

Israel's Choice: Cease-fire Now or Dead Hostages Later

By: Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert

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The fighting in the northern Gaza Strip and more recently in the heart of Gaza's military complex in Khan Yunis is difficult and unusual. It is an attempt to find the right balance between achieving the desired military objective of eliminating Hamas fighters and destroying the organization's military and civilian infrastructure, and at the same time a supreme effort to reduce the loss of life on our side and to minimize the inevitable casualties among Gaza's citizens who have no involvement in terrorism.

At the end of two months of fighting, we can say that this military effort has been put forth by an inspiring new generation of brave and dedicated commanders and fighters. Gradually, sometimes deliberately slowly, the units advance, exposing hidden tunnels, smashing bomb-making centers located inside mosques and schools, and weakening Hamas's resilience...

It is clear to many today that though the IDF fights with rare courage and perseverance, with the necessary care, and while suffering painful losses, there is no chance of fulfilling the expectations that [Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu] created. There won't be a "destruction" of Hamas.

Gaza is crashing, thousands of its citizens are sadly paying with their lives, thousands of Hamas fighters happily are being killed, but the destruction of Hamas will not be achieved. Whether Yahya Sinwar is found or enjoys a short life in hiding until he, Mohammed Deif and their partners in Hamas' leadership are eliminated, Hamas will continue as a very weak, battered, bleeding force. But it will continue to exist on the edge of Gaza.

Given that this is the true assessment of the situation, we must prepare for a change of direction. I know this may be unpopular...

The State of Israel now faces the choice between a cease-fire as part of a deal that may bring home the hostages in the hope that most of them are alive, and a cease-fire with no deal, no hostages, no apparent achievement, with a total loss of the remnants of international public support for the State of Israel's right to exist without terror threats from murder organizations. This cessation of hostilities will be forced upon us by our closest allies, led by the United States, England, France and Germany. They will no longer be able to bear the price they pay in their public's opinion in light of the gap between the lack of a military resolution and the continuation

of fighting bearing humanitarian costs the consequences of which they will not be willing to bear.

These are the only two paths that stand before us. Continuing the fighting will bring us important local achievements. More Hamas combatants will be killed, more tunnels will be unearthed, more leaders from the murder organization will be exposed. There will be no eliminating Hamas. There may, God forbid, be more dead hostages...

It's decision time. A cease-fire with living hostages, or a forced cessation of hostilities with dead ones.