



Yossi Verter

U.S. making final push for cease-fire deal before Ramadan

Amos Harel

Ahead of Ramadan, which begins at the start of next week, the Biden administration is making its final appeal to reach a deal to release the hostages and call a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. U.S. President Joe Biden put the ball in Hamas' court Tuesday night, telling journalists that Israel had responded positively to the proposal drawn up by the U.S., Egypt and Qatar. It was now up to Hamas to do the same. "We'll know in a couple of days," the president said. "There's

Violating the hostages' souls
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got to be a cease-fire. If we get to a circumstance that it continues to Ramadan ... it's gonna be very dangerous."

When Biden talks about Hamas, he is mainly talking about its leader in the Gaza Strip, Yahya Sinwar. Communication between Sinwar and the outside world is sporadic, with long intermissions between the messages transmitted from his hideout in Gaza to Hamas leadership abroad. All Israeli efforts to locate Sinwar have failed so far, but the Israel Defense Forces and the Shin Bet security agency continue their search, hoping to find him in Khan Yunis or Rafah.

In the last few days, as Hamas has taken a harder



Palestinian children waiting to receive food in Rafah on Tuesday.

Mohammed Salem / Reuters

line in the talks and responses have become slower, the Israeli defense establishment has come to suspect that Sinwar has adopted a new strategy. One theory is that he has become less interested in a deal and is instead counting on a regional escalation with the onset of Ramadan.

When Hamas launched its surprise attack on October 7, Sinwar assumed other members of the "axis of resistance" – specifically Hezbollah, and, to some degree, Iran – would come to his aid and attack Israel. That didn't happen. Hezbollah, which Israel believes was not in-

formed in advance of Hamas' plans, did open a second front against Israel on the Lebanese border. But it has engaged only in limited operations that have not escalated into a full-scale war. Now, due to the religious character of the Ramadan period, Sinwar may be hoping to set off a re-

gional conflagration, inflaming Jerusalem and the West Bank, and perhaps mass demonstrations in neighboring Arab countries. It looks like another big gamble on top of the gamble the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip took in October.

If that is what he hopes,

he's getting some help from the Israeli side in the provocations of National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who has been raising tensions around the Temple Mount by seeking to restrict Muslim access during

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Likud minister values voters over his job

Less than 24 hours after being commanded by Foreign Minister Israel Katz to return home for "immediate consultations," Gilad Erdan, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations landed in Ben-Gurion International Airport. By itself, this could have been an opening scene for a decent political satire series. The problem is that it's not funny – it's sad and tragic and it comes at our expense.

On Tuesday, UN Under-Secretary-General Pramila Patten, the special representative of the secretary general on sexual violence in conflict, presented her report that backs Israel's claim that Israelis were raped and subjected to severe sexual violence during

Hamas' October 7 attack and that the hostages continue to suffer the same fate.

After months of denial and silence on the part of international women's organizations, including those of the UN, the atrocities have finally won official recognition. Instead of leveraging the impact of the report by, among other things, enabling the ambassador and others (including women) to respond, Katz had an inexplicable tantrum and "ordered" a surprised ambassador to return to Israel. The absurd excuse used was that UN Secretary General António Guterres "did not order the Security Council to convene in view of the

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Biden: 'A cease-fire is in the hands of Hamas right now'

Jonathan Lis, Ben Samuels and Reuters

American officials called on Israel to urgently address the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, while Minister Benny Gantz met with officials in Washington and a foreign source stated that a deal was unlikely before the start of Ramadan next week.

"No excuses, we must get more aid into Gaza. A cease-fire is in the hands of Hamas right now," U.S. President Joe Biden told the press. Biden said a cease-fire is necessary to get more aid into Gaza.

An exchange of prisoners can only happen after

a cease-fire takes place, senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan said Tuesday. "We say to Washington, what is more important than sending aid [to Gaza] is stopping its supply of weapons to Israel," he told a press conference in Beirut.

A foreign source forecast that it would not be possible to reach a deal before the start of Ramadan next week. According to the source, the parties are playing "chicken," and talks aren't progressing.

"Currently there is an impasse on the key issues," the source told Haaretz. "The

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U.S. sanctions former Israeli intelligence officer behind spyware firms

Oded Yaron and Omer Benjakob

The United States on Tuesday imposed sanctions on former Israeli intelligence officer Tal Dilian, who is behind the cyber firms Cytrox and Intellexa which developed the Predator spyware software used for mobile phone surveillance.

The companies, which operate outside the supervision of the Israeli Defense Ministry, are at the center of a global scandal following the discovery of several cases involving the use of espionage technology against politicians, journalists, and other targets in Greece and other countries.

The U.S. Treasury announced Tuesday that its

"Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated two individuals and five entities associated with the Intellexa Consortium for their role in developing, operating, and distributing commercial spyware technology used to target Americans, including U.S. government officials, journalists, and policy experts." "The proliferation of

commercial spyware poses distinct and growing security risks to the United States and has been misused by foreign actors to enable human rights abuses and the targeting of dissidents around the world for repression and reprisal," the Treasury statement continued.

The new sanctions require the freezing of all Dil-

ian's assets, as well as those of his father-in-law and the various companies in the U.S., or those that are under the control of U.S. citizens.

Any such business interest is required to be reported to the Office of Foreign Assets Control, which is responsible for administering the U.S. Department of Commerce's blacklist.

The sanctions also pro-

hibit all U.S. citizens from carrying out any business activity with Dilian and any of his companies, unless they obtain a special permit.

The Treasury Department's statement further notes that financial institutions, companies, and individuals who continue to conduct business with Dilian may also face sanctions.

Among the activities that may lead to sanctions are any donations or payments and goods or services rendered to or from Dilian and his associates.

In July 2023, Intellexa and Cytrox were added to a U.S. blacklist of companies acting against American interests, but this is the first occasion that personal sanctions have been im-

posed on company executives, including on Dilian.

So far, the company has appeared on the Chamber of Commerce's list as an entity that official government bodies and agencies are not authorized to conduct business with. As of now, the sanctions have turned personal, and thus

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Bar-Ilan study:

Philistines worshipped Greek Mother Goddess, used drugs in cult



Altar at Gath.

Aren Maeir

notes that despite their outsized contribution to the Levant's history, we know very little about Philistine beliefs, not even the names of their gods.

Led by Dr. Suembikya Frumin, an archaeobotanist, and Prof. Aren Maeir, the archaeologist who directs the excavations at Gath, the researchers identified the plants used in the temple. They also ventured to speculate on their ritual purposes based on the season in which they were harvested and information on similar cultic practices – on the other side of the Mediterranean.

Mediterranean salad

The most common botanical traces were fruits of the chaste tree, with around 100 remains found mostly in the area of the temple's altar and the holy of holies, the researchers report.

The chaste tree, also known as monk's pepper, commonly grows in the wild and had multiple uses in antiquity. Its small fruits can be used as a substitute for pepper, while various ancient writers attributed

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Ariel David

Analysis of hundreds of burnt seeds and fruits found in a 3,000-year-old temple has revealed insights into the little-known religious rites of the Philistines, including links to cults in the Aegean, as well as the use of psychoactive drugs.

While they get a bad rap in the Bible, modern archaeological investigation has indicated that the Philistines were anything but a bunch of uncivilized yokels. We have learned that they were a sophisticated civilization that blended, both culturally and genetically, influences from Greece and

other regions with local Canaanite elements.

Now this picture is confirmed and enriched by the study of botanical remains in a temple in Gath, the Philistine city known as the birthplace of the giant Goliath, according to the Bible. Archaeologists from Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan, Israel, painstakingly collected some 2,000 samples of burnt seeds and fruits from the ruins of two successive phases in the temple's life, from the 10th century B.C.E. and the ninth century B.C.E.

The team's paper, published last month in Nature Scientific Reports,

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'PM wants world to accuse Israel of genocide, apartheid'

'Antisemitism on steroids'

How anti-Jewish hatred rose across Europe after Oct. 7



Justin Tallis / AFP

haaretz.com

'Everyone is heartbroken': In J'lem, Ramadan joy turns to despair

Nir Hasson

No one walking the streets of Jerusalem's Old City would know that the month of Ramadan is less than a week away. The lights and decorations remain in the stockrooms, many of the shops are closed, the yearly stalls selling toys and clothes are nowhere to be found, and the familiar buzz is absent from the food shops.

The Jerusalem Municipality too has given up the Ramadan decorations and the programming that took place in recent years. Damascus Gate Square is dug up for renovations. On Monday, workers on site promised that the main stage of renovations would be done by the end of this week, but it sounds like that promise would be hard to keep.

Feelings of sadness over the fate of Gazans, along with despair and fear of what may still come, have replaced in East Jerusalem the festive excitement for the holy month.

"I am 54 years old, and I don't remember such a Ramadan. I remember the war in Lebanon in '82, when it was like this for a week or two, but nothing compared to this situation," said Abu Musa, who sells coffee at



The Al-Aqsa mosque on the Temple Mount.

Ammar Awad/Reuters

one of the gates between the market and al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

"There is a special atmosphere in Al-Quds during Ramadan, that is why people from Israel and the West Bank come here. This year there will be nothing, everyone is heartbroken," says Abu Karim Nablusi, a shawarma salesman in the Muslim quarter.

The question on the mind of Old City and East Jeru-

salem residents is what will ultimately be Israel's policy regarding entry into Al-Aqsa during the holiday. Since the beginning of the war, the police have severely restricted Palestinians' entry to the Temple Mount, especially on Fridays, Islam's holy day.

The restrictions vary from gate to gate and from officer to officer, but generally, young people under the age of 45 or 50 are not al-

lowed in. Unlike in the past, this applies to women and children too.

An analysis by nonprofit Ir Amim, an organization dedicated to making Jerusalem a more equitable city for the Israelis and Palestinians who share it, shows that the restrictions imposed since the beginning of the war on prayers on the Temple Mount are the most severe

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