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Rekindling the Old Love Affair: Can Trump Save Netanyahu?



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Many political analysts believe that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is buying time in Gaza and Lebanon with the hope that Donald Trump returns to the White House, following the next November elections.

Whether this is the case or not, Trump, this time around, is unlikely to influence the outcomes of the war, or to alter Israel's fate.

US foreign policy seems to be ruled by two different outlooks, one dedicated to the whole world and another only to Israel. The first is driven by the famous, and oft-repeated quote by former US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, that "America has no permanent friends or enemies, only interests."

Israel, however, remains the exception, and the ongoing Israeli war on Gaza has, once more, demonstrated the truth of such a claim.

Though Washington fully shares Israel's war objectives, it fundamentally disagrees with the concepts of the long war, and 'total victory', as championed by Netanyahu.

Two protracted US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq taught the Americans that neither the longevity of wars nor the lofty, unrealistic expectations alter inevitable outcomes.

In fact, many US officials, military generals and mainstream analysts have tried to warn Netanyahu, to no avail.

Destabilizing the Middle East at this specific historical juncture is simply bad for the US. It comes at a time when Ukraine is suffering serious weapons shortage, thus territorial losses, and at a time that the US-European allies are struggling under the weight of economic and political crises.

Since US-Israeli relations are governed according to a unique foreign policy paradigm, the Biden Administration continues to support Israel in every possible way so that it may carry on with a losing war.

The war is, of course, happening at the expense of over 125 thousand Palestinians, who, thus far, have been killed and wounded due to Israeli strikes, shelling and mass executions. Those dying from famine or disease are a different number, yet to be fully accounted for.

Washington is not perturbed by the Gaza genocide itself but by the outcome of the war on US plans in the Middle East, and the future of its forces, namely in Iraq and Syria. It is also concerned about its geostrategic sway in the region due to the unprecedented instability of the Red Sea.

Yet, Joe Biden continues to arm Israel and to provide a safety net to its dwindling economy. On April 20, the House passed a bill to provide \$26.3 billion in assistance to Israel. Moreover, massive shipments of weapons continue to flow to Israel unhindered.

These explosives are not only destroying the whole of Gaza, but any chances that the US could ever regain any degree of credibility in the Middle East. Worse, US blind support for Israel has also shaken Washington's position internationally.

So, what could Trump do that Biden did not?

Trump's politics is abashedly Machiavellian. During his only term in office between 2017 and 2021, he served the role of the American genie, granting Israel's every wish, though all such demands were flagrant violations of international law.

Trump's pro-Israel policies included the recognition of all of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the annexation of the Golan Heights and the recognition of all illegal Israeli Jewish settlements in the West Bank, among others.

But Netanyahu is also Machiavellian, a fact that irked Trump following his humiliating exit from the White House.

“I haven’t spoken to him since,” Trump said in an interview with Axios’ Barak Ravid in December 2021, in reference to the Israeli leader. “F**k him,” he said.

But now, both sides are trying to rekindle the old love affair. The Republican presidential candidate must be pleased with Netanyahu’s public criticism of the Biden Administration. In return, Trump is ready to “finish the job”, as he stated in the first presidential debate on June 27.

However, Trump’s return will do nothing to change Israel’s misfortunes since October 7, because Israel’s problems do not originate in Washington.

Israel’s crisis is multifaceted. It is unable to win the war in Gaza, despite the mass tragedy and destruction it has created there. It is also failing to change the rules of engagements in Lebanon due to the strength of its enemies, and the fact that its military is unable to fight and win on multiple fronts – let alone one.

Another dimension of the Israeli crisis is also internal: deep divisions in Israeli society, security apparatus and politicians. Not even Trump could possibly bridge the gap or end the polarization, which is likely to deepen in the future.

Even on the international front, Trump is likely to prove equally ineffective, again, simply because the Biden Administration has defied international consensus on Israel since the start of the war. The current US House of Representatives went as far as passing legislation to sanction the International Criminal Court (ICC) after its Prosecutor applied for arrest warrants against Israeli officials.

If Netanyahu thinks that Trump would offer him a better deal than that of Biden, he is mistaken. Biden has proved to be the greatest American enabler to Israel in its 76-year history.

Ironically, the US’ unquestioned support of Israel could be a contributing factor to its downfall.

“To be an enemy of America can be dangerous, but to be a friend is fatal,” Kissinger also said. He is not wrong.

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