

# The lion and the rats

Did Netanyahu really propose the deal that President Biden outlined Friday night? So far, Bibi's not denying it. Is this a turning point, or just another day's headlines?

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I sat earlier today with a former member of the government, a person with an international (and stellar) reputation, who's no longer in politics. Our meeting was not meant to be about the war, but no conversation here begins with anything else. Obviously, what was new today was the Biden speech on Friday night and the multiple Israeli reactions (and non-reactions) to it.

What did he make of all this? My host said:

When I think of Israel's situation now, two images come to mind.

The first is of a gambler in Vegas. He's losing, and each time he bets, he keeps losing more. But he doesn't want to leave the casino feeling like a loser. So he keeps betting, figuring the next round will be the one that makes him a winner, even if only barely, so he can walk out with his head held high.

The other image is of a lion being bitten by hundreds of rats. He's the king of the jungle, but he can't stop the rats from biting him. Every time he swipes at them, they scurry back into their holes. So he lies there, bitten and bleeding, roaring at the rats he can't see, knowing that they're going to come after him again, knowing as well that there's nothing he can do. He's angry because he's hurting, and he's enraged because he's supposed to be the King.

We're a society in pain because we're just not as strong as we thought we were. Unless we have something up our sleeve that I don't know about, we can't really fully defeat Hamas. Which means we certainly cannot defeat Hezbollah. Now, they just take out homes in Metulla. But if they wanted to, they could take out towers in Tel Aviv. And then there's Iran. Iran doesn't want a war yet—because it's waiting for us to get even weaker and more distant from the US—

but when that happens, we're going to have war with them, too. And then there's the Houthis.

Not everyone would agree with that assessment, but most Israelis would sign on to some of it. Some would argue that we *could* hurt Hamas more than we have, but others would question the cost—in terms our international standing and how many of our children we'll lose. And everyone would agree that if you told Israelis eight months ago that we'd have fought as hard as we have and that Hamas would still be firing rockets this much later, they'd have said you were nuts.

Which leads to the rage.

If you want to get a sense of the omnipresent rage, take a quick look at this video of a very recent meeting at the Knesset between some MK's (with the white signs in front of them) and representatives of the hostages families (with the hostage posters in front of them). We're not even subtitling it, because what matters is the theater and the tone, not the content (of which there was almost none):



These people have loved ones in the hell of Hamas captivity. And that's how MK's speak to them. Welcome to the Jewish state.

How're things here? That's how things are here. Rage at everyone, frustration from everything. Was the Biden proposal, which Biden says is the Netanyahu proposal, born out of realization that we're the lion?

In the next days, we're likely to find out much more about the deal, who's really behind it, etc. In the meantime, though, here's an English translation of [an outline provided by YNet](#) (Israel's most-read online news source) that lays out the "deal" as it's currently understood:

## THE END OF THE WAR

### The Israeli proposal as outlined by President Biden

#### Stage 1: Six weeks

- \* ceasefire
- \* IDF withdraws from civilian populated areas
- \* release of women, elderly, wounded in exchange for hundreds of prisoners
- \* the residents of the north return to their homes
- \* 600 humanitarian aid trucks to enter Gaza each day

#### Negotiations over ceasefire

- \* no fighting resumes as long as negotiations are ongoing

#### Stage 2

- \* release of the remaining captives, including soldiers, in exchange for Palestinian prisoners
- \* IDF forces leave the Gaza strip

#### Stage 3

- \* rebuilding Gaza
- \* return of the bodies of the deceased hostages

Obviously, there are infinite questions to be addressed, some of them dealbreakers. Here are a few of those potentially critical issues:

- Was the Biden proposal to end the war really proposed by the Israelis? It seems that it may have been. Netanyahu is insisting that Israel's plans to destroy Hamas have not changed, but so far, at least, he's not denying that he and the small war cabinet are behind the four page proposal that the Americans say was sent to them.

- If Netanyahu *was* involved in preparing it, what's his political calculation? Is it the fact that for the first time since the war began, he's leading in the polls and would defeat Gantz? Is he trying to increase his support from the center to shore himself up should elections be unavoidable?
- As was completely predictable, Smotrich and Ben Gvir are threatening to bring down the government if Bibi goes for anything that calls for an end to the war. Yair Lapid has assured Netanyahu that if those two bolt the government, he'll bring in his party to give Bibi the majority he needs to keep his government and to get the deal through. Netanyahu, of course, understands that as soon as the deal happens, though, Lapid could bolt, leaving him without his coalition—so Lapid's offer gives Netanyahu nothing but temporary respite. What's really up?
- How could Israel trust Hamas that it's actually given back all the hostages, when we haven't even gotten a list of them or had a single Red Cross visit in the almost eight months of the war? What about the hostages that are in the hands not of Hamas, but Islamic Jihad?
- What is the status of Hamas at the end of this? It doesn't *sound* like Hamas is destroyed. Netanyahu, though, says that it will be. Is that to mollify Ben Gvir and Smotrich? Or is there a piece about the Hamas plan that we don't know? And if the plan calls for Hamas to be dismantled, why would Hamas agree to any of this?
- Is Hamas isn't entirely eradicated (which many Israelis are convinced Israel cannot make happen, anyway), who stops it from re-arming? And if it's an international force that Biden has in mind, why in the world would Israelis be willing to rely on that?
- In Stage ONE, the residents of the north are supposed to be able to go home. Does that mean that Hezbollah is somehow party to this arrangement? Is Iran, which controls Hezbollah? And Israelis are supposed to trust Iran?

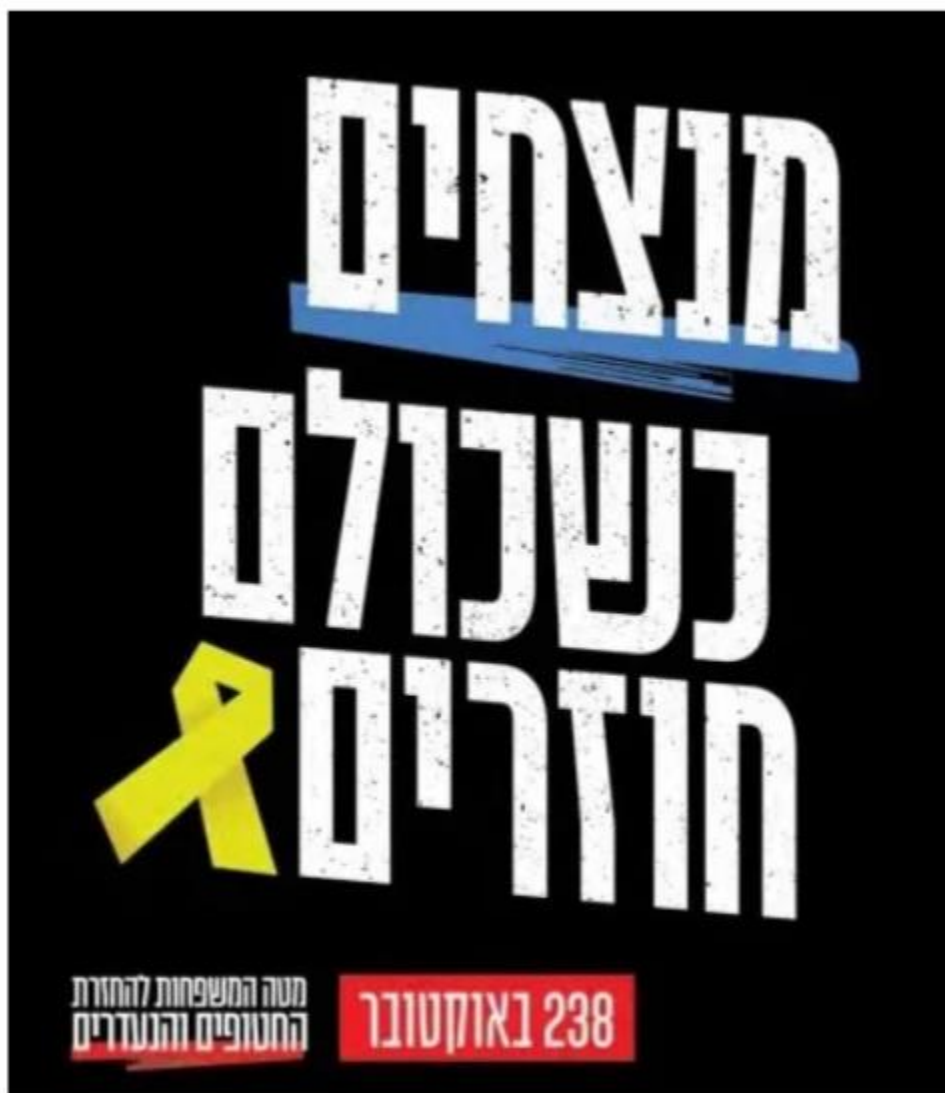
The list goes on. Essentially, we know nothing so far.

The fact that there are many questions, though, does not mean that discussion of this “plan” is going to go away.

Almost since the beginning of the war, the symbol of the movement to save the hostages has been the yellow ribbon, folded over. In the ad below, for example, which appeared in several newspapers this weekend, the wording (which has been used for quite some time now) is:

**We win when they are all home.**

And then underneath: October 238th.

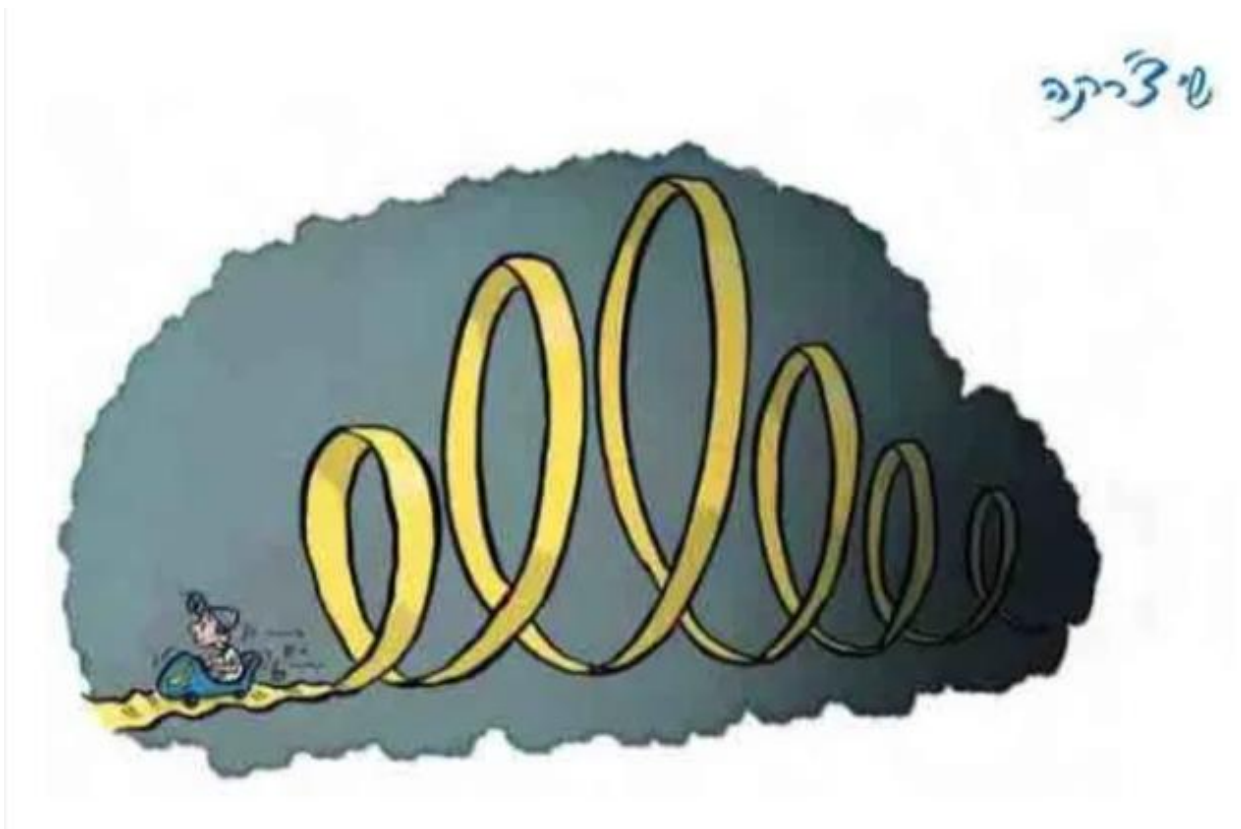


That's the standard ad we've all seen, in one form or another, for many months. Its point is, "Netanyahu, you keep talking about victory. Here's what victory would mean: getting them home."

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The following cartoon appeared in *Makor Rishon* this weekend. It's by the paper's regular illustrator, Shai Cherka. Over Shabbat, I heard a number of people talking about the drawing. What was he trying to say? That the hostage story (the yellow ribbon) is a roller coaster, but in the end, we keep just chugging along? Or that though the hostage families are making the road longer, we're still determined to get there?

Not clear. But no matter where you turn, the yellow ribbon appears.



And then, this morning, this new ad appeared on Israeli news apps.

**YES to Netanyahu's proposed deal.**

## **We win when they are all home**

It's an ad put out by the hostage families organization, SUPPORTING something associated with Netanyahu. That may not sound like a big deal, but it's huge.

I showed it to the person I was meeting with this morning, and they said, "Wow, where did you see this?" I told them I'd screenshotted it from YNet.

"Bibi *cannot* be happy about that ad," they said. I agree.

The hostage families seem to be trying to make the proposed deal stick, reminding Israeli society that it's the Prime Minister who apparently proposed it. Are they trying to say to him, "You're going to take the heat from your right flank for having suggested it, so you might as well do the right thing and close the deal"? Or something else?





Just like with the Cherka cartoon, it's to know what to make of this ad. But one thing is clear—the families of the hostages see a huge opportunity. One that Bibi created?

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Before I went to that meeting today, I had breakfast with a good friend who's a former member of the Foreign Ministry. We, too, spoke about this new deal/proposal, which he, too, found surprising and confusing.

Based on the little we know, I asked him, do you think Israelis would go for it?

"Is this war ends with Sinwar giving a victory sign," he said, "I think it will be unbearable for most Israelis."

That's probably right. But it also assumes we have an alternative.

And *that* is far from clear.

אֲחֵינוּ כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנִּתְּוֵנִים בַּצָּרָה וּבַשְּׂבִיָּה הָעוֹמְדִים בֵּין בָּיִם  
וּבֵין בִּיבְשָׁה הַמְּקוּם יְרַחֵם עֲלֵיהֶם וְיוֹצִיאֵם מִצָּרָה לְרוֹחָה וּמֵאֲפֵלָה  
לְאוֹרָה וּמִשְׁעָבוּד לְגְאֻלָּה הַשְׁתָּא בְּעִגְלָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן:

[As for] our brethren, the entire House of Israel who [still] remain in  
distress and captivity, whether on sea or on land, may God have  
compassion on them, and bring them from distress to relief, from  
darkness to light, from servitude to redemption, at this moment,  
speedily, very soon; and let us say Amein.

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