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Palestine

Pity the people of Gaza!

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What we have witnessed in recent days in the negotiations between Hamas and the Zionist state under American and Arab auspices, following the Islamic movement's rejection of the seventy-day truce accompanied by mutual prisoner releases and the entry of humanitarian aid, proposed by US envoy Steve Witkoff and accepted by Benjamin Netanyahu, is in fact a repetition of what we have been witnessing since the beginning of last year.

After news of an impending agreement spread, Hamas announced its rejection of the plan because it did not stipulate the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Gaza Strip and a permanent cessation of the war. These are the same conditions that Hamas announced it had obtained in the spring of last year. Then, the people of Gaza celebrated the good news until it became clear that it was a figment of imagination. I commented on what the movement announced at the time, more than a year ago, under the title "Gambling Game between Hamas and Netanyahu".

Apologies are due to readers for the length of the following two excerpts, but their purpose is clear enough. They illustrate the continuation of the situation as it has been since the beginning of last year, with one serious difference though: the number of victims of the genocidal assault on the people of Gaza continues to increase steadily, and the Zionist destruction of the Strip and its depopulation ("ethnic cleansing") continue at an extremely dangerous pace, with the aim of creating an irreversible situation. The following lengthy excerpt from the article mentioned above reads today as if it were a commentary on the current situation, replacing Joe Biden with Donald Trump and Anthony Blinken with Steve Witkoff:

The statement by Khalil al-Hayya, the deputy head of Hamas in Gaza, explaining what the movement had agreed to, left no room for hope that an agreement would be reached, except by projecting desires onto reality. Had the Zionist state accepted the movement's official interpretation, it would simply have been an admission of crushing defeat. The proposal accepted by Hamas comprised three stages, which, according to al-Hayya, included not only a temporary ceasefire and a prisoner exchange between the two sides, but also a permanent cessation of hostilities, a complete withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Gaza Strip, and even an end to the blockade imposed on it... Of course, the Zionist state could never accept such conditions, and Hamas is certainly not naive or prone to magical thinking to the point of believing that its declared position would lead to a truce.

This suggests that the announcement actually served two purposes: a secondary purpose, which was to lift the blame on Hamas in the eyes of the people of Gaza, desperate for a truce accompanied by an acceleration of the entry of aid so they could catch their breath, reunite, bury their dead, and heal their wounds. Thus, after a long wait, the movement is telling them that it has accepted the truce, but Israel is the one rejecting it. The other, primary, purpose behind the announcement relates to the ongoing gambling game between Hamas and Benjamin Netanyahu.

It is well known that the latter is caught between two fires in Israeli domestic politics: those calling for prioritizing the release of Israelis held in Gaza, naturally led by the families of the detainees, and those rejecting any truce and insisting on continuing the war without interruption, led by the most extremist ministers of the Zionist far right. However, the greatest pressure on Netanyahu comes from Washington, which aligns with the wishes of the families of the Israeli detainees in its pursuit of a 'humanitarian' truce lasting a few weeks, allowing the Biden administration to claim it is eager for peace and concerned for civilians, after having been and while remaining a fully responsible partner in Israel's genocidal war, a war which Israel would not have been able to wage without US military support.

Netanyahu decided to evade the embarrassment by tactically agreeing to a ceasefire lasting a few weeks and to terms for a prisoner exchange that Washington, in the words of its Secretary of State, deemed 'extremely generous'. That was a few days ago, and Antony Blinken added that the ball was now in Hamas's court and that it would bear sole responsibility for continuing the war if it rejected the proposal. This was embarrassing for the Islamic movement, both in the eyes of the people of Gaza and in the eyes of international public opinion, because it knows for certain that the Zionist government is determined to complete its military occupation of the Strip...

So, Hamas responded to Netanyahu with a counter-maneuver, announcing with great media fanfare its acceptance of a ceasefire based on a proposal that differed greatly from the one Netanyahu had agreed to, thus putting the ball back in his court, knowing that he would reject its proposal. However, this is a dangerous game, as it did not truly embarrass Netanyahu, because all wings of the Zionist power elite share his rejection of that proposal. Rather, it strengthened the Zionist consensus to complete the occupation of Gaza... (End of quote from "Gambling Game Between Hamas and Netanyahu", *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 7 May 2024—in Arabic.)

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But the similarity between the situation a year ago and the current situation does not hide the fact that things have seriously deteriorated, as I emphasized two months ago as follows:

Donald Trump's victory for a second presidential term allowed Netanyahu to achieve what he had been striving for, but could not have done without a US green light... With Trump's support, Netanyahu has now shifted the direction of pressure: Instead of Hamas using its hostages as leverage to extract concessions from Israel in exchange for their gradual release, Netanyahu has reoccupied the Gaza Strip, taking all its residents as hostages. He is now threatening Hamas with continued killing of thousands of Gazans and working to displace most of them if it does not surrender, release all its captives, and even leave the Strip.

The people of Gaza are now facing two possibilities, with no third looming on the horizon: Either the Zionist regime proceeds with its project to complete the 1948 Nakba by perpetrating a new "ethnic cleansing" accompanied by the annexation of the Strip, as advocated by Netanyahu's allies on the Zionist far right; or the settlement negotiated by the Arab states is reached, which stipulates the departure of Hamas's leaders and fighters and their allies from Gaza, similar to the departure of the PLO leaders and fighters from Beirut in 1982, to be replaced by the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority, backed by Arab forces. Hamas has no say in the cleansing scenario, of course, but it can negotiate the second scenario and set its own conditions.

Beyond that, what other option does Hamas have to offer? The only alternative strategy we've heard from the movement is the one articulated by one of its spokespersons, Sami Abu Zuhri [1]... He called for confronting the ongoing population displacement in the following way: 'In the face of this diabolical plan that combines massacres and starvation, everyone who can bear arms anywhere in the world must act. Spare no explosive device, bullet, knife, or stone. Let everyone break their silence. We are all sinners if the interests of America and the Zionist occupation remain secure while Gaza is being slaughtered and starved.' This vision of the battle is a reiteration of the call made by Muhammad Deif on the morning of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood: 'Today, today, everyone who has a rifle should take it out, for this is its time. And whoever doesn't have a rifle should come out with his machete, axe, or Molotov cocktail, with his truck, bulldozer, or car... This is the day of the great revolt to end the last occupation and the last apartheid system in the world.'

It quickly became clear that betting on such a call was pure fantasy, as nothing noteworthy happened, even in the occupied West Bank, let alone in the 1948 territories and the Arab world. So, what chance of success does the same call have today, after all the genocide and devastation the people of Gaza have endured? As for those who support this call from outside the Strip and do not implement it with any "explosive device, bullet, knife, or stone" they can lay their hand on, according to Abu Zuhri's recommendation, they are merely hypocrites, verbally inciting from afar to fight to the last Gazan. The truth is that Hamas today faces a choice between relinquishing its rule of Gaza—the terms of which it can negotiate to ensure the safety and survival of the people of the Strip—and continuing with the strategy of liberation through weapons and illusions. Of the latter, i.e. illusions, the Islamic movement have certainly much more than from the former. It seems, however, that there is a debate going on among the movement's leaders about the approach that should be taken in the face of the dilemma here described." (End of quote from "Gaza and Solomon's Wisdom", *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 1 April 2025—in Arabic.)

For an in-depth discussion of the ongoing genocide and Hamas's strategy, see my new book: (The) Gaza Catastrophe: The Genocide in World-Historical Perspective. UK edition, online and in bookshops on 20 June; US edition online on June 20 and in bookshops on August 5.

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Translated by the author from the Arabic original published in Al-Quds al-Arabi for his English-language [blog](#).

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[1] Abu Zuhri (based in Qatar) has recently attracted widespread condemnation—primarily within Gaza itself—for declaring in a televised interview in mid-May, “Today, we are more certain of the justice of the battle after we and our people have managed to hold out for fifteen months”, adding that “the houses that were destroyed will be rebuilt, and the wombs of our women will give birth to many more children than those who died as martyrs”.