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Palestine

Truce in Gaza and the dilemmas faced by Netanyahu and Hamas

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Since the end of last week, the news related to the ongoing genocidal war in the Gaza Strip has been overshadowed by the truce project that US President Joe Biden announced on Friday, attributing it to “Israel” without specifying which Israeli governing body had approved it.

Media commentators found rather odd that an Israeli proposal is announced by the US President instead of being announced by official Israeli sources. The confusion increased when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seemed to want to distance himself from the project by asserting conditions that apparently contradicted it, or complicated it, the most important being his insistence on continuing the onslaught until Hamas’s military and political capabilities are completely eliminated and Israeli security control over the entire Strip is ensured.

The truth is that this apparent mix-up reflects a real state of confusion that revolves primarily around Netanyahu himself. This is because the Zionist leader is caught between two fires: US pressure supported by the Israeli opposition and by a group within his own party, the Likud, led by “Defence” Minister Gallant, and counter-pressure exerted by Netanyahu’s allies on the Zionist far right. What is the nature of these two opposing pressures?

Let us begin with the pressure from the two “neo-Nazi” blocs that Netanyahu allied with a year and a half ago to obtain a majority in the Knesset that allowed him to return to power. It is well known that these two blocs believe that there is no point in concluding any agreement with Hamas, even if only temporary, and that the goal of the ongoing war must be for the Zionist state to seize the entire Gaza Strip and annex it to its territory as part of “Eretz Israel” (the Land of Israel) between the river and the sea. (This has become the common goal of the Zionist far right after it was forced to downsize the “Greater Israel” project by stopping it at the borders of Sinai in the south and the Jordan River in the east, while expanding north to the Golan Heights and coveting part of southern Lebanon.) The leaders of the Zionist far right aspire to deport the Gazans from the Gaza Strip – or incite them to leave it “voluntarily” as they claim with brazen hypocrisy – and to replace them with Jewish settlers. They also see this goal as more important than the lives of the remaining captives held by Hamas and other Palestinian factions in Gaza.

On the other hand, the two main partisan wings of US imperialism see that their state’s interests are achieved by forming a regional military alliance that includes the Zionist state and Washington’s Arab allies, namely, from the Ocean to the Gulf: the Kingdom of Morocco, Egypt, the Saudi Arabian Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, and other Gulf Cooperation Council monarchies, as well as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. It is a project for which Donald Trump made strenuous efforts while he was in the White House, and his endeavours were continued by his successor, Biden, who has been almost indistinguishable from him with regard to the “Greater Middle East”. Achieving this project requires however a “solution” to the Palestinian issue based on the establishment of a “Palestinian state” that would give it its backing, and thus deceive Arab public opinion (in the belief of the governments concerned).

As for the fate of Gaza according to this vision, it would be a return to what emerged from the Oslo Accords, i.e. a Palestinian Authority entrusted with the task of managing densely populated Palestinian areas, while the Zionist army surround these areas and supervise them security-wise in addition to the said authority. But experience has proven that a Palestinian Authority cooperating with the occupation is not able to control the popular resistance alone. US officials and their Arab allies also agree that the current Ramallah-based Authority is unable to prevent Hamas from regaining control of Gaza if the Zionist army withdraws from the Strip’s populated areas. They believe therefore that the ideal solution would be to deploy an Arab “peacekeeping force” in those populated areas, a force upon which the Palestinian Authority collaborating with the occupation could rely in controlling the population. Citing Western sources, the Financial Times revealed that three Arab countries have expressed their willingness to send forces to

Gaza: Egypt, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates.

Biden needs a truce that he could attribute to his administration's efforts before US public opinion, especially among traditional Democratic Party voters, in order to limit the electoral loss that he is likely to suffer in some circles. His administration made extensive efforts to persuade the Israeli war cabinet established following the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation to agree on a second truce project, the first phase of which consists in a six-week ceasefire during which a number of Israeli captives and a larger number of Palestinian detainees, as usual, would be released, along with the withdrawal of the Zionist army from Gaza's densely populated areas (as stipulated in the Oslo Accords). These areas have actually been significantly reduced in size, as most of the Gazans have become displaced and confined to restricted areas of refuge.

While the project stipulates a second phase during which the remaining Israeli captives and an additional batch of Palestinian detainees would be released, Netanyahu publicly disagreed with the project's promise of a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza during this same phase, stressing that he had never accepted this, and that the Zionist army would not end the war before ensuring the complete elimination of Hamas's potential in the Strip. What Biden and the members of the Zionist war cabinet really want, however, is nothing more than a temporary truce leading to the release of all Israeli captives except male soldiers, so that they could claim before the public opinion that they did everything they could to save those who could be saved. The rest will be regarded as part of the normal cost of war that soldiers are prepared to pay when they join the armed forces. The war cabinet members know that completing their occupation of the Rafah area will likely result in the death of the captives who constitute the last card in the hands of the Hamas leadership inside the Gaza Strip. They want therefore to reduce the number of these captives to what Israeli public opinion can stomach.

As for this second phase of the project and the third (reconstructing the Gaza Strip), they will not be achieved as the truce will not go beyond its first phase, which is what convinced Netanyahu to accept the project in the first place – even if reluctantly, because he knew that his far-right allies would not accept it. This is the reason for the mix-up and confusion that emerged in recent days as Netanyahu is trying to persuade his allies not to break their alliance with him and withdraw their blocs' support for his premiership, thus forcing him to rely on the opposition, whether it is Gantz's party, which joined the war cabinet, or Lapid's party, which refused to join it. The two parties have expressed their willingness to support Netanyahu's remaining in his position until the next parliamentary election if he accepts the truce and behind it the settlement project based on the involvement of Arab forces with the Zionist forces in the security control of the Gaza Strip.

It is a difficult choice that Netanyahu is facing today, the inevitable result of his reliance on two extremist groups, compared to which the Likud Party itself, despite its fascist roots, looks "moderate". It is an equally difficult choice, if not more difficult, that the Hamas leaders inside the Gaza Strip are facing on the opposite side, as they are asked to give up their last card in securing their survival, in exchange for a few weeks of truce accompanied by a massive entry of aid that is necessary to avoid the death of an additional large number of Gazans, children in particular.

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