



ISRAEL NEWS
A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation

Strip as a base for building its terror capabilities and to attack Israel, culminating with the Oct. 7 massacre—the deadliest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust. This approach exposed, in the most calamitous manner, the danger

Commentary...

Is it Time to Declare the Failure of the Oslo Accords?

By Lt. Col. (res.) Maurice Hirsch

The Oslo Accords were designed to achieve lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Betraying this noble goal, the Palestine Liberation Organization used the Palestinian Authority, created as part of the Accords, to cultivate ever-deepening Palestinian hatred of Israel and promote terrorism. As a result, the Oslo path has been disastrous for Israel and the Palestinians alike.

The following are some relevant considerations for assessing whether it is time to finally declare the Oslo Accords dead.

The Oslo Accords have failed: The accords, that provided self-governance for Palestinians in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, were predicated on the assumption that the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist and abandoned violence and terror as a means to achieve Palestinian aspirations. While the PLO committed to these criteria, the PLO and the P.A., that has been dominated by Fatah (the largest faction in the PLO), have fundamentally breached these commitments.

The PLO-P.A. have consistently refused to recognize Israel as a legitimate state and have perpetuated a narrative, both within Palestinian society and in international organizations and fora, of Israeli delegitimization. While presenting themselves to the international community as rational political entities, the PLO-P.A. have maintained policies and rhetoric that erode trust and fuel hostility. These policies include, inter alia, the constant radicalization of the Palestinian education curriculum, thereby brainwashing and poisoning the minds of generations of Palestinians, and adopting and implementing a multi-billion-dollar "pay-for-slay" program that promotes, incentivizes and rewards terrorism. Incitement to violence and terror against Israel and Israelis, and the glorification of terrorists and acts of terror are an integral part of the PLO-P.A. ideology, implemented daily.

The PLO is not different from Hamas: While there is often a tendency to classify the PLO (dominated by the Fatah movement) as a moderate organization in comparison to Hamas, the fact of the matter is that both organizations aspire to destroy Israel and differ only, occasionally, on the tactics employed to reach this goal. While Hamas promotes solely using violence to achieve the immediate destruction of Israel, the PLO employs intermittent diplomacy to achieve the same end, supported by violence when its unreasonable demands are not met. For the PLO, the Oslo Accords were nothing more than a Trojan Horse, adopted pursuant to the organization's 1974 "Plan of Stages" to destroy Israel.

Adopting the Oct. 7 massacre: Hamas's Oct. 7, 2023 massacre was never condemned by the PLO-P.A. leadership. Instead, it was embraced as a legitimate expression of "Palestinian resistance."

The Oslo Accords and PLO actions led to more violence: As a result of the Oslo Accords, the PLO-P.A. was given autonomous rule of extensive areas in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. Instead of building a functioning, democratic and prosperous society, these areas were turned into safe havens for terror and an incubator for Palestinian terror groups. The Oslo Accords were designed as a basis for ending the Palestinian conflict with Israel. However, due to PLO deception in the last three decades since the adoption of the accords, more Israelis and Palestinians have been killed than ever before.

The PLO and the P.A. allowed Hamas to seize control: While the PLO-P.A. committed in the Oslo Accords to combating terror, in practice, they view Hamas and other internationally-designated Palestinian terrorist organizations as legitimate Palestinian factions. For this reason, they demanded that Hamas be allowed to participate in the 2006 P.A. elections, which Hamas overwhelmingly won. These elections then provided the basis for Hamas to seize control of the entire P.A., later limited to the Gaza Strip. Hamas then used the Gaza

posed to Israel as a result of creating self-governed Palestinian areas in which terror festered.

The two-state solution poses an existential threat to Israel: The concept of a Palestinian state in Judea, Samaria and Gaza is not a path to peace but rather a catalyst for regional destabilization. Establishing a second state to the west of the Jordan River would not promote peace. Instead, it would provide Palestinian terrorist organizations with a sovereign region that would be used to promote the destruction of Israel and provide the Palestinian leadership with international legitimacy to continue demonizing Israel.

The PLO-P.A. is an obstacle to peace: The PLO and the Palestinian leadership have persistently acted as a hurdle to achieving international goals and interests in the Middle East and the Arab world. Instead of promoting peace, the PLO continues to block regional normalization with Israel. Recurring cycles of Palestinian-initiated violence and war have required the international community to devote both substantial attention and resources to prevent a regional war. These efforts have been further complicated by the Iranian support for terror and the creation of the "ring of fire" around Israel.

Internally, the P.A.'s governance and rampant corruption exacerbate internal divisions within Palestinian society, undermining any possibility of a substantial and moderate middle class that could serve as a stabilizing force or perhaps an economic lobby to counter the P.A.'s policies. Despite being given the funding, the opportunities and the capabilities to establish a functioning and prosperous Palestinian economy, the PLO, the P.A. and the Palestinian leadership abused international aid, including substantial U.S. and E.U. aid, to solely promote Palestinian national aspirations to destroy Israel.

The international community's misplaced focus: Since the adoption of the Oslo Accords, the international community has been manipulated into viewing the PLO-P.A. as legitimate partners for peace while ignoring its obstructionist and rejectionist role in preventing it from happening.

The Palestinian issue as an obstacle to regional conciliation: Since Israel's creation, the Palestinian leadership has managed to hold hostage the other Arab countries of the region. While the original Arab-Israeli conflict has gradually contracted through peace agreements with Egypt (1978), Jordan (1995) and the U.S.-led Abraham Accords (2020), the Palestinian leadership has nonetheless done its utmost to prevent the further expansion of regional agreements while simultaneously rejecting repeated offers to find a permanent solution.

The Gaza Strip: Having seized control of the Gaza Strip, Hamas turned the entire area into a base for terrorism. Instead of investing in the development of Gaza, Hamas dug hundreds of kilometers of tunnels. It imported, developed and manufactured attack capabilities that included rockets, missiles and mortars, and built up a terror army that exceeded 40,000 people. Since the 2005 Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip and Hamas seizing control there, the Gazan terrorists have fired over 20,000 rockets, missiles and mortars indiscriminately targeting Israel's civilian population. The Gazan terrorists have also conducted hundreds of attempts, some successful, to infiltrate Israel and murder Israelis.

PLO-P.A. promises to the Palestinian people that can never be realized: By promising the Palestinians that Israel will be destroyed, Jerusalem will be the capital of the Palestinian state, Jews will be prevented from alighting the Temple Mount and all of the six million "Palestine refugees" will be permitted to return to Israel, the PLO-P.A. and the Palestinian leadership have entrenched false hopes and, in practice, prevented the creation of any pragmatic Palestinian leadership. Having made grandiose and unrealistic promises, the PLO-P.A. have set unattainable goals as foundation stones for any

discussions with Israel. The inability of the Palestinian leadership to attain these goals then fostered and will continue to foster further Palestinian disenchantment.

Acknowledging the failure of Oslo: By constantly subjugating policy development to the Oslo Accords and the “Land for Peace” paradigm, Israel, the United States and other countries have ignored the realities on the ground. Recognizing and accepting the Oslo Accords’ abject failure would allow all the relevant actors to re-evaluate and develop alternative solutions.

Abandon the policy of wilful blindness: In an almost desperate attempt to breathe life into the Oslo Accords, Israel, the United States and other actors adopted and implemented a policy of wilful blindness to the actions of the PLO-P.A. and the Palestinian leadership. This approach undermined the foundations of the accords and emboldened the Palestinian actors, who constantly pushed and exceeded all limitations. To foster Palestinian-Israeli peace, any future Palestinian leadership should be held to strict adherence and conformity with accepted norms and held directly and immediately accountable for any deviation.

Demand the immediate abolition of the PLO-P.A. “pay-for-slay” policy: In the short term, the PLO-P.A. should be required to abolish all manifestations of this policy immediately. To achieve this goal, the PLO-P.A. should be given a clear ultimatum that sets a short deadline for compliance. Failure to entirely abolish the policy must result in the PLO-P.A. being internationally designated as a sponsor of terrorism, and all Palestinians and others who continue to participate in the implementation of the policy should be sanctioned and, if necessary, held criminally responsible and punished accordingly.

Dismantle the P.A.: The P.A. has failed to uphold its commitments and has consistently rejected fundamental reform. In practice, under the banner of the “P.A. Security Forces,” the PLO-P.A. has established an army trained and funded by both the United States and the European Union. This army should be immediately disbanded.

A new reality: In place of an antagonistic and rejectionist P.A., the international community and Israel should adopt a policy to promote localized civic autonomy. The Palestinians would elect their local leadership through municipal elections. These municipalities would have the power and jurisdiction to enact local ordinances and provide services. The new entity would be devoid of any nationalistic characteristics and goals and would work, under international supervision, to provide essential services and opportunities to the Palestinians.

Socio-economic development over national aspirations: Israel and the international community should work to foster economic development within Palestinian society as an alternative to unachievable nationalistic aspirations. Within this goal, all actors should be required to work toward eradicating Palestinian corruption and developing a Palestinian middle class that would support economic prosperity, social stability, and peace. These efforts would be complemented and founded on the principles discussed and suggested in the U.S.-led 2019 Manama dialogue.

De-radicalization of the Palestinian education curriculum and system: The radicalized P.A. education curriculum and system would be replaced with content that supports and promotes peace and coexistence. Adopting, for example, an education curriculum similar to that of the United Arab Emirates would provide the basis for the long-term de-radicalization of the Palestinians. While this process may take many years, preventing further hostilities is a fundamental prerequisite.

Gaza after the war: Allowing the P.A. to assume any future governance role in the Gaza Strip will only guarantee more violence. Thus, as already suggested by the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, Gaza, after the war, will come under exclusive Israeli security control. Together with Israel, an international coalition of Western and moderate Sunni Arab countries would work to rehabilitate and reconstruct the area in a manner that would support peace and economic development. In place of a centralized governance structure, the Strip would be divided into administrative districts run by Palestinians who are not affiliated with either Fatah or Hamas. A new education curriculum and system would ensure the long-term de-radicalization of the Gazan population.

The “Palestine Refugees”: Instead of relying on false and unattainable promises that have held the “Palestine refugees” in

perpetual limbo for the last 76 years, the unsustainable United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) would be disbanded. The “Palestine refugees” who have been living in their host countries for almost eight decades should be integrated into those countries.

Abbas replaced the P.A. with the PLO: Since its creation, the P.A. has been dominated by Fatah, first under the rule of Yasser Arafat and then under the rule of Mahmoud Abbas. In his twilight years, Abbas, now 89, has effectively replaced the P.A. envisaged by the Oslo Accords with PLO mechanisms. His decisions and moves were designed to obscure the new reality from public discourse and scrutiny, and ensure Fatah’s continued hegemony and corruption.

The same body in different clothes: When Abbas is no longer capable of performing his duties, the PLO-P.A. will present the new, unelected PLO leadership as “pragmatic” and “new faces,” in a manner similar to the passage of power from Arafat to Abbas. While this tactic would create the false hope of fundamental change, the new leadership will be no different from the existing leadership.

Seize the opportunity: The opportunity to dismantle the Palestinian Authority is time-limited and will effectively close, for the foreseeable future, upon the transfer of power from Abbas to whichever Palestinian leader seizes control of the Palestinian entity. Accordingly, Israel should seize the opportunity presented in the aftermath of the Oct. 7, 2023 massacre together with the aging of Abbas to announce the fundamental change. (JCPA Mar 3)

‘Pre-Oct. 7 Situation in Lebanon is No More’ By Yaakov Lappin

The Israel Defense Forces has fundamentally reshaped its enforcement policy against Hezbollah’s activities in Lebanon, marking a significant departure from the pre-war status quo, an IDF official told JNS on Monday.

“The guiding principle today is, the situation we were in before Oct. 6, [2023], where Hezbollah could erect a tent on the border and we would think about it, is no more,” said the official.

In addition to retaining for the foreseeable future five positions in Lebanese territory following its withdrawal from Southern Lebanon as part of the Nov. 27, 2024 ceasefire with Lebanon, Israel has been working steadily to enforce the truce.

It is aided in this effort by the fact that the Lebanese terrorist group has been severely weakened by its year-long war with the Jewish state.

In the final months of the war in the north, the IDF destroyed an enormous number of Hezbollah facilities and weapons, targeted its senior and intermediate command levels and killed more than 4,000 Hezbollah terror operatives.

Israel also attacked Hezbollah’s financial system and strongholds across Lebanon.

The Shi’ite terror organization has been struggling to recover ever since.

Lebanon has taken steps to prevent Iranian funds from being smuggled into the country to Hezbollah, while the IDF has been demonstrating its ability and willingness to turn actionable intelligence into strikes.

On Wednesday, Feb. 26, the Israeli Air Force eliminated Mahran Ali Nasser al-Din, a significant member of Hezbollah’s Unit 4400.

The IDF described Unit 4400 as “responsible for smuggling weapons into Lebanese territory from Iran and its proxies, aiming to maximize Hezbollah’s weapons stockpiles. Since its establishment, Unit 4400 has established numerous smuggling routes along the Syria-Lebanon border.”

Al-Din played a major role in these operations. “This activity, which facilitates Hezbollah’s armament, constitutes a clear threat to the security of the State of Israel and violates the understandings reached between Israel and Lebanon,” the IDF said.

The next day, on Feb. 27, the IDF announced that it had identified activity inside a Hezbollah observation post in the area of Aainata in southern Lebanon, in violation of the ceasefire, which requires that Hezbollah withdraw north of the Litani River. The IAF proceeded to strike the post.

That same day, the IAF eliminated Hezbollah terrorist Mohammed Mahdi Ali Shaheen near Hermel. Shaheen had been coordinating terrorist transactions for the purchase of weapons on the

Syria-Lebanon border since the understandings between Lebanon and Israel came into effect,” according to the IDF.

Shaheen was part of Hezbollah’s Geographical Unit, which according to the Israeli military is responsible for the Beqaa area and had recently been involved in transporting weapons from Syria to Lebanon. His actions posed a serious threat, according to the IDF.

Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror, a former Israeli national security adviser and ex-head of the IDF’s Military Intelligence Research Department, described the changes to the situation in the north as “historic.” “The situation in the north is totally different than when it was in the beginning of the war,” he said on Sunday during a call with reporters organized by the Jerusalem Press Club. For such dramatic changes to occur in so short a time is “very rare,” he added.

Following the collapse of the Assad regime in December, he continued, Hezbollah’s strategic position has fundamentally changed. For the first time in its history it now finds itself without a land bridge from Iran via Syria to Lebanon, he said.

According to Col. (res.) Barak Ben-Zur, a former IDF Military Intelligence officer and ex-head of a research unit at the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet), the collapse of the Syrian regime was a massive blow to Hezbollah’s main backer, Iran.

“The Assad family regime made a strategic decision, since the signing of the Israel-Egypt peace agreement, to seek another regional pillar to replace Egypt—this was Iran,” he told JNS on Monday.

That Iran “did not deliver” is the most important takeaway from the situation, according to Amidror.

Ben-Zur explained how since the 1980s Iran had established a regional array, building up Hezbollah and entrenching itself in Syria. That effort included bases, “tactical forces, intelligence-gathering capabilities on Israel and a command-and-control system,” he said.

“All of this ended with the rise of the Sunni government and the expulsion of Assad and his supporters” from Syria, he added.

“This has created a strategic opportunity that alters reality and allows Israel to deepen Hezbollah’s isolation after a series of operations weakened its capabilities,” he continued.

He warned, however, that Israel has not yet developed a fully coordinated strategic policy to reach this goal. “The Israeli defense establishment must dedicate a staff study to this issue, as strategic opportunities are time-sensitive and can close after a period,” he told JNS. “Alongside such a maneuver, preventing a renewal of the Iranian front within Syria is no less important a goal, and perhaps, more so,” he said. “At this stage, it is difficult to point to Israeli focus on this issue, and the building of a strategic plan designed to fulfill these objectives.” (JNS Mar 4)

Palestinians are Hamas, and Hamas are Palestinians

By Jason Shvili

How many times have you heard well-meaning progressives say that Hamas doesn’t represent the Palestinian people? Indeed, less than two weeks after the Hamas-led terrorist attacks in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023—the worst mass slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust—then-President Joe Biden said, “The vast majority of Palestinians are not Hamas. Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people.”

The truth is that the majority of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, as well as Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), supported the Oct. 7 massacre, and more than 1 million (48%) still support “armed struggle” to end the “occupation.”

Palestinians have a long history of supporting Hamas. Back in 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian legislative election. It was the last time the Palestinians held elections. Little has changed. While recent polls show support for Hamas falling, Palestinians still support their primary goal: the elimination of the Jewish state.

Research through 2024 shows the overwhelming majority of Palestinians supported Hamas’s attack on and kidnapping of mostly Jewish civilians, though astoundingly, 89% deny Hamas’s atrocities. Thousands of Palestinian “civilians” eagerly took part in the massacre, and 17 months later, many more thousands turned out to mock Israeli hostages during their release.

Ordinary Palestinians also happily assisted Hamas by hiding Israeli hostages and the terrorist group’s tunnels and hideouts. No wonder that Liri Albag, an Israeli who was held hostage in a private home in the Strip and recently released, said ruefully that Gaza

consists of “2 million terrorists.”

Moreover, research shows that even those who don’t support Hamas do support the group’s Islamist ideology and its terrorist methods. Movements around the world, the global media and politicians who excuse the Palestinians for their brutal dictators are simply ignoring the hateful values that course widely through Palestinian society.

It’s time for the politicians, media, social movements and the American public to understand and accept that Hamas speaks and acts for the vast majority of Palestinians. Make no mistake, the Palestinians are Hamas. Hamas are the Palestinians.

Palestinians’ support for Hamas goes back decades. Palestinian voters elected Hamas to power in 2006, with 44.45% of the vote, giving them a majority of seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council.

A year later, Hamas violently seized control of the Gaza Strip from the Palestinian Authority. Whereas several Arab states experienced rebellions and revolutions in the past decade, Hamas has encountered little popular resistance to its rule of Gaza.

After the Oct. 7 pogrom, support for the terrorist group increased. According to a poll by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) conducted in December 2023, 43% of Palestinians expressed support for Hamas. In contrast, Fatah, the second most popular faction, had just 17% support. A subsequent poll conducted in September 2024 showed that even after nearly a year of witnessing and suffering the effects of war with Israel, Palestinians continued to support Hamas more than any other faction.

Even Palestinians who don’t support Hamas very much support their ideology and methods. Indeed, a survey by researchers at Oxford University found that 98% of Gazans said they were religious and almost as many said they viewed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as religious, not political—exactly as Hamas. Furthermore, polls show that Palestinians in Gaza, and Judea and Samaria, broadly support terrorism as a means to end the “occupation” and achieve independence, just like Hamas. These polls also reveal that more than half of Palestinians want Israel to be replaced by a single Palestinian state governed under Islamic law—just like Hamas.

Palestinians broadly support the Oct. 7 massacre. The December 2023 poll by PCPSR showed that 72% of Palestinians supported Hamas’s decision to launch the Oct. 7 attacks. The effects of war since then have eroded Palestinians’ support for this decision, yet the September 2024 poll showed that 54% of Palestinians still supported it. Palestinians enthusiastically participate in Hamas’s atrocities against Israel. In fact, an Israel Defense Forces’ assessment released in August 2024 revealed that more than 2,000 Palestinians who invaded Israel from Gaza on Oct. 7 were not Hamas members—many were mere “civilian” terrorists. Palestinian civilians went into a maniacal frenzy when hostages were kidnapped into Gaza, surrounding the vehicles used to carry them and shouting “Death to the Jews.” Similarly, more than a year later, Palestinian “civilians” cheered and jeered as Hamas mockingly paraded hostages before their release.

When the coffins of the Bibas children, who were murdered with the terrorists’ bare hands, were paraded before civilian mobs through the streets of Gaza, it wasn’t just Hamas presiding, but members and supporters of other Palestinian factions, including the PLO’s Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Furthermore, some hostages were held in civilian homes, including female soldiers, who were used as slaves, and forced to cook and clean for Palestinian families. Albag, for example, was forced to clean toilets for a family and cook food that she was forbidden to eat. She subsisted on scraps and was only allowed to shower after 37 days.

Palestinian civilians also gladly assisted Hamas during the war by hiding their terrorist infrastructure in civilian buildings—schools, hospitals, mosques, playgrounds and even in children’s bedrooms.

Progressives cannot deny that Hamas and the Palestinian public are virtually indistinguishable. No matter how well-meaning, progressives cannot deny that the Palestinians elected Hamas to govern them. They cannot deny the research that shows broad support among Palestinians for Hamas, their ideology and their methods, or the research that reveals overwhelming Palestinian support for the atrocities of Oct. 7. Finally, they cannot deny that

even as Hamas's popularity fades, Palestinian civilians continue to support its goals, ideology and methods.

Those who assert that Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people are either fooling themselves or trying to gaslight you, contrary to all factual evidence. (JNS Mar 4)

With Trump's Backing, Hamas's Defeat is Now Possible

By Jonathan S. Tobin

For the last year and a half, it has been a self-fulfilling prophecy. Those who have claimed that Hamas couldn't be defeated were right—but only because the rules of engagement of the war that the terrorists launched on Oct. 7, 2023, were set up to ensure that it survived. Those rules may now be about to change. Or at least they will if the Jewish state takes advantage of two factors that could alter the balance of power between it and the genocidal terrorists it seeks to destroy.

The change in power in Washington and the shocking exploitation of the ceasefire deal on the part of Hamas that so outraged the Israeli public has given Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu an opportunity to reset that agreement in a way that could either free all the hostages or lead to Hamas's demise. The question is: Does he have sufficient support from his own people to do it?

That's the context for the announcement this past weekend that Israel was halting the entry of humanitarian goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip until Hamas agrees to the framework for a second-phase deal along the lines proposed by the Trump administration. The goal is to set up a negotiation that would achieve at least one of Israel's two main war goals: freeing all of the remaining hostages taken by the Palestinians on Oct. 7 and eradicating Hamas.

The problem with those goals is that they are mutually exclusive.

The only way to get all the hostages back is by assenting to an accord that will mean full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. In spite of the various plans being floated for what will happen in the Strip after fighting truly ends, that means Hamas will emerge from the war not only alive but still in control of its ruined fiefdom.

At the same time, the only way to completely defeat Hamas—something difficult but not impossible—involves a decision on the part of Jerusalem that its war effort cannot be held hostage along with the Israelis still held by the terrorists.

This is glaringly obvious, though not being acknowledged by Netanyahu or the Trump administration. Yet the aid cutoff is a sign that Israel's government is finally starting to act as if it is not committed to fighting Hamas with one hand tied behind its back.

The Israel Defense Forces destroyed Hamas's organized military formations, killed much of its leadership and demolished a sizeable portion of its infrastructure—both above ground and in the hundreds of miles of tunnels it had built in the coastal enclave. But when a ceasefire/hostage release deal halted the fighting in January, it was also clear that the Islamist group that had ruled Gaza as an independent Palestinian state in all but name since 2007 was far from eradicated.

The constant admonitions of the Biden administration demanding that Israel avoid civilian casualties in Gaza, even if it meant letting the terrorists escape, was one part of the problem. Those warnings couldn't be entirely ignored because they were backed up by threats of halting the supply of vital arms shipments, as well as the slow-walking of deliveries of those shipments that were allowed to be sent to Israel.

The other was that even while it was fighting the Islamist group, in addition to its allies and collaborators, Israel was forced to do something unprecedented in the history of warfare: aiding the civilian population under the control of its enemies. Moreover, it did so while knowing that much of the food, fuel and other supplies being shipped into Gaza daily were winding up in the hands of the very same group that started the war with unspeakable atrocities on Oct. 7.

Despite being falsely accused of war crimes and even committing "genocide" in Gaza, the IDF conducted urban combat in a situation in which its foes deliberately tried to get its own people killed. They did this by fighting around and even underneath them in tunnels and bunkers under hospitals, schools, mosques and civilian homes. Even when taking into account that the casualty statistics supplied by Hamas were wild exaggerations, roughly half the number of those killed in Gaza included Hamas and combatants of other terrorist groups. More than that, when realizing that approximately 80% of fatalities were Hamas members or their families, it's clear that the charges against the

IDF were utter falsehoods.

Nevertheless, the ability of Hamas to maintain its much-diminished numbers is the result of pressure exerted on Israel by a Biden administration that was primarily interested in ending the war at any cost, even if it meant that the terrorists emerged triumphant.

Just as important, the terms of the ceasefire/hostage deal that President Joe Biden's foreign-policy team crafted with their duplicitous Qatari partners seemed to lead to that same outcome. And though President Donald Trump was opposed to Hamas's continued existence and threatened to unleash "all Hell" on the region if all the hostages weren't released by his inauguration on Jan. 20, his desire to have the shooting stop in time for his swearing-in led his Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, to accept those same terms as he pushed the deal over the goal line in the days before Trump 2.0 took power.

That agreement did lead to the release of 30 hostages. But even as Israelis and every decent person celebrated their return home, their condition and the humiliating ceremonies that Hamas staged for their release, including a celebration when the bodies of the Bibas children were handed over, has also transformed the situation.

Netanyahu is under enormous domestic pressure to try to ransom the remaining living hostages, which may number no more than two dozen. He has also been empowered by the outrage against Hamas to not accept the same terms for a second phase of the ceasefire that would simply drag out the same process. That would further empower the terrorists and encourage them to believe they can continue to hang on amid the ruins of a war they started.

The aid stoppage represents a fundamental change in the way Israel is treating an enemy that makes no secret of its desire to destroy the Jewish state and commit the genocide of its population. It puts Hamas on notice that the gloves may soon be coming off in the war unless it stops playing for time.

That has only been made possible by Trump's victory last November.

Europe and much of the world still act as if Israel is the only country in the world not allowed to fight to win a war forced on it. But unlike Biden, Trump isn't worried about international opinion about Gaza. Nor is he constrained to avoid whole-hearted support of the war on Hamas by a faction of his party as Biden was by the left-wing base of the Democrats, where hostility to Israel has gone mainstream. Trump wants the hostages freed, but he's also floated a plan for not just ousting the terrorists but resettling Gazans elsewhere and turning the Strip into a resort. If Israel chooses to resume the war—the only way to make that or any other postwar plan that is predicated on a non-Hamas government there—he won't protest or continue advocating for the fantasy of a Palestinian state as Biden did. Indeed, it's likely that Trump will be cheering on an Israeli offensive.

The next days and weeks will be something of a game of chicken as Hamas and Israel go right up to the brink of war, with both sides daring each other to take responsibility for blowing up the ceasefire talks. The question of which of them has more to lose from such an outcome is open for debate. Netanyahu can't let Hamas survive, but he also can't be seen as writing off the lives of any remaining living hostages. Hamas wants to hold onto the hostages because so long as they do, they think they are safe. But they also know an Israel unfettered by American pressure could mean their doom.

Netanyahu now has far more weapons to pressure Hamas than he did before January. By having a partner in Washington who doesn't believe that Hamas is an "idea" that can't be defeated but a terror group that can and should be eradicated, he can finally start waging war on it in a way to accomplish that goal.

Such a decision will bring down more opprobrium on Israel than before. And it will likely further fuel the surge of antisemitism spreading across the globe from those who believe that one Jewish state on the planet is one too many. But if anything is certain, it's that Hamas won't give up the remaining hostages unless it retains its power and arms. And that is something neither Israel nor the Trump administration should accept.

It remains to be seen if Netanyahu can resist the pressure on him to throw away the sacrifices made by Israel's soldiers to secure the lives of the hostages. If he does, the primary reason won't be an American ally that doesn't think an evil terrorist organization should be allowed to get away with mass murder. (JNS Mar 4)