



With ceasefire, Israel becomes a geopolitical pawn

Amy Neustein Wednesday, January 22, 2025 4:06 pm

The U.S.-brokered “dizzying deal” — secured by fiat over consensus — struck an incontrovertible blow at the Jewish community this month. Many were left flummoxed, if not demonstrably shaken. On nearly everyone’s mind was how Donald Trump, a proven diehard supporter of Israel, could send an envoy to pressure Benjamin Netanyahu into agreeing to suspend his campaign to extinguish Hamas and to release convicted terrorists who evidently pose an imminent danger to Israel’s security.

In a Jerusalem Post exclusive, it was reported last week that on the heels of Netanyahu having been pressured to agree to the arguably ill-fated Gaza ceasefire/hostage deal, sources close to Trump issued a stern warning to Israeli officials against a possible collapse of the ceasefire agreement in Lebanon, without taking into consideration the need for Israel to maintain its military presence beyond the 60-day deadline due to the “slow deployment of the Lebanese army” in tamping down Hezbollah’s militant forces.

So, before Trump had officially taken office, he bullied the Jewish state into accepting compromises that are contraindicative to its survival. I’m afraid this all points to an elephant in the room that must no longer be ignored. The problem is that we tend to look for easy explanations (we rationalize Trump’s impetuous hostage-release deal as arguably a way of achieving flashy inauguration optics), while haphazardly overlooking major forces that adumbrate geopolitical decision-making and transactional agreements often hidden behind the wrapper of peace talks.

To that end, we must take a step back to accurately comprehend the power dynamics found in the theater of world politics so that we are not so easily caught off-guard. To do so, we must first recognize that it is no secret that Trump’s main objective is to have the U.S. achieve economic superiority over China. In fact, Trump has averred to establish the “External Revenue Service” to collect tariffs from Chinese imports that flood the U.S. consumer markets. Not surprisingly much of Trump’s policies, politics and passions are principally geared toward fortifying America’s presence in trade relations and in closing the U.S. borders to, among other things, prevent the onslaught of illegal drugs coming over from China. To Trump, China presents the greatest existential threat to America.

In understanding this, it would be hard to ignore how Trump, in his mission to defeat his Chinese rival, has been at pains to leverage the support of Russia, by displaying unusual comity and collegiality toward Putin and his oligarchy. By showing fealty to Russia, Trump ostensibly weakens the dyad between China and Russia, making it easier for America to compete with China in global consumer markets. In truth, Russia obviously would want Israel to cease their combat operations in Gaza because continued fighting in the Middle East would portend an eventual assault on all of Iran’s nuclear facilities. Given that Iran is a longstanding ally of Russia, it wouldn’t take much for Putin to encourage Trump to bring an end to Israel’s counteroffensive in Gaza.

Furthermore, since it is no secret that Russia has vocally supported Palestinian statehood, it does not bode well to continue to ignore Putin’s preoccupation with the Middle East — and how easily he can exact compromises and concessions from Trump who has openly courted Russia in his grand scheme of fortifying the U.S. against its formidable rival, China. Certainly, the strong-arming of Israel to consent to the Gazan ceasefire deal, followed by stern warnings regarding the Lebanon-Hezbollah ceasefire, has sacrificed Israel on the altar of a geopolitical chess game. By doing so, the Jewish state has been slid across the chessboard as a pawn of politics, while superpowers gloat in their mastery of this game.

Why it is important to understand the larger picture? First, it’s spilled milk to agonize over whether the coordinated efforts to mobilize Jewish communities across the U.S. to vote for Trump has proven justified. Second, it’s an extravagant waste of time to impute solely small-minded motives to Trump — such as glory and pomposity in bringing about a hostage release/ceasefire deal — while overlooking the meta-politics of superpower rivalry that presumably informed Trump’s controversial 11th hour arm-twisting diplomacy.

Similarly, while considering the geopolitical landscape to understand what motivated Trump’s imperious behavior toward his staunch ally, it might help to look at the fuller picture in terms of why Netanyahu had caved in. Was his pusillanimous behavior partly that of a man enervated by his recent prostate surgery, worn down by his ongoing corruption trial, and drained by the dissenting voices in his cabinet — all of which added to the stress of a 15-month war against Hamas?

The Ferris wheel of fate has played out, I’m afraid, and not to Israel’s benefit. The landslide victory of Trump has emboldened the Jewish state and Jews throughout the world. It’s time to get off the Ferris wheel and stand firmly on the ground. We must use our intellect to analyze, understand, and comprehend, which is by far more prudent than to swing with exultation over election victories. A steady demeanor will make Israel less likely to be moved around as a pawn on a chessboard. And this will augur well for Israel’s longterm survival.

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