

[I Negotiated for Israeli Prime Ministers. Netanyahu Is Lying](#)

Former Israeli peace negotiator Daniel Levy joins Zeteo as a contributor and unpacks this week's resumption of Israel's violence in Gaza.



[DANIEL LEVY](#)

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It has taken less than two months for normal service to be resumed – a White House that is the plaything of the prime minister of a client state, Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu. Having briefly flirted with leading the 'ceasefire over war' camp, the US is back to [bombing Yemen](#), threatening [Iran with military action](#), and undermining its own negotiations in the service of [greenlighting Israel's resumed bombing of Gaza](#).

Trump has apparently been reminded who is the superpower here. The peace president? Not if Israel says otherwise. It is hard to say that Trump 47 has exactly been duped, he of the ethnically-cleansed [Gaza Riviera plan](#). Alignment with Israel's genocidal orientation would seem to come naturally.

Having, in the words of [Einav Zangauker](#) (mother of Israeli captive Matan), "sabotaged negotiations" in order to "blame Hamas," Netanyahu definitively shattered the ceasefire in the early hours of March 18, aerially bombarding parts of Gaza, killing over [400 Palestinians](#), among them over 180 children, and the slaughter of innocents has continued since. The timing of the initial strike was designed to coincide with Suhoor, the pre-dawn meal taken during the month of Ramadan, rubbing salt in the wounds of religious sensibilities well beyond Gaza.

Israeli officials have claimed that the resumed strikes create leverage in getting Hamas to accept Israeli terms for a deal. Lies, pure and simple. Israeli war crimes failed to shift the terms of a deal for over a year. Hamas is negotiating in accordance with the parameters agreed in January, Netanyahu is not. On Wednesday, [Hamas clarified](#) that "any proposal based on negotiating the second stage and permanently ending the war will be welcomed."

Protesters inside Israel are also calling out Netanyahu's bluff. The Hostages and Missing Families Forum [issued](#) a statement calling for a renewed ceasefire, dismissing the government's claim that a return to war is "for the sake of hostages' return" as "a complete deception," and blaming the

government for “withdrawing from the agreement” and endangering the hostages. Former Mossad chief Tamir Pardo, addressing a Tel Aviv rally, [accused Netanyahu](#) of “start[ing] yet another round of war ... not to protect your people but to protect your government. Another war with no purpose, another war with no strategy.”

A number of Israelis recently released from Gaza in the 42-day ceasefire [joined](#) the protest, expressing their shock and dismay at the government's resumption of war. The reality is all too transparent. Israel already broke the terms of the ceasefire during its first phase of implementation. Israel also repeatedly disavowed the broader framework agreement that had been reached, which committed the Israeli side to negotiate a second and third phase and stipulated a full ceasefire and full Israeli military withdrawal from Gaza.

Addressing the Knesset on March 3, Netanyahu [committed](#) to a continued war even if the hostages were returned; he replaced his negotiating team, placing loyalist Minister Ron Dermer in charge; on March 2, Israel [reimposed a humanitarian siege](#), which has subsequently been tightened by closing off electricity, with the premeditated spillover effect that has on water supplies, and in particular, desalination plants. In other words, Israel's leadership is doubling down on the war crimes that led to the urgent [provisional measures](#) issued by the International Court of Justice in the case brought by South Africa regarding violations of the Genocide Convention and that also led to [arrest warrants](#) against Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant being issued by the International Criminal Court.

As Tom Fletcher, the UN undersecretary for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief, [testified](#) to the UN Security Council earlier this week, “This total blockade of life-saving aid, basic commodities, and commercial goods will have a disastrous impact on the people of Gaza who remain dependent on a steady flow of assistance into the Strip.”

Netanyahu's Political-Personal Calculation

Basing analysis of Israel's actions and decisions during the last 18 months through the lens of hostage releases or security priorities is to miss the primacy accorded by Netanyahu to political and personal calculations. The payoff, in this instance, has been immediate. The ceasefire announced on Jan. 19 induced a coalition crisis. Netanyahu had just 12 days left to pass an annual budget, or the government would have automatically dissolved and new elections called. Itamar Ben-Gvir's ultranationalist Jewish Power faction (which [quit](#) Netanyahu's coalition over the ceasefire) precipitously [rejoined](#) the government once the war on Gaza resumed as it had promised to do.

Netanyahu's budget headache – gone; coalition – strengthened; threat of early elections – likely punted to 2026.

Netanyahu can resume dismantling what he calls the Israeli [deep state](#), currently focused on [his firing](#) of the Shin Bet chief Ronen Bar and attempts to [remove](#) Attorney General Baharav-Miara. The gatekeepers, the checks and balances, were never designed to protect the rights of Palestinians in an apartheid system – but the democratic freedoms of Israeli Jews are in the crosshairs. Is it too trivial to acknowledge that it also buys Netanyahu more days off from testifying in court on his personal corruption trials?

And one should not underestimate the ideological imperative at work here – the relentless push to displace Palestinians and [make the land uninhabitable](#) for them, whether in Gaza, the West Bank, or East Jerusalem. Israel's current coalition says the quiet part out loud.

The Trump Factor

The crucial variable here was Netanyahu's reading of how much wiggle room he had with President Trump. It was, after all, Trump's unpredictability and Netanyahu's decision not to risk antagonizing the president at the get-go that led to Israel agreeing in January to the very ceasefire parameters it had been rejecting for the better part of a year.

Trump was embellishing his peacemaker rhetoric, and the two leaders appeared to be out of sync on both a Gaza deal and how best to approach Iran – talk or saber-rattle. It would have been irresponsibly naive to imagine a Trump administration delivering an end to occupation and apartheid for the Palestinians, but for Trump to succeed where his predecessor had blundered on the hugely consequential front of securing and holding a Gaza ceasefire was in the realm of the possible. That was the concern of an Israeli prime minister for whom politics and ideology align in the pursuit of permanent war and wartime leader status.

The worry was notched up the DEFCON dial when news broke of a [direct channel](#) between senior Trump hostage special envoy Adam Bohler and Hamas. When Bohler took to the airwaves, not only in the US but across three major Israeli news networks, to defend and explain that engagement with Hamas (one has to say, in some of the most lucid language used by an American official in a long time), Netanyahu moved into action.

In a long exposé, so far only in Hebrew, in the [Yedioth Ahronoth](#) paper, Ronen Bergman wrote:

"[T]he Israeli government does not want the United States to know what Hamas wants or plans or thinks or presents except through the filter and the prism of Netanyahu and Dermer... Netanyahu and Dermer are simply afraid that it will suddenly become clear to the United States that the division of roles between ...who is reluctant and who is pushing for the continuation of the war, is not exactly as senior Israeli government officials described it."

Boehler had done what any negotiator worth their salt must do: hear first-hand from the major warring parties in a ceasefire negotiation (and which the Biden team of moral and diplomatic degenerates failed to do).

Boehler stated the obvious, [telling](#) the Israeli viewing audience, "It is hard to negotiate anything if you don't understand the other party at all [M]eeting with someone is not a concession. You have to understand what's important to the other side."

Israel had built its case on a lie – that Hamas could not be reasoned with. Netanyahu's role as rejectionist-in-chief was in danger of being exposed. Boehler told the Israeli public on [Channel 11 Kan TV](#) that "some of the things that they [Hamas] talked about were relatively reasonable ... and workable things." Boehler understood that there could be a long-term truce with Hamas, that Hamas would [cede governance](#) (not demilitarize as claimed) in Gaza – something they had been willing to do for years in the context of reconciliation talks with Abbas and when Palestinian elections were scheduled but again [canceled](#) by Abbas in 2021 (with the connivance of the then-Biden administration).

Israel now claims to be targeting Hamas's political and civilian capabilities to topple its governance. But Hamas is not insisting on retaining governance. So what then prevents progress in negotiations? It is Israel's unachievable and unrealistic terms of Hamas surrender, attempting to secure in negotiations what it failed to achieve on the battlefield. That, alongside Israel's refusal to allow any kind of Palestinian governance, combined with its insistence on perpetual war and Palestinian removal.

Boehler's wings have, for now, been [clipped](#). The US system, including White House envoy Steven Witkoff during his visit to the region, resumed the traditional role of being Israel's lawyers, festooning Netanyahu's proposal with the stars and stripes of a Made In America plan.

The other mediating countries of [Qatar](#) and [Egypt](#) have made clear which party has violated the ceasefire (spoiler alert: Israel), but the US calls the shots with Israel. At this stage, Team Trump has moved the goalposts and abandoned the framework that it had not only been a party to reaching

an agreement on, but also of which it was a guarantor. The envoy who led that, Witkoff, is also central to the talks on Russia/Ukraine. That, too, does not bode well.

Far Beyond Weaponizing Antisemitism

For the Trump administration and the overall Republican Party ecosystem to be in lockstep with the unbridled extremism of contemporary Israel, is hardly a jaw-dropping development. Donald J. Trump has form from his first term. The new Gaza Riviera proposal was a grotesque encouragement of the crime of mass forced displacement and served to further empower and egg on the already pumped-up 'apartheid is not enough' camp inside Israel, who are, from within senior government positions, pursuing a zero-sum outcome of completing the Nakba in a frenzy of destruction and ethnic cleansing.

Other aspects of Trump policy have been a continuation of the Biden administration, sometimes on steroids, for instance, expediting even more [expansive and harmful arms deliveries](#) to Israel, and threats against the UN as well as asset freezes, and entry bans against [ICC officials](#) and those who assist the court in its work.

On the domestic front, targeting those supporting Palestinian rights had long been identified by the MAGA movement as a battering ram in the culture wars. And thus, it has played out in executive orders, in the defunding of universities, in attempts to deport the activists (notably the Columbia University case of [Mahmoud Khalil](#)).

Trump has gone far beyond weaponizing antisemitism. When the [White House posts](#) "Shalom Mahmoud" to announce the unlawful arrest of a Palestinian activist, they are signing off on this unfettered assault on civil liberties with a Star of David, apparently claiming this is done in the name of and in defense of Jews (in applauding this action, the Anti Defamation League is signifying that it has definitively lost its collective marbles and constitutes a danger to the [wellbeing of many Jews](#)).

It is, of course, conceivable that Trump will rethink US abandonment of the ceasefire, will rue having been played like a fiddle by Netanyahu, and will show leadership in forcing the Israeli premier's hand. There is a counter-strain of policy approach in the Trump 2.0 melange (one that did not previously exist), able to distinguish between American and Israeli interests, and unimpressed when the latter appear to take precedence. Other opportunities will emerge as the unintended consequence of the Trump administration's alienation of vast swaths of the planet, including traditional allies. With the Global South assuming greater prominence, Trump may, as journalist [Tony Karon notes](#), "be inadvertently accelerating a decolonization 2.0 moment – and Israel, as its primary dependent, may be the biggest loser."

The recently formed [Hague Group](#), committed to upholding ICJ and ICC rulings on Palestine/Israel, is the latest meaningful initiative on that front.

Even some dormant Democrats might be aroused from their slumber (as some have been in the case of Mahmoud Khalil) – and be forced to decide – are they the more-Zionist-than-thou Cheney-esque party of perpetual war or a governing alternative even on Israel/Palestine?

But those hopes are for another day.

Averting Israeli Plans for What's Next

The immediate challenge is to prevent the looming disaster of the already [60,000+ Palestinians killed](#) becoming a six-digit number – each a life, a family, a world shattered.

Briefing the [UN Security Council](#) recently, I warned there are good reasons to fear a renewed Israeli attempt to permanently depopulate the north of Gaza. Having broken the ceasefire this week, senior IDF officers [briefed](#) military correspondents that “we are succeeding in moving the population that returned to the north to again go south.” Israeli forces have again cut off main arteries and compartmentalized Gaza, including retaking the Netzarim Corridor. If this continues, one can expect a stated Israeli war goal of indefinitely reoccupying parts of Gaza and for ethnic cleansing to be pursued via this strategy of attrition. Israel's new Defence Minister, Israel Katz, has doubled down on the collective punishment war crimes of his (ICC-charged) predecessor, [stating](#), “Gaza residents...you will pay the full price.”

So much will continue to depend on the willingness or otherwise of ordinary Israelis, and [notably reservists](#), to continue signing up for endless war and the abandonment of those Israelis being held in Gaza. It will depend on the continued and remarkable resilience of Palestinians on the ground. And over time, it also depends on every one of us, each new act of solidarity, each person brought into the circle of those who refuse to be bystanders.

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