently in competition for leadership of the Palestinian people, will be hit especially hard.

It is not by chance that Hamas, Iran and Hezbollah regard a political solution for the Palestinian issue as the worst possible threat, which is why for the past 22 years they have consistently rejected the Arab Peace Initiative, despite the general Arab-Islamic consensus consistently supporting it. The fact that Israel, in terms of result, not intention, has joined its enemies in the "resistance axis" in the management of the conflict, and as they do, rejects political initiatives, is a tragic paradox.

Thus, Israel finds itself shoring up its sworn enemies and their image for a large percentage of the population in the region and beyond, while it is pushed into an isolated corner with a "stop the world, I want to get off" mentality, or rather, "stop reality..."

If the Palestinian issue ends with a political settlement, the worlds of Iran and Hamas will turn upside down. From interviews with (the deceased) Saleh al-'Arouri, the deputy of (the deceased) Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, heralding the war, we learned that one of the main reasons behind the October 7 attack and massacre was Hamas' fear that of a possible normalization in relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. The dialectics of history will celebrate its victory when it turns out that in the end Hamas was responsible for exactly what it wanted to prevent, normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia along with a political resolution to the Palestinian issue. The same will be true for the government of Israel, when its military victory in the Gaza Strip produces the unexpected, or perhaps unintended consequence of a political resolution to the Palestinian issue. The irony is that history will have toyed with both sides.

The great crisis may provide a great, unprecedented opportunity for a substantive change for the better. Even those who doubt, and in my opinion incorrectly, the life expectancy of a political settlement, will have to accept it as the polarized default position of the mostly evil, or rather, entirely evil management of the conflict. Only a political settlement will be able to get us out of the malignant strategic putrefaction of managing the conflict.

***Written on July 3, 2024**