

GNITN - Special Edition

Israel At War – Day 458

Leaving Us Better Off

Really Better?

Outgoing US Secretary of State Antony Blinken gave an interview and started out with a claim that I think is outlandish:

The way US Secretary of State Antony Blinken began his swan-song interview with The New York Times some three weeks before leaving office was predictable: The Biden administration he served left America better placed around the world than when it came into office.

“Today, as I sit with you, I think we hand over an America in a much, much stronger position, having come through the economic crisis, having come through the health crisis, and having changed much for the better [of] our position around the world because we made those investments in alliances and partnerships,” he said in a message approximating what every secretary of state says when they leave office.

While the full sit down was pretty much by the book, it was when he talked about the conflict in the Middle East that it was like he was given a truth serum:

But his comments in the interview Saturday were not all that predictable when nearly 20 minutes of the 50-minute conversation turned toward Israel, Hamas, and Gaza.

The report gives the opposite side of why no hostage deal is in place:

Among certain segments of the Israeli public, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is the reason the hostages are still languishing in Hamas’s tunnels. If he only really wanted their freedom, they would be released.

One such critic of the PM thinks Netanyahu is averse to telling the truth:

Yair Golan, chairman of The Democrats party, gave voice to this sentiment in a KAN Reshet Bet interview Sunday morning. “Israel does not want an agreement; the prime minister of Israel does not want an agreement,” he said. “Netanyahu could have reached an agreement three or four times for sure; he dismissed this, he lies to the press, he leaks reports to Bild. All kinds of shameful tricks and games. He should stand up before the citizens of Israel and say, ‘I don’t want to free the hostages, I have political pressure, I can’t do it.’ He should tell the truth for a change.”

The first truth bomb was huge - Netanyahu is not to blame for no hostage deal:

But Blinken, who has been closely involved in the negotiations, probably has a pretty good idea. And here is what he said when asked by the interviewer whether Netanyahu blocked a ceasefire deal in July that would have led to the hostages’ release.

“No, that’s not accurate,” he said. “What we’ve seen time and again is Hamas not concluding a deal that it should have concluded.”

He did blame Israel for making things hard at times, though:

Blinken said there have been times, such as when Israel killed Hamas head Yahya Sinwar, that Israeli actions have made getting to a conclusion of a deal more difficult, but unlike Golan, he clearly placed the onus not on Netanyahu but on Hamas.

Public and Private Views

Blinken then opened up about how they seemed to distance themselves from Israel or put daylight between them:

Blinken, who served at the time as then-vice president Joe Biden's national security advisor, told the Times that perceived daylight between Israel and the US emboldened Hamas and made the possibility of a hostage deal more distant.

He said the tenuous balance between supporting Israel and getting Hamas to reach an agreement took some work. He mentioned the two things that got in the way of a deal:

Blinken said there were two main impediments to Hamas reaching an agreement to free the hostages. One impediment, he said, was when there was public daylight between the United States and Israel and the perception that pressure on Israel was growing: "We've seen it: Hamas has pulled back from agreeing to a ceasefire and the release of hostages."

As a result, there were times, Blinken said, that what the US said in private to Israel was not what it said in public so that Hamas would not get the wrong idea. Daylight, he said, means that "the prospects of getting the hostage and ceasefire deal over the finish line become more distant."

Blinken then tells us what the other concern was:

The other main impediment to Hamas making a deal, Blinken said, was their belief and hope that there would be a much wider conflict: "that Hezbollah would attack Israel, that Iran would attack Israel, that other actors would attack Israel, and that Israel would have its hands full, and Hamas could continue what it was doing."

He's Frustrated

Blinken, when a question he was given was framed to blame Israel for genocide, again spoke his mind and refuted the thinking:

To his credit, Blinken flatly refuted the ethnic cleansing canard, saying, "It's not, first of all."

None of the responsibility for the evil Garcia-Navarro listed did she place at Hamas's doorstep.

Blinken, again to his credit, flagged this, though not specifically referring to her.

"Look, one of the things that I found a little astounding throughout is that for all of the understandable criticism of the way Israel has conducted itself in Gaza, you hear virtually nothing from anyone since October 7 about Hamas," he said. "Why there hasn't been a unanimous chorus around the world for Hamas to put down its weapons, to give up the hostages, to surrender – I don't know what the answer is to that."

He then brought up a point that I have been screaming to be heard:

"Israel, on various occasions, has offered safe passage to Hamas's leadership and fighters out of Gaza. Where is the world? Where is the world saying, Yeah, do that! End this! Stop the suffering of people that you brought on!"

"Now, again, that doesn't absolve Israel of its actions in conducting the war. But I do have to question how it is that we haven't seen a greater sustained condemnation and pressure on Hamas to stop what it started and to end the suffering of people that it initiated."

The interviewer still pushed the issue and asked why the administration just gave Israel everything it wanted. He rebuffed her, but he still thinks the region can be stabilized by creating a two-state solution as part of that deal. Again, I'm happy he's leaving soon.