

“Netanyahu is Finished”, “He is a Walking Dead Man”. Seymour Hersh

The Bibi doctrine—his belief that he could control Hamas—compromised Israeli security and has now begat a bloody war

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Decades ago I spent three years writing [The Samson Option](#) (1991), an exposé of the unstated policy of American presidents going back to Dwight Eisenhower to look the other way as Israel began the process of building an atomic bomb. The right or wrong for Israel, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, was not the point of the book.

My point was that what America was doing was known throughout the Third World, as it was then called, and our duplicity made our worries about the spread of nuclear weapons another example of American hypocrisy. Since then others have undertaken far more comprehensive studies, as some of the most highly classified Israeli and US documents have become public.

I chose not to go to Israel to do my research in fear of running afoul of Israeli national security law. But I found Israelis living abroad who had worked on the secret project and were willing to talk to me once I indicated I had information from American intelligence files. Those who worked on such highly classified materials have remained loyal to Israel, and a few of them became lifelong friends of mine. They have also remained in close touch with former colleagues who stayed in Israel.

This is an account of the past week’s horrific events in Israel, as seen by a veteran of Israel’s national security apparatus with inside knowledge of recent happenings.

The most important thing I needed to understand, the Israeli insider told me, is that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

“is finished. He is a walking dead man. He will stay in office only until the shooting stops . . . maybe another month or two.”

He served as prime minister from 1996 until 1999 and again, as leader of the right-wing Likud Party, from 2009 to 2021, returning for a third stint in late 2022. “Bibi was always opposed to the 1993 Oslo Accords,” the insider said, which initially gave the Palestinian Authority nominal control over both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. When he returned to office in 2009, the insider said, “Bibi chose to support Hamas” as an alternative to the Palestinian Authority, “and gave them money and established them in Gaza.”

An arrangement was made with Qatar, which began sending hundreds of millions of dollars to the Hamas leadership with Israeli approval. The insider told me that “Bibi was convinced that he would have more control over Hamas with the Qatari money” —let them occasionally fire rockets into southern Israel and have access to jobs inside Israel—than he would with the Palestinian Authority. He took that risk.

“What happened this week,” the insider said,

“was a result of the Bibi doctrine that you could create a Frankenstein and have control over it.”

The attack by Hamas was a direct result of a decision Bibi made, over the protest of local military commanders, “to allow a group of Orthodox settlers to celebrate Sukkot in the West Bank.”

Sukkot is an annual fall holiday that commemorates the ancestral journey of Jews into the depths of the desert. It is a weeklong festival that is observed by building an outdoor temporary structure known as a sukkah in which all could share the food that their predecessors ate and viscerally connect to the harvest season.

The request came at a time of extreme tension over another West Bank incident in which Jewish settlers, according to the Associated Press, “rampaged through a flashpoint town” on October 6 and killed a 19-year-old Arab male. The youth’s death, the AP report added, “marked the latest in a surge in Israeli-Palestinian fighting that so far has killed nearly 200 Palestinians this year—the highest yearly death toll in about two decades.”

The Sukkot celebration, held near a Palestinian village known in Hebrew as Haware, would need extraordinary protection, given the tension over the latest violence, and the local Israeli military authorities, with the approval of Netanyahu, ordered two of the three Army battalions, each with about 800 soldiers, that protected the border with Gaza to shift their focus to the Sukkot festival.

“That left only eight hundred soldiers,” the insider told me,

“to be responsible for guarding the 51-kilometer border between the Gaza Strip and southern Israel. That meant the Israeli citizens in the south were left without an Israeli military presence for ten to twelve hours. They were left to fend for themselves. And that is why Bibi is finished. May take a few months, but he is over.”

The insider called the attack in southern Israel “the great military failure in Israeli history” and pointed out that “only soldiers were killed in the ‘73 war”—the surprise attack on Yom Kippur in which Israel was briefly overrun by Egyptian and Syrian troops.

“Last Saturday twenty-two settlements in the south were under control of Hamas for hours, and they went house to house slaughtering women and children.”

There will be a military response, the insider said, noting that 360,000 reservists have been called up.

“There is a big debate going on about strategy. The Israeli Air Force and Navy special forces are ready to go, but Bibi and the military leadership have always favored the high-tech services.

The regular army has been used primarily as security guards in the West Bank ... The reality is that the ground forces are not trained for combat. Don't misunderstand—there is confidence in the spirit of the troops but not in their ability to succeed in the 'special situation' that the soldiers would be facing in a ground assault" in the ruins of heavily bombed Gaza City.

The reservists are now undergoing crash training and a decision of what to do may come by the end of this week, the insider said. Meanwhile, the current bombing of civilian targets—apartment buildings, hospitals, and mosques—no longer includes a token civilian safeguard. In prior attacks in Gaza City, he said, the Israeli Air Force often would drop a small bomb on the roof of a civilian facility to be targeted—it was called "a knock on the roof"—that would theoretically alert noncombatants to flee the building. That is not happening in the current round-the-clock bombing raids.

As for a ground attack, the insider told me that there is a brutal alternative under consideration that could be described as the Leningrad approach, referring to the famed German effort to starve out the city now known as St. Petersburg during World War II.

The Nazi siege lasted nearly 900 days and the death toll was at least 800,000 and possibly many more. It is known that the Hamas leadership and much of its manpower "live underground," and Israel's goal is to destroy as much of that manpower "without attempting a traditional house-to-house attack."

The insider added that some Israelis were "made anxious" by the initial statements from world leaders in Germany, France, and England who avowed, in one case through an aide, their total support for an immediate response but added that it should be guided by the rule of law. President Biden reinforced that point in an unscheduled appearance at a White House conference of Jewish leaders Wednesday by pointedly saying that he had recently told Netanyahu: "it is really important that Israel, with all the anger and frustration and just—I don't know how to explain it—that exists is that they operate by the rules of war—the rules of war. And there are rules of war."

The option now under consideration, the Israeli insider told me, is to continue the isolation of Gaza City in terms of power supply and the delivery of food and other vital goods.

"Hamas now only has a two- or three-day supply of purified water and that, along with a lack of food," I was told, "may be enough to flush all the Hamas out." At some point, he said, Israel may be able to negotiate the release of some prisoners—women and children—in return for food and water.

"The big debate today," he said,

"is whether to starve Hamas out or kill as many as 100,000 people in Gaza. One Israeli assumption is that Hamas, which has received as much as \$1.6 billion from Qatar since 2014, wants to be seen as a sovereign that takes care of its people. He went on: "Now that President Biden says they are a terrorist state, Hamas may have reason to want to be seen as less hostile and there might be a chance for calm and rational discussion about prisoners—and a release of some of its Israeli hostages, beginning with women and children."

The other prisoners will be treated like prisoners of war, he said, and their release could be

negotiated, as has happened in the past.

But, the insider added, “the more we all see” of Hamas brutality on TV and “the more Hamas is seen as another ISIS, time gets short.”

The reality, he said, is that Hamas is not rational and is incapable of any negotiations, and Qatar will not intervene. And, barring some international or third-party intervention, there may be a general ground invasion with untold deaths to all sides and to all prisoners.

The decision to invade in full force is Israel’s, and it has not yet been made.

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