

Vice President Harris's speech proves the importance of Gantz's visit - editorial

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By JPOST EDITORIAL MARCH 5, 2024



US Vice President Kamala Harris speaks about the \$1.9 trillion "American Rescue Plan Act" as Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) listens during an event to celebrate the legislation in the Rose Garden at the White House in Washington, US, March 12, 2021.

(photo credit: REUTERS/TOM BRENNER)

If anyone needed proof of the importance of National Unity Party

chairman and war cabinet minister Benny Gantz's scheduled meeting Monday with US [Vice President Kamala Harris](#), the vice president provided it herself one day earlier in a speech.

She bewailed the tragic plight of Gazans but did it in a way that – even as she decried Hamas as a “brutal terrorist organization” – implied that Israel is responsible for a situation where “we have seen reports of families eating leaves or animal feed, women giving birth to malnourished babies with little or no medical care, and children dying from malnutrition and dehydration.”

Israel, she said, to applause, “must do more to significantly increase the flow of aid. No excuses. They must open new border crossings. They must not impose any unnecessary restrictions on the [delivery of aid](#). They must ensure humanitarian personnel, sites, and convoys are not targeted. And they must work to restore basic services and promote order in Gaza so more food, water, and fuel can reach those in need.”

This could have left her listeners with the mistaken impression that Israel indiscriminately fired on hungry Palestinians in search of food last week. “As I have said many times, too many innocent Palestinians have been killed,” she said. “And just a few days ago, we saw hungry, desperate people approach aid trucks, simply trying to secure food for their families after weeks of nearly no aid reaching northern Gaza. And they were met with gunfire and chaos.”



NETANYAHU AND Gantz - can they put their animosity aside and serve the public? (credit: CORINNA KERN AMIR COHEN REUTERS)

What she did not say, but which she should have, is what Democrat Pennsylvania Sen. John Fetterman wrote in a post on X on Sunday. He wrote that Hamas could have ended the tragedy by surrendering and releasing every hostage. “Hamas instigated and owns this humanitarian catastrophe,” he wrote.

“Demand Hamas surrender. Demand [Hamas] [release every hostage](#). Demand to seize billions of dollars Hamas stole from Gaza. Demand those stolen billions to rebuild Gaza and compensate true victims – Israelis and Palestinians. Demand Hamas eliminated or permanently exiled.”

But that was not the tone of Harris’s speech. It was more like “both sides are responsible for this calamity.”

And that is a morally shortsighted position.

Is there a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Gaza? Tragically, there is. But it could end tomorrow, as Fetterman said, with the release of the hostages and Hamas's surrender. Hamas is responsible for the Palestinian suffering in Gaza. That is what Harris should have conveyed.

Gantz's visit was beneficial for Israel and the Biden administration

This is why it is good Gantz met with her to explain Israel's position and perspective. Harris is an important player in the current administration and one who could soon become even more important in Washington. A New York Times/Siena poll on Sunday found that 73% of registered voters agree with the statement that US President Joe Biden is "too old to be an effective president."

If it appears Donald Trump would beat Biden in November and, consequently, the president drops out of the race before or after the Democratic convention in the summer, Harris would be the leading contender to replace him – not a shoo-in, but the leading prospect. Hers is an ear Israel should want to have access to.

It is for this reason that Gantz is serving Israel's interests by meeting with her, hopefully conveying the message that though there are differences within the government, when it comes to the need to roundly defeat Hamas and secure the release of the hostages, there is no daylight between most of the ministers, including between him and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

While Gantz's meeting with Harris is useful and serves Israel's interests, the way he went about arranging it – without first securing Netanyahu's approval and carefully coordinating the trip and the messages – is unfortunate and puts Israel in a silly light: a senior cabinet minister is meeting the US vice president and Israelis are debating the suitability of that meeting.

Israel – as Harris's speech showed – needs time with Harris. It also needs to gain access to her in a way that does not make it appear as if the country cannot overcome petty political squabbles even in wartime.