

## Progress in latest hostage deal negotiations is an optical illusion

Chaim Levinson

The positive signals emanating from the Prime Minister's Office together with reports in the Hebrew media about progress in the hostage deal negotiations should be taken with a grain of salt. Ostensibly, there has been progress, but it is based on an optical illusion.

That's because there is no progress in negotiations between Israel and Hamas on the key issue – in fact, the opposite is true. And Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as usual, strove to blow up the talks in his public statements on Sunday.

Setting aside questions of right and wrong, the dispute between Hamas and Israel revolves around the question of guarantees that serious negotiations will take place on ending the war and on Israel pulling out from the Gaza Strip. In Hamas' view, that's what was agreed on and that's the track on which the talks should continue.

Hamas isn't willing to free the hostages it holds without serious guarantees that this time the negotiations will be for real, not an empty promise like they proved to be in the first stage of the deal that was signed in Doha on January 17. The group won't be satisfied with American promises to the Qataris that "this time, it will work out." It wants insurance.

But in any case, diplomatic guarantees aren't worth the paper they are printed on. What was signed yesterday becomes a violation tomorrow. Hamas has



Protesters calling for the release of the hostages demonstrate in front of Minister Ron Dermer's Jerusalem home on Sunday.

Naama Grynbaum

a paper signed by Mossad Director David Barnea and Shin Bet security service Director Ronen Bar saying Israel would withdraw from Gaza's Philadelphi corridor by the 50th day of the deal signed on January 17. What good did that do it? Since the talks in Qatar

blew up two weeks ago, Egypt's intelligence service has entered the vacuum and is pressuring Hamas to compromise. The Egyptians lack the same financial means as Qatar for pressuring Hamas, but it does have dozens of freed terrorists sitting in Cairo hotels with

nothing to do and has threatened to throw them out and send them to an unknown destination.

This weekend, on the eve of the Eid al-Fitr holiday that ends Ramadan, Egypt and Hamas reached understandings. According to those understandings, which

Israel and America aren't party to, Hamas will free five hostages in exchange for a public American statement about the start of negotiations on the original deal's second stage. But the Egyptians still have to sell this agreement to Washington and Jerusalem.

Israel promptly submitted a counterproposal demanding that 11 hostages be freed. Now everyone is waiting for Hamas' response.

Netanyahu usually says publicly that he wants a deal, but then works behind

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## Approved road could pave way for Ma'aleh Adumim annexation

Hagar Shezaf and Noa Shpigiel

Israel's security cabinet approved on Saturday the construction of a separate road for Palestinians in the West Bank near Jerusalem. The decision will enable Israel to carry out construction plans in the E1 area beyond the Green Line.

The new road could pave the way for the annexation of Ma'aleh Adumim, an Israeli settlement regarded as a Jerusalem suburb.

Until now, Israel has refrained from building in the E1 area due to sharp international criticism, including from the U.S., as it would create a separation between the two parts of the West Bank, potentially hin-

dering the establishment of a Palestinian state.

The road, to be built south of E1, will connect Palestinian villages in the northern West Bank with those in the south, diverting Palestinian traffic from Route 1. As a result, the road linking Jerusalem to Ma'aleh Adumim will primarily serve Jewish residents.

The government called the resolution "ground-breaking," adding it will "improve traffic, strengthen transportation links between Jerusalem, Ma'aleh Adumim and eastern Binyamin [in the West Bank] and enable continued settlement development in the E1 area."

The ministers instructed

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## Regional Cooperation Min. to cut ties with Palestinian Authority

Jonathan Lis and Noa Shpigiel

The cabinet altered the definition of the Regional Cooperation Ministry's responsibilities Sunday in a way that ends cooperation between the ministry and the Palestinian Authority.

The definition of the ministry's responsibilities written in 2009 said that it "will work to further cooperation with countries in the region and the Palestinian Authority and to implement joint economic projects in the region." Sunday's decision removed the PA from that definition.

The regional cooperation

minister, David Amsalem, is the one who decided to end cooperation with the PA. But the attorney general said he could not do so without getting the cabinet to change the definition of the ministry's responsibilities.

The resolution that the cabinet approved on Sunday, which will be in force until the end of the year, stipulates that "The Palestinian Authority will not be considered one of the countries in the region as defined in the funding allocation criteria for the ministry's [financial] sup-

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Preparations for Eid al-Adha in Gaza City, Fri. Jehad Alshrafi/AP

## UN: Israeli blockade of food, supplies longest in war

Liza Rozovsky and The Associated Press

Gaza's bakeries will run out of flour for bread within a week, the United Nations says. Agencies have cut food distributions to families in half. Markets are empty of most vegetables. Many aid workers cannot move around because of Israeli bombardment.

For four weeks, Israel has shut off all sources of food, fuel, medicine and other supplies for the Gaza Strip's population of more than 2 million Palestinians. It's the longest blockade yet of Israel's 17-month-old campaign against Hamas, with no sign of it ending. Many are going hungry during the normally festive Eid al-Fitr, a major Muslim holiday.

Aid workers are stretching out the supplies they have but warn of a catastrophic surge in severe hunger and malnutrition. Eventually, food will run out completely if the flow of aid is not restored, as almost all local food production in Gaza has been destroyed by the war.

"We depend entirely on this aid box," said Shorouq

Shamlakh, a mother of three collecting her family's monthly box of food from a UN distribution center in Jabalya in northern Gaza. She and her children reduce their meals to make it last a month, she said. "If this closes, who else will provide us with food?"

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and

Emergency Relief Coordinator, Thomas Fletcher, underlined on Friday the severity of the situation in Gaza.

Posting on X, Fletcher wrote: "At the border, food is rotting. Medicine is expiring. Vital medical equipment is stuck. If the basic principles of humanitarian law still count, the international community must act to uphold them." He put the

onus on Israel for denying "humanitarian access to people in need."

The World Food Program said Thursday that its flour for bakeries is only enough to keep producing bread for 800,000 people a day until Tuesday and that its overall food supplies will last a maximum of two weeks. As

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## Defies state prosecutor

### Police chief ends protection for three top criminal prosecutors

Josh Breiner

Police Commissioner Danny Levy has ordered the removal of personal police protection for three senior prosecutors who have faced threats from organized crime groups, after lowering the prosecutors' threat assessment to 5, from 6.

Levy acted despite a warning from State Prosecutor Amit Aisman that lowering the threat assessment would endanger the prosecutors and have "a chilling effect that will deter prosecutors from handling cases of serious crime."

In response, one of the prosecutors, who faced an assassination attempt 12 years ago, filed a petition with the High Court of Justice seeking to block the move. The president of the court, Justice Isaac Amit issued a temporary injunction to halt Levy's move until he provides the court with an explanation.

In 2011 the plaintiff, a prosecutor in the Tel Aviv District, was appointed head of a team prosecuting the criminal organization headed at the time by Amir Mulner. In November 2013, as the indictment against



Danny Levy Olivier Fitoussi

### Netanyahu is playing for time

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him was being prepared, the prosecutor's car exploded. It had been parked near the Tel Aviv District Court, and a car bomb was found inside. No one was hurt.

After the incident the prosecutor's threat assessment was raised to 6, where it has remained. As a result he was given an armored car and 24/7 police protection.

The police never discovered who was behind the

car bombing and therefore decided to maintain the high level of security. In 2023 Sigal Bar-Zvi, then head of police operations, justified the policy on the grounds that "law enforcement officers, wherever they are, should be protected and also feel so in practice."

But two weeks ago Levy lowered the threat assessment on the prosecutor and two others to 5 and ceased providing them with round-the-clock protection, which is only given to those at level 6. Level 5 security is provided by on-site cameras and regular visits by police patrols in the area.

The prosecutor wrote to the police, saying: "It is difficult to dream of a situation in which a lawyer who served the state as an officer of the law will be abandoned and left vulnerable and without protection from criminal elements who have tried to kill him, some of whom live nearby and whom he even encounters during his daily routine." The police told the prosecutor in response that the decision was made in the wake of "an intelligence assessment of the degree of

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## As Israel resumes war on Hamas, Gaza civilians have nowhere to run

Naghm Zbeedat and Rawan Suleiman

It was a difficult decision: The week the cease-fire ended, Ola and her family would return to Rafah at Gaza's southern tip, even though their house was in ruins. To reunite with her grandmother, they would return to the Tel al-Sultan refugee camp from their temporary haven northwest in the Muwasi area.

Days later, an Israeli attack shattered the fragile sense of security they cherished during the two-month cease-fire, a plight experienced by many Gazans as the Israeli army resumes its war against Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Speaking to Haaretz by text message as her internet connection kept cutting off, Ola, 23, described the horror of what she called one of her "deadliest days" of the 18-month war.

Her grandmother had insisted on returning to Tel al-Sultan, even if all that remained was rubble, "even if it meant dying along the way," Ola said.

Her grandmother's resolve is deeply rooted in history. "She was first displaced during the Nakba in



Displaced Palestinians in a makeshift camp in a landfill in central Gaza, Mar. 21. Jehad Alshrafi/AP

1948 from a village just outside Gaza. She always said she'd rather die in her home than be forced to flee again," Ola said.

When Israel's cease-fire with Hamas was announced in mid-January, her grandmother and uncle returned to Rafah, while Ola, her parents and her younger sister remained in Muwasi in Khan Yunis. But with Ramadan underway and Eid al-Fitr – the holiday marking the end of the holy month –

approaching, they decided to visit her grandmother.

"My brothers, who now live in Turkey, have been sending us money to survive. We wanted to bring my grandmother food and water," Ola said. Then, everything changed. "It all happened so suddenly."

On Sunday night a week ago, gunfire erupted across Tel al-Sultan just north of Rafah. "Explosions, bullets from every direction. We were completely surround-

ed. Then they dropped leaflets ordering us to evacuate. There was no time to do anything," Ola said.

"They fired at the displaced people. Dozens were wounded. Bodies lay in the streets, but nobody could reach them. Tanks advanced toward the Helmi Saqr Mosque along the road they claimed was safe, but it wasn't safe at all."

As Ola and her family

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