

Trump puts an American First, and Israel rejoices

The freeing of Edan Alexander was a wonderful instance of US and Israeli interests overlapping. But Netanyahu was sidelined, and there is daylight between the two leaderships on a widening number of key issues, just as JD Vance had warned there would be

By [David Horovitz](#) May 13, 2025



A crowd celebrates the release of hostage Edan Alexander in his hometown of Tenafly, New Jersey, May 12, 2025. (Lokman Vural Elilbol / Anadolu / via Reuters)

If anything can be sudden after 584 days, the release by Hamas on Monday of the last living Israeli-American hostage, Edan Alexander, was indeed an unexpected and wonderful surprise.

It was also a reflection of US President Donald Trump's declared "America First" outlook — or, in this case, "American First." Unwilling to wait any longer for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's reliance on military pressure to yield even a mini-new deal with Hamas, the US president tasked his envoys with securing Alexander's freedom. Israel was only officially updated on Sunday, when it was a fait accompli.

For the families of hostages without American or other second citizenship, delight in the return of another hostage was tempered by the heightened concern that their own government is less obsessed than the leader of the free world with liberating their loved ones from the daily life-threatening peril of Hamas captivity.

“My Matan, a citizen who is unwell and who was abducted from his bed, is being held together with Edan Alexander,” Einav Zangauker, the most relentless public critic of the prime minister among the parents of hostages, posted on social media on Monday morning. “The two of them are in one dark tunnel, without other hostages. If Matan is left behind alone in the tunnel, Netanyahu has decided to murder my son,” she charged. “Instead of freeing all the hostages, he is becoming my private angel of death.”

But while the release of the New Jersey-raised 21-year-old was plainly an instance of American First, the US president and his officials indicated that it is not a case of American Only.

Trump pledged late on Sunday to seek the return of “all living hostages and remains to their loved ones.” His hostage envoy, Adam Boehler, flying to Israel together with Edan’s mother Yael on Monday, [took to their plane’s PA](#) to vouchsafe that Trump “told me to go get back every hostage, every Israeli,” and “he wasn’t kidding.”

Having ignored Netanyahu in securing Alexander’s release, the US president also appears increasingly at odds with the prime minister over the cabinet-approved imminent intense escalation of the fighting in Gaza, and the coalition’s determination not to end the war.

His special envoy Steve Witkoff was [quoted](#) recently telling families of hostages that the US did not see where further progress could be made militarily, and that it “wants to return the hostages, but Israel is not ready to end the war.”

Whatever the veracity of that report, [Trump stressed](#) on Sunday that he regards Alexander’s release as “hopefully... the first of those final steps necessary to end this brutal conflict,” and he did not cite the imperative to destroy Hamas as a condition for the war to end.

US Ambassador Mike Huckabee, similarly celebrating Alexander’s release, also said on Monday evening that he hoped it “marks the beginning of the end to this terrible war.” While Huckabee stressed that “Hamas alone is responsible for the continued death and suffering,” he, too, did not specify that Hamas would have to be destroyed for the fighting to conclude.

At the joint press conference with Netanyahu in February where Trump announced his radical idea of turning Gaza into a “Riviera of the Middle East,” the president [did state](#) that

he had discussed with Netanyahu “how we can work together to ensure Hamas is eliminated.”

But since then, Netanyahu elected not to proceed to the second and third phases of the hostage-ceasefire deal that Witkoff finalized in Doha in January, and last week [set out his plans](#) for “an intensified operation in Gaza” that, he made clear, would not end anytime soon.

And while the prime minister spoke of retaining captured territory until all the declared goals of the war were attained, a stance not entirely contradicting Trump’s Gaza vision, his far-right coalition partner, Bezalel Smotrich, went considerably further. [Smotrich declared](#) that Israel was “finally going to occupy the Gaza Strip” and asserted that once the new offensive began, there would be “no retreat from the territories we have conquered, not even in exchange for hostages.”

A crowd celebrates the release of hostage Edan Alexander in his hometown of Tenaflly, New Jersey, May 12, 2025. (Lokman Vural Elibol / Anadolu / via Reuters)

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Released hostage Edan Alexander, center, reunites with his parents at an IDF base near Re'im, May 12, 2025. (Israel Defense Forces)

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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (right) in a video with Finance Minister Bezael Smotrich after passing the 2025 state budget, March 25, 2025. (Screenshot/GPO)

Given that Smotrich, along with fellow far-right coalition party leader Itamar Ben Gvir, had insisted on a return to the war, rather than continuing to the second phase of the January ceasefire deal, Trump and his officials might reasonably have concluded that it is Smotrich, rather than Netanyahu, who is determining Israeli government policy — and it is evidently not to their liking.

Vance's warning

In October, at the height of the US presidential election campaign, Trump's running mate, now Vice President [JD Vance](#), [warned](#) resonantly that "America's interest is sometimes going to be distinct" from Israel's. He was speaking not in the context of Gaza, but of Iran: "Sometimes we're going to have overlapping interests, and sometimes we're going to have distinct interests," Vance repeated. "And our interest very much is in not going to war with

Iran.”



US President Donald Trump (center) and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu look to Vice President JD Vance in the Oval Office of the White House, February 4, 2025, in Washington. (AP/Evan Vucci)

For all the protestations from both sides that ties between the two leaderships are “[excellent](#),” daylight is visible as regards the prosecution of the war against Hamas, especially given Smotrich’s declared annexationist and resettlement ambitions. In addition, there was acute discomfort over Trump reaching a truce deal with the Houthis, without warning Israel, a fairly staggering two days after a missile launched by the Yemeni terrorists had hit the grounds of Ben Gurion Airport, sending most foreign airlines fleeing, yet to return. And Trump has declared definitively that a deal with Iran “is going to happen” — echoing Vance’s October mindset and despite Netanyahu’s concern over the terms.

There’s also Trump’s repeated praise and support for Turkey’s Israel-loathing, Hamas-backing President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. And we’ll see starting Tuesday how the president will choose to advance US-Saudi ties, including Riyadh’s desire for a civilian nuclear program opposed by Israel, amid the receding prospect of a Saudi-Israel normalization deal. This was an accord that Trump was once confident of brokering, and that Netanyahu, in a [September 2023 address](#) to the UN General Assembly, enthused would usher in a new Middle East. Two weeks later, Hamas invaded, and Netanyahu’s refusal to endorse any potential path to a Palestinian state, as demanded by the Saudis, has only intensified.

The extraction of Edan Alexander from the vicious clutches of Hamas emphatically serves both American and Israeli interests. But as Vance predicted, those interests are not always going to overlap. They already evidently don’t entirely align over Gaza, or the Houthis, or, most worryingly, over Iran — not for a US president impatiently intent on ending wars, dealing with an Israeli government, dominated by far-right expansionists, that isn’t.