



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

A squandered opportunity for a cease-fire in Gaza during Ramadan - will the US be harsher on PM Netanyahu?



The holy month of Ramadan began without a cease-fire in Gaza. This was a significant setback to US and Arab peace attempts to bring Israel and Hamas closer to resolving their conflict.

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu has been testing the US' patience as it struggles to keep its partners together in an attempt to find a balance between supporting Israel and stopping civilian casualties in Gaza.

US President Joe Biden spoke rather sharply to the Israeli PM in an [interview with MSNBC](#) over the weekend - "He must, he must, he must pay more attention to the innocent lives being lost as a consequence of the actions taken".

Weeks of talks between the US, Egypt, and Qatar with Hamas regarding the release of Israeli hostages captured in the October 7 terrorist attack in exchange for a six-week cease-fire during the holy month have failed.

Ramadan [began last Monday](#) without peace in Gaza, leaving the entire Arab world outraged by the continued suffering during the biggest holiday.

There is no sign of compromise

There is still time to arrange a cease-fire by April 9, during Ramadan. However, a significant opportunity for peace has been wasted, and, more worryingly, there is no hint of a truce between Israel and Hamas.

The beginning of the holiday month served as an unofficial deadline for negotiators from the United States, Egypt, and Qatar to achieve an agreement. Any new arrangement would be weaker after that date. If there is any at all.

Majed al-Ansari, a foreign policy adviser to the Qatari prime minister, spoke about this unwanted but real option during the negotiations, saying that the conflict could reach "the point of no return" if an agreement is not reached before the holy month.

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Benjamin Netanyahu does not want to compromise on the release of all hostages and the complete elimination of Hamas in Gaza. However, the price he insists on is hardly acceptable for Israel.

"He is hurting Israel more than helping Israel", said President Biden last Saturday. He has fewer options to soften the policies of his Israeli partner.

The US has been losing authority with its partners

The US risks losing credibility with its Arab partners in the region, given that the US is expected to exert a decisive influence on Netanyahu to start calming the conflict.

The last attempt to use heavy diplomatic weapons (an urgent tour of the region by CIA director William Burns) did not produce results. He returned to Washington during the weekend after conducting talks in several Middle Eastern capitals, but the cease-fire did not begin with the start of Ramadan.

The US is in a very delicate position, and time is running out to broker a truce during the holiday month, which would restore its shaky authority as Israel's main ally.

The reality is that there are children who are starving in Gaza - William Burns

CIA Director Burns said during a [hearing in the US Senate](#) last Monday that "the reality is that there are children who are starving" in Gaza.

It is a clear American emphasis on the humanitarian aspect of the crisis as a factor that shapes US policy towards Israel to a greater extent than its unquestionable support for Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas.

However, after the collapse of the attempt to establish peace before Ramadan, will the US further increase this imbalance in its policy regarding the crisis in Gaza by insisting on stopping the humanitarian crisis at the expense of its support for the Israeli military operation?

Is the US pressure on Netanyahu coming?

This is risky terrain for Joe Biden's administration, which is still trying to maintain a balance between 2 principles - decisive support for Israel on the one hand, and, on the other hand, protection of Palestinian civilians from a humanitarian disaster.

The pressure to which the Biden administration is exposed is multiple, both from Israel and the Jewish community in the US, and from Arab partners in the Middle East and opponents of Israeli intervention at home in the US.

Eight months before the presidential elections, these pressures intensified and forced the administration to move more cautiously and, at the same time, faster than usual.

To relieve these pressures, Washington has one remaining option - redirect pressure to PM Netanyahu. According to the most recent messages from leading officials, including President Biden, this is already happening.



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Netanyahu is pretty much cornered in Israel, as his refusal to accept a cease-fire in Gaza confirms opinions that a long-term war is in his best political interest.

Members of his war cabinet, Benny Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot, as the prime minister's political opponents, have been asking for a cease-fire. The Israeli army, which is involved in the operations, is looking for a break after 5 months of conflict. A large part of the public is also asking for a break.

And while President Biden reiterated that he would not leave Israel without military support, it is not excluded that the US would still reach for a reduction in arms deliveries to Israel, as an unusually harsh measure.

By March 25, Israel must provide the US with written assurances that the weapons it has acquired from the US would not be used in violation of international humanitarian law and would not obstruct the delivery of humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza.

Apart from this, the decisive point of US pressure on Israel is opposition to a possible attack on Rafah, which would represent crossing a red line for Washington.

PM Netanyahu will rapidly lose support from his primary ally if he ignores these warnings and turns a deaf ear to American humanitarian concerns, potentially leading to his full isolation.