



Briefing Paper 2

January 15, 2025

DID STEVE WITKOFF ENGINEER TRUMP'S FIRST DEFEAT BEFORE HE EVEN TAKES OFFICE?

The Top Line

President-elect Trump's designated special envoy for the Middle East, Steven Witkoff, has no official portfolio just yet. He seems, nonetheless, to have materially contributed to a disastrous, albeit tenuous, cease-fire accord between Israel and Hamas, the designated terrorist group that murderously attacked her on October 7th, one that the Trump administration will be stuck managing.

Witkoff would chain the Trump administration to the failed policies of the Biden administration.

Analysis

"I think Steve Witkoff has been a terrific partner in this," Secretary of State Tony Blinken told MSNBC. After all, instead of working toward Trump's goals, Witkoff went to work helping the Biden administration achieve *its* major objectives – namely, 1) assuring the survival of Hamas, 2) denying Israel a strategic victory and 3) destroying the premiership of Benjamin Netanyahu.

Witkoff was injected into the negotiations by Bret McGurk, a "Deep State" Biden official who has spearheaded the catastrophic strategy of strengthening the Iranian regime and undermining Israel that resulted in the war now raging across the Mideast. Trump's envoy promptly "went native." Under the insidious influence of McGurk and Blinken, Witkoff evidently perceived his role to be the man who would broker the ceasefire deal. He did so by transforming the President-elect's laudable threat to have "all hell break loose" if Hamas did not release the hostages *before he took office* into a demand for Israel's capitulation via extracting concessions that are neither in her interest nor Mr. Trump's. And for whose consequences the Trump administration has been set up to take the fall.

Witkoff went so far as to praise Hamas' diabolical financier, Qatar, as "doing the Lord's work" in getting Hamas to accept Israel's surrender. The special envoy then hived off to Jerusalem to demand that Bibi meet with him *on the Sabbath* and agree to his utterly unacceptable deal lest he cause "all hell" to break loose *on Israel*.

The resulting agreement is, at this writing, awaiting Hamas' final approval. If it is finalized, Witkoff will have implicated Donald Trump in achieving what Team Biden had been unable to do for the past fifteen months:

- Ensure the survival of, and therefore victory for, Hamas;

- Secure Israel’s complete withdrawal from *all* of Gaza, including in due course the Philadelphi corridor and the buffer zone between Gaza and Israel;
- In Phase 1, exchange 33 Israeli hostages, dead or alive, for 1,000-1,300 terrorists including hundreds with Israeli blood on their hands from attacks prior to October 7th. All of those “Israeli prisoners” can be released directly into Gaza – ensuring that many, if not *all*, of them will return to the jihad against Israel, and perhaps some even against America.
- In Phase 2, exchange as many 3,000 more prisoners – including hardened terrorists serving life-sentences for their crimes – to secure the release of the remaining 65 male hostages (again dead or alive), provided that Israel fully withdraws from Gaza;
- Remove at the get-go the Israeli forces occupying the Netzarim Corridor and the logistics structure it affords the IDF for ready access to all of Gaza;
- Enable the entire population of northern Gaza to return there, including fighting-age males, with “remote monitoring” by Israel, but the actual screening by Qataris and Egyptians;
- Fracture Israel, virtually ensuring the political demise of Bibi Netanyahu, and preventing her from emerging from the present conflict as the strong and secure ally who will allow the United States under Donald Trump to safely play a less direct and costly role in the region’s conflicts; and
- Assure that there will be in the future further war between Israel and Hamas, likely embroiling the United States on President Trump’s watch and under circumstances far less conducive to success.

An outstanding item is whether this deal explicitly commits Israel to permanently end the war or to otherwise render the ceasefire of indefinite duration. That is Hamas’ interpretation and demand – and Biden’s contention. Israel insists that this is just a temporary humanitarian arrangement to secure the release of some of the remaining hostages and that she has the right to resume hostilities

The Bottom Line

The Trump administration is being set up to take the fall for Biden’s policies. It will be stuck enforcing a deal with terrorists that they will be sure to break and that will make America look weak. Rather than a successful deal, this ceasefire is an extended commitment by America to managing a no-win scenario in Gaza that the Trump administration will never be able to escape.

President Trump thus has a fleeting opportunity to disown this train-wreck. If he fails to do so promptly, however, the narrative will be that, thanks to his hapless envoy, the incoming administration will bear responsibility for what is coming next and for being unprepared to deal with it.

Trump’s best bet is to let Israel fight without getting his administration dragged into managing the situation in Gaza. Such subversive micromanagement was Team Biden’s anti-Israel agenda and they are perilously close to embroiling Trump in it, too.