

Chapter 3: Returning the Hostages

We must strive for a deal that will lead to the release of the hostages, and quickly, even at the price of declaring an end to the war.¹

Unlike the other issues, in this case, Israel's decisions are not independent since the consent to the hostage deal is also in the hands of Hamas. Even if Israel is flexible in its positions, there is no guarantee that a deal will be reached. However, breaking down the deal into its components indicates areas of flexibility. This is subject to the following assumptions:

1. Any concession that is reversible is a tactical concession, and there is no problem in agreeing to accept it. In this context, redeployment in the northern Gaza Strip is temporary, ceasefire is always temporary, and the validity of statements is also temporary. Therefore, Israel has ample room for flexibility as part of negotiations. Agreements in these contexts are not "red lines."
2. Civilians must be distinguished from soldiers and the fallen. The State of Israel has failed to fulfill the basic obligation of a state toward its citizens. Therefore, the return of the civilian hostages is not only a matter of "saving a soul," but, in fact, an exercise of sovereignty and an important step toward restoring trust in the state's governance.
3. There is no choice but to release prisoners to complete the deal. However, the Palestinian prisoners are not all the same. Among them are terminally ill individuals and those who did not commit murder, but rather assisted in murder or incited terrorism. The bottom line is that, even if they are released, the State of Israel remains strong enough to deal with any potential new threats posed by these released terrorists.
4. The security consideration involved in the release of the more serious Palestinian prisoners must be examined not only in the narrow context of the price for each released hostage, but also in relation to improving Israel's regional status and advancing the normalization process with its neighbors, as well as the restoration of trust of Israel's citizens in the security system and the government. Within the broader strategic context of improving Israel's security situation, this comes at a heavy and difficult price.

¹ Any ceasefire in the Middle East is temporary, and it is likely that Hamas will give Israel enough reason to resume fighting (if it chooses to do so).