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Trump prefers talks, but Iran problem isn't over

Trump and Netanyahu also haven't revealed what they've decided to do should talks fail

Amos Harel

Economists tend to speak of "revealed preference," meaning that the intention of a person or an organization becomes clear through the choices they make in practice, time after time. The revealed preference of Israel's governments in the Gaza Strip in the course of 15 years, until the October 7 massacre, was to manage the conflict with Hamas rather than bringing it to a decisive end.

Israel preferred short rounds of fighting over lengthy, costly campaigns, that might have been able to remove the terrorist organization from power in Gaza. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu even admitted this on some occasions.

Now, too, on the Iranian question, U.S. President Donald Trump is letting it be known clearly what he prefers. This is evident from his actions (or rather, inaction) and from his statements. Trump reiterated his position again this week, in an interview with Barak Ravid of Channel 12 News and afterward in a statement he issued after his meeting with Netanyahu in

the White House.

With regard to Trump, the possibility of deliberate deception always has to be considered. Still, the comments are consistent. Trumps is saying clearly: in his view, the path of negotiations is preferable to the path of war. He would rather forge an agreement that will put a stop to Iran's nuclear project, than get involved in a prolonged military campaign.

Trump slams Herzog over pardon

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The fact that this is Trump's intention doesn't necessarily solve the problem. Although another round of Iran-U.S. talks is likely to take place soon, there are large gaps between the sides. The Tehran regime is in the meantime refusing to forgo the right to enrich uranium, and is behaving as though it's unaware of the dangers lurking for it.

At the meeting with Netanyahu, the Americans this time dispensed with the trappings of honor and even dropped the part the president is so fond of – the joint press conference – though in his statement Trump emphasized his liking for the prime minister. (That's likely to be repeated ahead of Israel's elections, possibly to the point of blatant intervention by the president in the democratic process, if Netanyahu delivers what he wants.)

The question, which is unlikely to get a credible answer soon, is what was agreed between the two in the event that the negotiations fail. The meeting lasted almost two and a half hours. Did Trump undertake in its course that if the talks with Iran fail the United States will attack Iran? A joint attack? A green light for an Israeli move? At least one more round of talks is likely to take place. In some of his statements, Trump has also mentioned the need to address Iran's missile program, which deeply concerns Israel.

Meanwhile, the Americans are continuing to build up a military force in the Middle East. Still, it's best

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The scene of a suspected homicide in Lod, central Israel, on Thursday morning.

Tomer Appelbaum

Five Arabs killed in 12 hours across Israel, as homicide rates continue to skyrocket

Deiaa Haj Yahia, Adi Hashmonai, Eden Solomon, Yair Foldes and Josh Breiner

Police Commissioner Danny Levy said the country is in "a national state of emergency" after five Arab Israelis were shot to death since Wednesday night, in separate incidents.

Just a month and a half

into 2026, the violent crime death toll across Israel has reached 46.

Speaking at a police situation assessment meeting on Thursday, Levy said, "The war on criminal organizations requires a root cause treatment."

According to the police chief, "Everyone must get involved – including the IDF and the various social

nonprofits."

A man around the age of 20 was fatally shot in the Bedouin village of Shaqib al-Salam, also known as Segev Shalom, in southern Israel, police said Thursday morning.

Shortly earlier on Thursday, a man in his 60s was fatally shot in the city of Lod in central Israel. The man was later identified as

Hussein Abu Raqayek, and police said they are in pursuit of the suspected shooter.

Several hours prior, a 22-year-old man was found with gunshot wounds in a vehicle in the Bedouin city of Rahat in southern Israel and was pronounced dead at the scene by paramedics.

The man was later identified as Mukhtar Ata Abu Madigham, the son of the

town's former mayor, Ata Abu Madigham.

About an hour earlier, a 42-year-old man was fatally shot in Yarka, a Druze-majority town in the north. The man was later identified as Najib Abu Rish.

Police said they are searching for suspects in the two suspected homicides,

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Netanyahu is peddling conspiracy theories again – his targets are watching their backs

Gidi Weitz

Benjamin Netanyahu tried to evade the question, but MK Chili Tropper persisted. "Do you believe there was deliberate treason from within?" he repeatedly asked the prime minister during a closed session of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, until he finally managed to extract an answer from him: "There was a huge intelligence failure, but I don't believe there was treason."

From Netanyahu's perspective, even this weak statement was a mistake. His political survival depends on the spread of conspiracy theories about what happened on October 7, 2023. A few days later, therefore, he engaged in damage control through an insane online post accusing former Shin Bet security service director Ronen Bar of rebellion – that is, treason by another name.

According to the disturbed theory he quoted, Bar appointed himself as "de facto prime minister" on the night before the massacre and refrained from waking Netanyahu because he viewed the latter as an illegitimate leader. In other words, Netanyahu is back to normal.

Had Netanyahu not been prime minister, he could have collaborated as a screenwriter with conspiracy theorist and filmmaker Oliver Stone. When he smelled defeat at noon on Election Day in 2015, he as-

The incumbent's advantage

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cribed it to a globe-spanning secret alliance among the Obama administration in the United States, the CIA, the Israeli civil society group V15 and, of course, the media, which had united behind the rival candidate, Isaac Herzog.

When he was a criminal suspect, he told his in-

vestigators that "someone initiated and operated [the investigations] to preserve the situation in which our media market isn't being opened up." When former Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit decided to indict him, he claimed in private conversations that Mendelblit had been extorted by then-State Prosecutor Shai Nitzan, who had threatened to pull embarrassing information about Mendelblit out of his safe.

Moreover, Netanyahu

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After the war with Israel

Key to Hezbollah's weapons may lie with Lebanon's Shi'ite public



Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam in southern Lebanon, Saturday.

Mohammed Zaatar/AP

Analysis Zvi Bar'el

"All of us for the homeland, for glory and the flag," a hoarse loudspeaker blared Lebanon's national anthem, composed in 1927. Flowers and rice were showered over the dignitaries, and the head of the town presented the guest of honor with a certificate bearing the word "Shukran" – thank you – in large letters.

Thus was the reception for Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam on Sunday during his state visit to the village of Kfar Shouba in

southern Lebanon, near the border with Israel.

Hundreds of residents from the town and surrounding villages came to greet him and thank him for the visit. "The state has returned to southern Lebanon and we thank it," read one of the posts accompanying the many videos that circulated on social media that day.

Salam, 73, a respected jurist and former president of the International Court of Justice in The Hague, marked one year since his ap-

pointment as prime minister and did not conceal his emotion. "We want this region to return to the state," he said, acknowledging that "the state was absent from the south for a long time."

Now, he added, the army has deployed and "we want it to remain to fulfill its duty." But, he stressed, the state cannot rely on the army alone – "it rests on law, institutions, social protection and services to its citizens," he told residents gathered around him.

Not far away, Israeli army observation posts were clearly visible.

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Top court justice: Government policy is forcing judges to release murder suspects

Chen Maanit

Israeli judges are being forced to release murder suspects to alternative forms of detention, like house arrest, due to a shortage of judges, Supreme Court Justice Alex Stein said at a High Court of Justice hearing on Thursday.

The hearing was on a petition that argues that Justice Minister Yariv Levin must immediately rescind his ban on convening the Judicial Appointments Committee, delaying the appointment of around 150 judges – 15 percent of all judicial appointments, including four Supreme Court



The High Court hearing on Thursday.

Itai Cohen

justice positions.

"In today's reality in Israel, releasing people from

criminal organizations, in my opinion, constitutes a crisis. It is impossible to ignore

this," Stein said of the extra workload on judges, which he said caused suspected criminals to be released from detention.

The petition was filed by the Movement for Quality Government, and is supported by Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara. The hearing was held before Justices Ofer Groskopf, Alex Stein and Gila Canfy Steinitz. Levin was represented by an attorney.

Levin has claimed he was not convening the committee because there needed to be a broad consensus among its members to appoint judges. The law, however, stipulates

that a normal majority is required for appointments to the lower courts, and a majority of at least seven out of nine is required for the Supreme Court.

The petition claims that Levin's actions have created a serious failure, harming the judicial system and citizens. The minister's actions were likely "tainted by extraneous considerations unrelated to the matter," the petition argued.

Last March, the coalition passed a law altering the composition of the Judicial Appointments Committee, which will come into effect in the next Knesset.