

Hamas and Netanyahu Are Partners: Israel Can't be Managed by a Criminal Defendant

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How depressing and upsetting it is today to recall Benjamin Netanyahu's arrogance under interrogation about Case 2000, one of the three corruption cases against the prime minister. "This is classified, don't let it leak, okay?" he said, flattering the police investigators with the magic lure of security secrets. And then he explained his doctrine regarding Hamas and Hezbollah.

"We have neighbors," he said, "who are our bitter enemies ... I send them messages all the time ... these days, right now ... I mislead them, destabilize them, mock them, and then hit them over the head." The suspect then continued his lecture: "It's impossible to reach an agreement with them ... Everyone knows this, but we control the height of the flames."

This arrogant worldview, so disconnected from reality, isn't the only thing that blew up in Netanyahu's face, and ours, on Saturday morning. The other "concept" that collapsed was one many good people warned about: the idea that the leadership of the state could be entrusted to a criminal defendant.

History will judge everyone who lent a hand to this moral distortion – first and foremost the defendant himself and his fanatic supporters, party colleagues, and partners in the governing coalition, but also the media personalities and jurists who mobilized to kosher this abomination.



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at an update at the Kirya army base in Tel Aviv, October 10, 2023
(Credit: Amos Ben Gershon/GPO)

It will also presumably cast an unflattering light on the 11 Supreme Court justices who refrained from putting their fingers in the dike on the grounds that they lacked the power to do so, while shutting their eyes to the disastrous consequences of their passivism.

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But even before that history is written, the state commission of inquiry that will have to be formed once the fires die down will have to delve into the prime minister's priorities and agenda. It will have to examine how many hours he devoted this year to his dangerous justice minister, to the court's reasonableness standard and to the Judicial Appointments Committee, compared to how many he devoted to his defense minister and the army's chief of staff; it will have to examine how much attention he paid to the head of Military Intelligence compared to how much attention he paid to his lawyers and PR people.

It's infuriating to recall that just a few months ago, Netanyahu found time to appear in the Jerusalem District Court to deter a frightened witness, the businessman Arnon Milchan, while Israel's own deterrence was eroding. Or to recall his refusal to meet with IDF Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi, who sought to warn him about the destructive consequences of abolishing the reasonableness standard, on the day the law doing so was passed.

It's impossible to close your eyes to the reality. There's a clear connection between the corruption trial, the government's judicial overhaul, and the greatest failure since the Yom Kippur War of 1973, perhaps even since the establishment of the state.

Admittedly, the intelligence agencies failed inconceivably at foreseeing the actual attack. But they warned Netanyahu time and again in recent months that Israel's enemies had

identified a historic weakness, making the likelihood of war higher than it has been since the Second Lebanon War of 2006.

Yet instead of quelling Justice Minister Yariv Levin, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich due to this danger, Netanyahu prioritized ensuring his personal survival and the integrity of his coalition at the price of capitulating to insane, messianic racists. To this end, he turned his domestic rivals into enemies and systematically destroyed the connective tissue that, with great difficulty, held Israel society together.

He and his partners in this criminal organization forgot that Israel isn't Poland or Hungary, but first and foremost a country deeply embroiled in a national conflict. Consequently, it doesn't have the privilege of entertaining itself with dictatorial games.

Hamas as Partner

Effectively, Netanyahu's entire worldview collapsed over the course of a single day. He was convinced that he could make deals with corrupt Arab tyrants while ignoring the cornerstone of the Arab-Jewish conflict, the Palestinians. His life's work was to turn the ship of state from the course steered by his predecessors, from Yitzhak Rabin to Ehud Olmert, and make the two-state solution impossible. En route to this goal, he found a partner in Hamas.

“Anyone who wants to thwart the establishment of a Palestinian state has to support bolstering Hamas and transferring money to Hamas,” he told a meeting of his Likud party's Knesset members in March 2019. “This is part of our strategy - to isolate the Palestinians in Gaza from the Palestinians in the West Bank.”

The worst terror attack in Israel's history also strips Netanyahu of his title as “the terrorism expert,” a source of pride ever since he established the Jonathan Institute in memory of his brother Yoni, who was killed during the Entebbe hostage rescue. With its help, he marketed himself for years and eventually reached the Prime Minister's Office.

Netanyahu learned the lesson of his predecessors Menachem Begin and Olmert and for years, maneuvered skillfully to avoid getting embroiled in a war in which hundreds would die, since he knew that would likely be the end of his road as a politician. But the vertigo of his current term, during which he sacrificed everything for the sake of clinging to power, resulted in “his nightmare scenario coming true,” to quote a man who knows him well.

He has been prime minister for most of the last 16 years, yet what he will be remembered for after he goes is this last devastating year. In a single day, under his reckless leadership, Israel paid a much higher price in blood than it did during the Second Lebanon War, and similar to what it paid during the first Lebanon War in the early 1980s.



Israeli troops driving towards Beaufort Castle in 1982 (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Olmert will be credited with destroying Syria's nuclear reactor and striving to end the conflict with the Palestinians. Begin will be remembered for bombing Iraq's nuclear reactor and, of course, making peace with Egypt. Netanyahu's portfolio of achievements is pretty thin, with all due respect to the Abraham Accords.

Not long ago, we marked the 40th anniversary of the cabinet meeting at which Begin announced that he couldn't go on any longer. Israel was bogged down in the Lebanese quagmire, with fatalities mounting every day, and this overcame him.

"The reason is that with every fiber of my being, I can't go on," Begin told his partners in Likud and the governing coalition, who begged him to reconsider. "There are times like that ... If I had even a shadow of a doubt that I could go on, I would do so. But it's not in my power to do so. What does a man need to do if it's not in his power? ... Allow me to go to the president [to resign] this very day. Forgive me, pardon me, grant me atonement. I can't do it anymore."

What we need now is for Netanyahu to follow in the footsteps of Likud's first leader. But you can't expect any soul-searching from him, and certainly not self-flagellation or shutting himself up at home à la Begin. Soon, any moment now, he'll be blaming everyone except himself. The poison machine has already started to work.

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*Featured image: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at an update at the Kirya army base in Tel Aviv, October 10, 2023*Credit: Amos Ben Gershom/GPO

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