



Netanyahu's statement jeopardizes deal at critical point in negotiations

Amos Harel

Negotiations toward a hostage deal with Hamas reached a critical point this weekend. The Egyptian and Qatari mediators – perhaps the American ones, too – bombarded Arab media outlets with optimistic forecasts in a bid to spur Israel and Hamas to commit themselves to a deal. On Saturday, it remained unclear whether the Hamas delegation in Cairo will respond to the mediators positively or reservedly (“Yes, but...”).

The Biden administration, concerned about yet another failed effort, dispatched CIA chief William Burns to Cairo. The Washington Post reported that as part of the efforts to salvage the negotiations, the U.S. demanded that Qatar expel Hamas leaders from its soil if the organization rejects the deal. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, however, quickly began responding to the optimistic reports on Saturday, issuing an announcement disseminated among Israeli media outlets.

In the guise of a “senior diplomatic official,” Netanyahu announced that “in contrast to reports, Israel will under no circumstances agree to end the war as part of a deal involving the release of hostages. The IDF will enter Rafah and destroy the Hamas battalions remaining there, whether there is a temporary truce for releasing the hostages or not.”

Netanyahu's announcement elicited enraged reactions from both sides of the



Protesters in Tel Aviv on Saturday evening denouncing the government and calling for hostages to be freed. See story, Page 3.

Itai Ron

debate. Even on the right, many already don't believe the prime minister's empty promises about the taking of Rafah and “absolute victory.” Meanwhile, the Hostages and Missing Families Forum (and military top brass) are concerned that with this announcement,

Netanyahu is harming the mediators' efforts deliberately. Furthermore, such a blunt statement could widen the rift between Israel and the U.S., which has recently praised Israel for its flexibility while laying responsibility for delays in reaching a deal.

Israel's revived threat to enter Rafah should be taken with caution. The military is indeed making preparations for capturing Rafah, but these have been halted and restarted many times over the last three months. Last week, in a phone conversation between President Joe

Biden and Netanyahu amid a visit to Israel by Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the Americans emphasized that in their view, an invasion of Rafah was unacceptable – certainly without Israel taking careful and systematic steps to evacuate the more than one million Pal-

estinian civilians currently in the area. It's more likely that Israel is leaning toward a limited military move in the city, if any at all.

The U.S. administration has been dropping hints about possible sanctions

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Report: Hamas says yes to cease-fire deal; Israel skeptical

Jonathan Lis, Jack Khoury and Haaretz

Hamas was expected to announce that it is accepting Egypt's proposal for a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip and the release of hostages, the Saudi newspaper Al-Sharq reported on Saturday morning.

According to the report, several hours of intensive talks were underway between Egypt and Qatar and the delegations from Israel and Hamas about prisoners to be released in the deal.

Hamas sources stated there had been progress in talks regarding the United States and Egypt committing that Israel would not resume fighting after the deal, and full Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in the third phase of the deal.

However, the United States and Egypt are not willing to commit to Hamas that its leaders and any members who were involved in the October 7 attacks would be protected from Israeli strikes.

The Saudi paper reported that Israel is willing to release Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti, who is serving several life sentences for murder, but only to Gaza and not to the West Bank.

A source told Haaretz that despite the public impression that Egypt is leading the negotiations, Qatar is still responsible for the process behind the scenes, and has expressed commitment to bringing the Israeli hostages home.

The Washington Post reported that the United States

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Turkey says trade with Israel halted until Gaza cease-fire

Reuters

Turkey will not resume trade with Israel, worth around \$7 billion a year, until a permanent cease-fire is secured in Gaza with unhindered humanitarian aid flowing to Palestinians there, its trade minister said on Friday.

Israel's uncompromising attitude and the worsening situation in Gaza prompted Turkey to halt trade, Omer Bolat said in a speech in Istanbul.

Turkey's decision, announced late on Thursday, made it the first of Israel's key trade partners to halt

exports and imports over its military campaign in Gaza.

Israel's Foreign Minister Israel Katz criticized Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan's move, saying it breaks international trade agreements.

Last month, Turkey curbed exports of steel, fertilizer and jet fuel among 54 product categories over what it said was Israel's refusal to allow Ankara to take part in aid air-drop operations for Gaza. Remaining trade, which totaled \$5.4 billion in Turkish exports and \$1.6 billion in Israeli imports last year, will now be halted.



Dror Or



Elyakim Libman

Israeli believed to be hostage in Gaza killed on Oct. 7

Aaron Rabinowitz, Yaniv Kubovich, Ofer Aderet, Noa Shpigel, Yael Freidson and Ido Efrazi

The body of Elyakim Libman, previously believed to be one of the Israeli hostages held in Gaza, was found recently in a grave of another victim of the October 7 attacks, in Israeli territory. Representatives of the

Israel Defense Forces, the Health Ministry and the Abu Kabir Institute of Forensic Medicine informed the Libman family on Friday that 24-year-old Elyakim was murdered during Hamas' surprise attack on October 7.

Due to the chaos that took place during the process of collecting and identifying those killed by Hamas on October 7, the Religious Ser-

vices Ministry ordered the reopening of many graves.

The deaths of several other people who were thought to have been kidnapped to Gaza were determined by reopening graves of October 7 victims, Haaretz has learned.

Elyakim was the son of Elyahu Libman, the former head of the Kiryat Arba Regional Council. The Tikvah

Forum, a group affiliated with some of the hostages' families, said that Elyakim had worked as a security guard at the Nova Musical Festival. Following the attack, he assisted in evacuating many partygoers.

Libman was named after his uncle, who was murdered in a terror attack in 1998. He was the fourth of eight children, and grew up

in the West Bank settlement of Kirya Arba, near Hebron.

During his yeshiva years, he participated in a youth program, where he met his good friend Eitan Mor, who was kidnapped to Gaza on October 7 by Hamas. Libman served in the IDF's Golani Brigade.

Following his release from the army, Libman studied culinary arts and

began working at a restaurant. He moved to Tel Aviv a few months before his death, having told his friends he planned to attend law school.

On the morning of October 7, Elyakim managed to call his father, telling him about the unfolding attack. “Terrorists, terrorists,” he whispered into the phone.

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At age 103

Danish nun who saved 2 Jewish infants recognized by Israel

Ofer Aderet

“I would like to thank you, Ane-Lise Bylov Jespersen, for your courageous act of helping two Jewish babies, far away from their parents who had to escape to Sweden during the time of the German occupation in [World War II]. Your deeds represent the very basic decency and goodness of humanity – to help a fellow human being in distress, especially the most vulnerable human beings – day-old babies.”

This letter of appreciation from Israel's ambassador to Denmark, David Akov, was delivered last month to Ane-Lise Bylov Jespersen,

a 103-year-old Danish nun, in the presence of the two “infants” she saved in the Holocaust: Both are now 80. “During these very difficult days after October 7, 2023, when our world is shaken, it is a ray of light to bring forth the memory of your inspiring act of goodness,” the ambassador added.

The man behind the belated recognition of the elderly nun's deed is Itamar Wexler of Tel Aviv, who heard about this unique rescue story a few years ago from Max Solove, one of the “infants,” who is Wexler's second cousin. Solove was born in Denmark in August 1943, about two months before the dramatic

rescue of the Danish Jews, in which they were evacuated to neighboring Sweden. Since he was too small to travel with his parents, he was transferred to the Diakonissestiftelsen, a church institution that included a hospital and a kindergarten, in the Frederiksberg district of Copenhagen. He was hidden there for about 18 months together with a slightly younger Jewish baby, Birte Sabov, whose parents were also evacuated to Sweden. Ane-Lise Bylov Jespersen, who was 22 at the time, took care of them during that entire period. In 1945 the children's parents returned safely from Sweden and the families were reunited.

“There is no doubt that many of the women and men who served in the Diakonissestiftelsen in those years endangered themselves when they hid and cared for wounded Resistance members, just as they saved the two babies,” Wexler says, adding: “They took care of the babies and protected them with dedication and at risk to their lives.” Bylov Jespersen is the only member of the group from Diakonissestiftelsen who is

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At Columbia, Israeli students have become the campus pariahs

Judy Maltz

NEW YORK – Eden Shaveet is in her second year of a special postgraduate program at Columbia University that trains aspiring doctoral candidates in math, science and technology. Her bio on the program website used to include the fact that she was Israeli. A few weeks ago, Shaveet asked that this detail be removed.

“I was afraid of being harmed,” says the 26-year-old whose scholarship focuses on the intersection of computation, information and health.

Whether or not the protests sweeping across American college campuses are antisemitic has been a matter of widespread debate. In their defense, the protest leaders often point out that Jewish students attend their demonstrations and are part of their encampments. They have also proudly shared photos of the Passover seders held in their “liberation zones.”

What is undeniable, though, is that the movement is driven by a deep and fundamental hatred of Zionism and Israel. This has made Israelis – a distinct subgroup within the Jewish community on campus – feel particularly targeted.



Columbia University assistant professor Shai Davidai calling for the Israeli hostages in Gaza to be released, after he was banned from the Columbia campus last month.

Stefan Jeremich/AP

Because while not all Jews are Zionists, it is usually presumed that Israelis, almost by definition, are.

For that reason, some Jews might not feel threatened when protesters on campus chant, as they often do: “Say it loud, say it clear, we don't want no Zionists here.” And they might not necessarily interpret as a death threat a statement from a leader of the protests (since banned from campus) that “Zionists

don't deserve to live.” For Israelis, such equanimity would be almost impossible.

“The situation for Israelis on campus is horrific,” Shaveet says. “While the media tends to amplify the voices of Jewish-Americans on campus complaining about antisemitism, we get ignored, even though our predicament is much worse.”

“Our connection to Israel is real – it's not hypothetical, like it is for most Jewish

Americans. We live there, our parents live there, our siblings live there, we were born there, we served in the army there, and a disproportionate amount of hatred is being directed at us.”

Lior Kreindler, a 25-year-old doctoral student in biomedical engineering, says the campus has felt “unwelcoming” to her since October 7, but the situation has

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Ane-Lise Bylov Jespersen, center, with Birte Sabov, right, and Max Solove in Denmark in 2013.

Courtesy of Itamar Wexler

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