

# THE GAZA WAR

WHERE IT STARTED, WHERE IT LEADS

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The Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies

The Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies (ECSS)

The Gaza War: Where It Started, Where It Leads

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# Introduction

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\*GEN. MOHAMED IBRAHIM ELDEWERY

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The book “The Gaza War: Where It Started, Where It Leads” is being published as we approach the fourth month of the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip, which began on October 7, 2023. This war continues to rage, shattering and breaking all international and humanitarian principles and laws. Those who have falsely and deceitfully claimed to champion and defend human rights—which appear to be preserved for specific countries—are revealed. Meanwhile, nations striving for their freedom, independence, progress, and development are disregarded by the unjust international classification of human rights.

The Israeli war on Gaza was not born on October 7; it was a cry to the world to remind them that there are Palestinian people seeking their most basic rights—to live in an independent, sovereign state like other nations. They are willing to coexist peacefully with a neighboring state called Israel, hoping both can live in peace, security, and stability. However, this world, which recognizes only double standards, ignored the rights of this resilient, heroic people and did not care about their cause, which has been marked by sixty years of injustice, suffering, and inhuman treatment inflicted by the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian people in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, without regard for any international legitimacy laws or any peaceful solutions that attempted to find a path in the dark political tunnel.

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The war on Gaza has been a stark revelation, confirming that the international community only awakens when its interests are threatened. It then begins to search for causes and solutions. This has brought the Palestinian issue back to the forefront of global concern. The international community has begun demanding a political solution and to grant the Palestinians their legitimate rights and establish their independent state. These solutions have been proposed for decades, but the constant response has been neglect and disregard, reflecting a global refusal to fairly address this focal point in the Middle East, which could explode without warning.

The Israeli war on Gaza has also revealed that Israel cannot achieve security and stability, no matter how fast the normalization 'train' travels in the Arab region. The desired security Israel seeks will never be achieved through its military, nuclear, technological, and economic power alone. The only path to this security is through the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

The cost of the war on Gaza will be a significant burden for Israel at all levels, material-wise and human-wise. It will leave deep scars on the body of the Israeli military establishment that will not heal, which has already shown signs of collapse, most notably on October 7. These costs will also have negative repercussions on the global economy, which has yet to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. The Gaza war adds further to these global economic woes, with conditions primed for more deterioration and widening conflict.

The Israeli society pays a heavy price due to the policies of its extremely right-wing government, which has abandoned the peace process even in theory. Israelis remain at the mercy of this government, which leads them towards further losses and criticisms. The widespread protests in major world capitals condemning the Israeli military actions in Gaza are a clear expression of the damage done by this extreme right-wing government to its people. This wave of criticism will not cease until the war on Gaza ends.

The Israeli war on Gaza has led to an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe in modern history. Palestinians in Gaza are at risk of death every moment due to civilian targeting, home destruction, and displacement from north to south.

The Israeli military continues its indiscriminate bombing, erasing entire areas and families. It has also enforced severe measures on the entry of humanitarian aid through the Rafah crossing, exacerbating the collective punishment policy against defenseless Palestinian civilians.

In the midst of these highly negative conditions, Egypt has strived to shed some light in the very dark tunnel. The Egyptian political leadership has been active since the first day of the war, attempting containment by all possible means, struggling to halt the fire and bring in humanitarian aid through the Rafah crossing, which has remained open throughout the crisis. Egypt proposed initiatives to exit the current Gaza quagmire and went further by convening a peace conference to signal to the world that the only solution to this crisis lies in a political resolution focused on establishing an independent Palestinian state. This message was gradually picked up globally, highlighting the comprehensive, just political solution as the sole exit from this crisis.

The war on Gaza has somewhat awakened the world's conscience, but this should not end at mere sympathy and appeals. Practical steps must be taken, starting with a political solution plan through the resumption of negotiations aimed at a two-state solution. This means establishing an independent, sovereign Palestinian state along the 1967 borders, living in security, peace, and stability alongside Israel. Without this sole solution, stability in the region remains a fantasy, and conditions could deteriorate unpredictably, leading to even further destruction.

Despite the catastrophe we all witness in Gaza; current efforts must first focus on a ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied areas within Gaza. Only then can we move on to reconstruction and a political solution. The international community must atone for its past mistakes, discard its double standards, and start a peace process that grants Palestinians their basic rights to live in their independent state. Let us move forward on this path to change the painful reality we currently observe from a distance. We must shift from this position to one of interaction, engagement, and involvement in a peace process that could transform the current situation for the better.

Ultimately, although the war on Gaza has begun, it must end with Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem united under the banner of the independent Palestinian state.



## Section One

# A General Strategic Vision for the War in Gaza (Objectives, Timing, Performance)

DR. DALAL MAHMOUD - SHADI MOHSEN

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In 2015, Israeli Colonel Gabriel (Gabi) Siboni, Director of Military and Strategic Affairs and Cybersecurity Programs at the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), published an article titled “Will Hamas Be Better Prepared for Its Next Confrontation with Israel? Insights from Hamas’ Lessons in Operation Protective Edge.” He concluded that Hamas, during fifty days of fighting in Operation Protective Edge, realized that on the geopolitical and strategic level, it cannot operate against Israel without prevailing regional support. Therefore, Hamas held its hopes on Iran to help rearm and build its military strength. Siboni suggested that Hamas would not alter its overall doctrine towards war against Israel and would continue rebuilding its power to gain strength, further develop its missile capabilities, enhance its cross-border operations, and arm itself with advanced high-quality weapons.

The question now is whether Israel took such insights presented by Colonel Gabi Siboni -shared by many Israeli military and strategic experts- seriously. These experts advised Israel to continue limiting Hamas’s military strength, which motivated Israel to repeatedly conduct military operations in Gaza since 2007, with Hamas unilaterally managing the area. Israel bombarded Gaza in the years following consecutively in 2008, 2012, 2014, 2019, 2021, 2022, and then in May 2023. But did these operations suffice to deter Palestinians from

resistance? Or did they continue to increase their suffering and violate their natural and human rights?

The “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation, which began on October 7, 2023, was not a conventional military operation like its predecessors in Gaza. This time, Hamas launched an unconventional military attack inside Israel, shocking both Israel and the world with this unexpected assault. Israel has consistently aimed to weaken Hamas’s capabilities and strike its infrastructure multiple times while also strengthening its superior early warning and air defense systems. The surprise intensified with Israeli officials accusing each other of either underestimating Hamas’s capabilities or misjudging the intelligence they had.

Regardless of Israel’s surprise and performance in managing this war, this stage represents a critical turning point for Israel. It will not deal with Gaza as it did before, and may not stop at neutralizing Hamas but might plan to eradicate the Palestinian issue entirely. This is evident from daily reports in the press conveying statements from Israeli military and political leaders that this war will not end soon. So, will Israel fail to end what it started in Gaza, or have its ultimate goals not yet been attained?

Israel has recognized that it did not achieve its objective in all its previous military operations against Hamas in Gaza. From that point until the current moment of writing, the war in Gaza has raged on, with Israeli military experts estimating that it could last for months, potentially extending into a new year. This raises questions about Israel’s real objectives in continuing this war. Does it aspire to stop the bleeding of Israeli pride after a symbolic defeat and failure to manage the situation politically and militarily? Or has it lost control over the security developments in Gaza, leading to arbitrary decisions? Or does it have other regional objectives that won’t be accomplished if the war stops? Are the narrow interests of some Israeli politicians and economists driving the war’s persistence for as long as possible? To what extent can one be certain that the American stance is against the war’s continuation in Gaza? How can one realistically and objectively explain the United States’ unlimited support for Israel?

Many questions arise regarding Israel’s management of the war in Gaza, and likewise, many questions surround Hamas’s management of the war it planned. These questions range from Hamas’s political and military motives and objectives, to whether Hamas planned all stages of this war, to whether Iran was indeed involved in helping or spurring Hamas as Gabi Siboni predicted. How

do the Palestinian people resist the collective Israeli punishment, which Israel bets on to make the people reject resistance organizations like Hamas due to the punishment and daily humanitarian crimes committed by Israel in plain sight of the international community and its democratic superpowers, which have long 'boasted' of respecting human rights?

These questions preoccupy politicians, military experts, researchers, and academics in all forums and think-tanks, not to mention the diverse global populace. This has created a global public opinion at the populace's level that condemns Israeli violations, even if it doesn't necessarily align with official state positions. While Israel and Palestinians are the direct parties in the Gaza war, regional and international parties involved in the war, directly or indirectly, have been the emphasis of many writings, especially with the war's relative expansion from Lebanon or Yemen. This suggests more interventions and broader threats arising from the war, both security-wise and economically. At the international level, there is significant momentum in addressing and analyzing the United States' policy towards the situation in Gaza, given its role as the guarantor of Israel's security on one hand and the international sponsor of Palestinian-Israeli relations on the other. Additionally, the U.S. is the most influential superpower in the Middle East, which has renewed its focus on the region since the outbreak of the Ukrainian war in 2022.

Among all regional parties, Egypt stands out as a key player in the Gaza war scene, being both a target and a mediator. Israel has repeatedly 'floated' the idea of forcibly or voluntarily displacing Palestinians to Sinai, which Egypt has outrightly rejected. Egypt was the first country to organize a peace conference to end the war and investigated methods to cease fire, subsequently mediating a humanitarian truce with Qatar that lasted several days until Israel broke it again. Egypt also presented an initiative for a comprehensive settlement of the Gaza situation and a comprehensive negotiation over the Palestinian issue.

## **“Al-Aqsa Flood” Threatens Israeli Security:**

A century ago, in his essay “The Iron Wall,” Ze'ev Jabotinsky, a leading figure in the Zionist movement and founder and leader of the Zionist Revisionist Movement, laid the foundation of Israel's security concept. In 1923, he identified the motives behind the Arab resistance to the Zionist project in the Land of Israel and proposed a strategic approach to achieve Zionist goals. He viewed

Arab resistance against Zionism as an expression of a deep-rooted national religious conflict, stemming from the Arab hope of continually challenging and weakening Zionist dominance until its eventual demise. As he said, “It is not despair that causes Arab resistance but hope.” He believed the solution was transforming Zionism into an iron wall that eradicates the Arab hopes of removing it.

This perception returns in Israel after the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation, which some Israeli military personnel consider a collapse of Israel’s strategic security concept, marking the end of the thirty-year era since the Oslo Accords with a seismic impact. For Israel to achieve victory in its war against Hamas, it will be compelled to completely eradicate Palestinian resistance and ‘construct’ a new iron wall. Is this view an exaggeration and fear-mongering by Israel to achieve its goals of neutralizing the Palestinian issue and expanding the Jewish state? Or does this opinion reflect the opinion of the Israeli society, both military and civilian?

In the limited timeframe starting from October 7, 2023, and ongoing, with the continued uneven military engagement between Israel and Hamas, everyone has realized we are witnessing a new phase of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This phase brings the Palestinian issue back to the forefront of the international community’s agenda, restating it as the core issue in the Middle East, especially with the conflict’s extent expanding beyond Gaza to other fronts, most prominently Lebanon.

From a broader perspective on the Gaza war, it can be said that it might reshape relations among certain regional countries. Iran, engaged in the war at different levels, has been accused of spurring Hamas to attack Israel and providing material and qualitative support to Hamas. This connection is strengthened with other Iranian proxies entering the conflict, such as the Houthis in Yemen, who declared war on Israel and targeted ships heading to or suspected of heading to Israel. Additionally, Hezbollah in Lebanon, initially limited in its involvement, intensified its military activity on the Lebanese front from the third month of the war.

On another front, Turkey leverages the Gaza war to regain popularity in Arab countries, intensifying its rhetoric against Israel, exposing Israeli agents within Turkey, and refusing to designate Hamas as a terrorist organization while

supporting the Palestinian cause morally. Many articles suggest Turkey plans to secure its presence in Gaza's reconstruction post-war, requiring it to increase its media statements in favor of Palestinian rights, though its stance might not evolve beyond this.

The deepest regional impact of the Gaza war is felt in Egypt and Jordan, as Israel's collective punishment of Palestinians aims to forcibly displace them to these two countries, reminiscent of the 1948 expulsion. Some view this Israeli objective as exploiting Hamas's attack to achieve this objective, maintaining its demographic superiority, a long-standing fear, and a primary motive for its 2018 Nation-State Law declaring the Jewish state's identity.

Great powers are not far from the Gaza war scene. The United States has been present from the war's early hours, not only as a primary guarantor of Israel's security but also actively with its forces and equipment in the region, providing strong support to Israel. The United States is also protecting its own self-interests and strategic interests in the Middle East, sending a strong message to other major powers competing for influence that it remains the dominant force, prioritizing Israel's security and maritime route safety. This is evident in the ongoing Gaza war days.

Russia has also remained involved, hosting a Hamas delegation to showcase its influence and ability to attract a significant Middle Eastern faction (armed political movements and their sponsoring states). Russia also capitalized on the Ukraine war, achieving field gains against Ukraine during the West's preoccupation with Gaza. Moreover, the Western bias towards Israel and disregard for Israel's legal and humanitarian violations have fostered a significant public opinion within the Western countries opposing the war's continuation, both in Ukraine and Gaza, and rejecting their countries' support for the war.

It can be said that the Gaza war, which brings the Palestinian cause back to the international agenda, extends its impact to all internal, regional, and global levels, adding complexity and intertwining dimensions. This necessitates a discussion of some important aspects to clarify significant angles in viewing the scene, the most important of which are: the objectives associated with this war, and the implications of the timing for the start of the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation. Before addressing these two angles, it is worth mentioning the key milestones in the development of events.

## What Happened and What is Happening?:

The security situation between Israel and Gaza exploded on the morning of October 7, 2023, after Palestinian resistance factions in Gaza infiltrated Israeli settlements in the “Gaza Envelope” area, launching their military operation dubbed “Al-Aqsa Flood.” Four hours into the event, Israel began to somewhat respond by launching its military operation in Gaza, dubbed “Iron Swords.” However, it officially declared war on the fourth day (October 11) of the security and military escalation, continuing the war for over thirty continuous days without a truce or a temporary ceasefire.

Hamas has benefitted from various experiences with Israel, most notably the escape of six Palestinian prisoners from the Gilboa Prison in September 2021. These prisoners managed to deceive surveillance systems, cameras, guard systems, and the prison’s architectural design, using very simple tools to dig a tunnel leading to freedom outside the highly guarded prison area with modern security systems. The lesson obtained from this operation is the fragility of the Israeli security system, despite the image Israelis try to project of their advanced security and espionage systems worldwide. During the escape and pursuit by Israeli security forces, the Jenin Battalion was formed to support these escapees. After the Israeli forces recaptured them, the battalion transformed into a resistance group along with other factions, engaging the Israeli army to divert attention from Gaza’s security monitoring.

This ongoing Gaza war differs from previous security escalations between Israel and Gaza, as it has been evident by unprecedented phenomena throughout its continuous days. Starting with Hamas’s operations in the Gaza Envelope using new combat and military tactics, to the Israeli sites being targeted by Hamas’s rocket strikes. Israel’s reaction involved excessive force not only against Hamas but also against all Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, destroying Gaza’s infrastructure, besieging it, and obstructing aid efforts from Egypt. Israel began with aerial bombing and then got involved on the ground on October 27, 2023, as the second phase of the war, which is still ongoing, with intermittent humanitarian truces and resumed military operations, with no consensus on its military objectives yet. Many factors led to the resumption of war after a one-week truce that allowed the release of dozens of hostages held in Gaza in exchange for three times their number of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. The first factor is the Israeli government’s failure to achieve its goal of freeing the captives and eliminating Hamas, making it desperate to continue the brutal war against

civilians. Secondly, a sustained truce implies an unspoken acknowledgment of Israel's defeat and a moral victory for the resistance, securing a favorable position in future negotiations. Thirdly, a continued or permanent truce would hold the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu accountable, potentially leading to his removal from government and prosecution for past and present war crimes.

In the second phase of the war, Tel Aviv moved deeper into the south, claiming Hamas leaders were in southern Gaza. Israel stated it would wage this war with different means and weapons than those used in the north due to the population density. Israel does not care about civilian lives, nor does it heed the popular calls and voices asking to stop this brutal war. It fights not just to eliminate Hamas, though it desires that, but to prove its strength to its citizens and the world, even if its opponents are unarmed civilians. Israel fights to ensure Netanyahu's government remains intact and to weaken the resistance by all means, legitimate or otherwise, to enforce its terms during future negotiations concerning the remaining Israeli civilian captives, the return of the killed, and, crucially, negotiations over Israeli soldiers, who might be exchanged for many Palestinian prisoners, especially since the prisoner exchange deal exposed Israel's prison system and confirmed the use of systematic torture, ill-treatment, and arbitrary detention.

The war has expanded due to two key factors. First, Hezbollah transitioned from supporting Gaza to directly confronting Israel after the assassination of Hamas leader Saleh al-Arouri, followed by the assassination of Wasam al-Tawil, a key Hezbollah leader. Unceasing skirmishes occur on the Lebanese-Israeli border between Hezbollah fighters and the Israeli army, prompting Israel to threaten Lebanon. Israeli Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi stated that his forces could destroy any village in Lebanon, intensifying his rhetoric against Hezbollah. Speaking to soldiers in Gaza, Halevi asserted that their actions in the besieged sector convinced him they could extend the fight to Lebanese territory if necessary. Overall, Hezbollah's engagement is currently restrained to avoid widening the war, but this may change with the continued Israeli assassinations of its leaders or attacks on its bases, indicating a broader conflict beyond Gaza.

The second factor is the Houthis' declaration of war on Israel, announcing they would prevent any ships bound for Israel from passing unless Gaza received necessary food and medicine, warning these ships would become legitimate targets if unmet. The Houthi, supported by Iran, targeting commercial ships in the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb Strait, expands the geographical scope

of the conflict to strategic points. The United States directly intervened, and after failing to form an international coalition to secure the Red Sea without regional states, the United States directed airstrikes alongside Britain on Houthi bases starting January 11, 2024. In response, the Houthis targeted some American interests in the region, highlighting the regional threat posed by Red Sea navigation due to the Gaza war.

## **Pre-War Conditions:**

Internally, Israel experienced turmoil before the war. Ongoing Israeli public protests against the judicial reform project involved reserve officers and soldiers submitting petitions, memoranda, and threatening letters refusing training, suggesting a deep rift within the Israeli army. Politically, Israel faced a political divide between the far-right bloc and other secular, left-wing, and centrist factions, particularly over the conscription law for Haredim (religious students). Socially, increased emigration due to economic crises impacted foreign investment inflows, exchange rates, and political considerations affecting budget allocation, governmental spending, and modernizing the Israeli army. At the level of Israel and abroad, specifically the United States, which has not found logical justifications to defend the far-right policies that threaten democratic values.

Regarding Hamas, Palestinian surveys and public opinion polls before the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation indicated declining popularity in Gaza, impacting its governance and resistance role, especially since two years had passed since its last direct conflict with Israel. Over these two years, Iran focused on supporting its closer proxy, “the Islamic Jihad”, financially, technically, and politically, prompting Hamas to regain its position with Iran and coordinate with its strategic regional proxies, notably Hezbollah. Israel had been working since March 2021 to dismantle Hamas’s infrastructure in the West Bank, particularly in Jenin and Nablus, making Hamas perceive the Israeli threat. Some experts view the Gaza-initiated war as Hamas’s attempt to divert Israel’s attention from the northern West Bank, which Israel continues targeting through raids and neutralizing Hamas elements.

Regionally, Israel’s integration in the region appeared imminent, focusing on ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, demonstrated by the India-European corridor project promoted by the Israeli Prime Minister at the UN General Assembly in September 2023. The Abraham Accords normalization agreement between Saudi Arabia and Israel, expected to be signed in November or June 2024 at the latest, also indicated increased regional integration. Moreover,

regional indicators pointed to a multi-front crisis, including the resumed fighting in Yemen against the Arab coalition, political and security crises between Hezbollah and Israel in the “tent crisis,” Syrian confrontations with Israeli jets, escalating political and military conflict in Sudan, and unclear paths for a Libyan settlement. The Ukrainian war’s economic and political impacts continued to influence the Arab region and the Middle East, presenting the economy as a major challenge for many regional countries. Overall, the regional situation was tense and directed away from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which wasn’t the primary regional concern before the war.

Internationally, the United States, Israel’s primary supporter, was preoccupied with its competition with China and Russia and the internal repercussions, including political crises faced by the American administration. Political tension between Israel, led by Netanyahu, and the American Democratic administration, led by Biden, also persisted due to the judicial reform project, causing widespread public protests and straying from American democratic values. This led to constant tension with the Palestinians, nearing an outbreak. Some estimates within the U.S. anticipated a Palestinian popular uprising rather than a military operation by resistance organizations.

European countries, preoccupied with the energy file since the Ukrainian war, couldn’t ignore their goal of diversifying regional energy sources (natural gas) in the Middle East to reduce Russian gas dominance, aligning with Iran’s ambition to push natural gas pipelines to Europe via Turkey. Thus, Europe pursued stability in the southern Mediterranean as a growing gas supplier.

## **War Timing Indicators:**

The timing and context of this war, both in Israel and regionally and internationally, have unique implications. Timing includes both the onset of the war, initiated by Hamas on October 7, 2023, corresponding with significant Jewish holidays like Simchat Torah, which saw many Israeli military leaders on leave. There were strategic contexts observed as Hamas’s bets in launching its operation at that time, raising questions about the accuracy of Hamas’s political and military calculations against its adversary and the intended goals.

Timing also involves the war’s end, particularly with extensive analyses and views on the post-war phase. Currently, Israel seems to be the one determining

the war's end, despite populist and diplomatic pressures that haven't significantly influenced Israel. According to Israeli statements, this war will persist for several months, possibly a year. Israeli officials have presented contrasting views on Gaza's war developments, ranging from difficulties necessitating longer operations to nearing mission completion with reduced quantity of military operations in favor of specialized ones, potentially ending by January 2024.

Experts and analysts view these conflicting Israeli estimates as reflecting confusion and differing priorities within Israel. Some consider political motives behind these differing assessments, implying that declarations of nearing war's end only aim to quell criticisms, particularly with the issue presented to the International Court of Justice. For the Israeli government, prolonged war benefits it, especially the Prime Minister, by achieving some success to avoid popular, legal, and political accountability. Calls for early elections will likely follow the war's end, with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant stating the war requires more time. Israeli Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi described the war as "just" against Hamas to defend the "right to live in safety," stating, "We are waging the most just war against a bloodthirsty enemy, killing innocents in inhumane ways. We will not forget, we will not let it go, and we will continue to remind even those who try to deny it. To achieve actual results, we must continue working in the enemy's land and not allow ourselves to be dragged into a ceasefire that achieves no results for us."

## **Objectives of the War Parties:**

Hamas initiated the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation with multiple objectives, fully anticipating an Israeli reaction. But how did both parties define their goals? Were they limited to action and reaction, or did this war aim to achieve broader objectives?

For Hamas, the main objectives included reintroducing the Palestinian issue to the international agenda after being disregarded in favor of the Russia-Ukraine war, preventing Israeli aggression against Al-Aqsa and Palestinians in Jerusalem and other cities, and reviving its role in Palestinian resistance—especially since the last two rounds saw the Islamic Jihad at the forefront. Responding to Israeli violations of Palestinian rights to normal life and countering the extreme right-wing government formed in late 2022 and its repeated aggression against Palestinians were also key motivations. As previously noted, Hamas's popularity had declined before the war, making it likely that regional and local conditions necessitated this move despite the risks of severe Israeli retaliation.

In response, Israel launched the “Iron Swords” operation following the “Al-Aqsa Flood,” with Netanyahu declaring war in the early hours of the Hamas attack. Despite the retaliatory nature of Israel’s response, it had several objectives starting with revenge but not ending there. Israel’s goals included exacting revenge on the Palestinian people, restoring the security and military establishment’s credibility, which was lost due to Hamas’s attack, and restoring Israel’s deterrence capability through its four components: warning, deterrence, defense, and resolution. The “Al-Aqsa Flood” disrupted the first three elements, hindering early warning mechanisms, confusing Israeli defense units for several hours post-attack, and collapsing deterrence, failing to prevent effective resistance attacks inside Israel, resulting in many Israelis being taken captive and moved to Gaza.

In addition to revenge and restoring credibility, Israel aims to maintain the occupation, criminalize Palestinian resistance, and strip it of its moral legitimacy, forcing Palestinians into silence and acceptance. This includes equating Hamas’s actions with those of ISIS and portraying Palestinian resistance as terrorism, capitalizing on false narratives of Hamas beheading children—a claim uncritically accepted by the U.S. president and his Secretary of State despite the retraction of the official Israeli narrative by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the admissions of the journalist, who stated in an interview with an Indian channel that she did not witness it but rather heard about it from some people who were at the scene, and that she has no evidence of it, artificial intelligence technologies revealed the fabrication of the video that was broadcasted related to this lie.

Israel’s primary declared objective is the total dismantling of Hamas, as emphasized by an Israeli Prime Minister spokesman who stated, “The war in Gaza can end if Hamas leaders surrender to the Israeli army and release the captives.” This narrative frames the war’s main goal as dismantling Hamas’s structure and targeting its leaders in Gaza, ensuring Gaza no longer poses a threat to Israeli residents, by preventing any threats or rocket launches by Hamas towards Israel.

There are, of course, interim objectives, the most important of which is the liberation of hostages, especially since any delay in their return would be considered a significant failure. Other objectives include establishing a humanitarian truce, allowing aid into the Gaza Strip, and determining who will take responsibility for managing the region. In the face of these interim objectives, there are differences within the government regarding the realistic and actionable definition of these goals. In Israel, there is a recurring conflict between defining the political objective of the war and defining the military objective, and it appears that there are differences between the two levels.

However, what is certain is that politically, Israel aims to adopt a highly ambitious goal to be considered an achievement, regardless of the practical ability to execute such a goal militarily. As for this ambitious objective, some analyses consider it to be the eradication of Hamas, while others see it as the elimination of the Palestinian issue itself and the creation of a new reality in which Israel expands horizontally once again.

The conflict between political and military objectives is not limited to the Israeli government but extends within Israeli society. There are those who want to push this confrontation to its maximum limit and others who believe the hostage issue should be the primary focus around which Israeli positions should unify, considering the war a secondary objective.

Notably, the mission to eliminate Hamas seems impossible; Hamas is not a regular army that Israeli forces can dismantle or target in the military sense. Insisting on its eradication would merely create a stronger resistance and an unprecedented wave of extremism. Hamas is expected to respond to the Israeli incursion with irregular warfare, forcing Israeli forces to penetrate deeper into the Gaza Strip to target them. The result of this war will likely be a new humanitarian catastrophe, with nearly two million civilians in overcrowded shelters, most of them in the south.

In this context, critics from the Western world and Israeli analysts indicate that the anger and revenge driving Israel in its war will not lead to victory. They emphasize the importance of focusing on achievable goals through capable political leadership, which is highly questioned. From a military perspective, military experts believe that conflicting statements about the war's objectives and expected duration reflect a lack of grounding in reality, indicating a flaw and disorder within the Israeli leadership. This confusion suggests that the Israeli army is experiencing a lack of clarity. Israeli military analyst Amos Harel predicted, "The Israeli war on Gaza will end without achieving its objectives, and the defeat of Hamas is not currently possible, amid continued losses for the Israeli army during its ground operation in the Gaza Strip."

# Hamas

## (The Initial Strike and The Tactical Maneuver)

TOKKA ELNAGGAR – MONA QESHTA

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### **Hamas: The Initial Strike and The Tactical Maneuver:**

This section discusses the comprehensive dimensions of the severe security escalation that erupted between Israel and Gaza, describing the unique phenomena of the war concerning Hamas—from the political level to the military-security level, and finally, the scenarios related to Hamas in the upcoming period.

#### **First: The Political Dimension:**

The “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation by Hamas on October 7 was an unprecedented security, military, tactical, and operational surprise against Israel, showcasing new tactics and combat methods that Hamas had not previously performed.

In this context, the features of regional coordination before the war materialized. Over the past two years, there have been ongoing coordinations between Iran and Hamas. For example:

- A meeting between the Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and representatives of Palestinian organizations in Syria in July 2022.
- A meeting between the Iranian Foreign Minister and representatives of

Palestinian factions in Damascus, including a Hamas delegation led by Osama Hamdan, in January 2023.

- A phone conversation between the Iranian Foreign Minister and Hamas Political Bureau Chief Ismail Haniyeh in January 2023.
- A phone conversation between the Senior Advisor of the Iranian Leader for International Affairs Ali Akbar Velayati and Hamas Political Bureau Chief in February 2023.
- A meeting between Quds Force Commander in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Ismail Qaani and Hamas Political Bureau Chief and his deputy Salah Al-Arouri in Damascus on April 8, 2023.
- A phone conversation between the Iranian Foreign Minister and the Hamas leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar and the Hamas Political Bureau Chief on April 28, 2023.
- A visit by a Hamas delegation led by Ismail Haniyeh to Tehran in June 2023. The delegation, which also included Deputy Political Bureau Chief Saleh Al-Arouri and senior Hamas members Khalil Al-Hayya, Mohammad Nasser, and Nizar Awadallah, met with the Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and the Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Akbar Ahmadian, and Revolutionary Guard Commander Hossein Salami on June 19, 2023.
- A meeting between senior Quds Force officials and Hamas on July 25, 2023.
- A phone conversation between Velayati, the advisor of the Iranian leader, and Hamas Political Bureau Chief on August 22, 2023.

In this regard, the factors that drove Iran to support Hamas in its operation against Israel on October 7 are as follows:

### *1. Halting The Saudi-Israeli Normalization:*

Iran recognizes that achieving the Abraham Accords normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel could create two levels of strategic threats to Iran:

- **Firstly:** A disruption in the strategic balance of the Middle East following the signing of a mutual defense agreement between Saudi Arabia and the United States, Saudi Arabia's request for approval of a civilian nuclear project on its soil, and advanced American military equipment. This has already been achieved as Saudi Arabia confirmed it is "freezing" the normalization talks with Israel, which is considered an accomplishment for Iran's goal.
- **Secondly:** Greater strategic integration of Israel in the region at the expense of Iran and its proxies, leading to the potential loss of the Irani-

an deterrence, or at least a considerable loss of its regional influence, in exchange for the spread of Israeli weapons along the Gulf coasts opposite Iran. This explains Iran's focus on downplaying the value of Israeli weapons compared to Hamas' operation.

## *2. Reducing the Security Viability of New Middle East Projects:*

Iran recently faced a series of geostrategic actions led by the United States, Israel, Gulf countries, and neighboring India, aspiring to form economic and security blocs that could encircle Iran in the region, similar to the "India-Middle East-Europe" project announced on the sidelines of the G20 summit. The Al-Aqsa Flood operation sends a message that the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict weakens the security feasibility of any geostrategic project in the region. This motivated Iran to support the operation, which might cause a reconsideration of these projects before confirming their security feasibility or including Iran in them rather than excluding it.

## *3. Achieving Regional Deterrence:*

One factor behind establishing a network of armed militias in the Middle East, associated with Iran, particularly the Revolutionary Guard, is implementing the policy of "encircling Israel" in the region. This creates multiple fronts that constrain the Israeli military behavior, achieving regional deterrence that serves Iranian interests.

Tehran believes that supporting Hamas' operation against Israel might give it a real maneuvering margin against countries in the region and American interests in the Middle East. Iran succeeded in this goal after Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman held their first direct phone call since the signing of the normalization agreement, clearly aiming to halt escalation and expound its risks. Iran also warned Israel against involving other regional parties if the conflict continues.

## *4. Institutional Cohesion within Iran:*

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard tried to maintain its central role in arranging strategic relations in the Middle East, especially after the Iranian president succeeded in reaching a normalization agreement between Riyadh and Tehran with Chinese mediation. However, it soon produced tension with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait over Iran's right to the Durra field in the Arabian Gulf.

The Iranian decision-maker understands that not supporting Hamas' operation might force it to create an internal crisis between security institutions like the Revolutionary Guard and others, creating a negative impression about the institutional cohesion within Iran.

### *5. Promoting the Idea of “Supporting the Proxy”:*

Hamas is considered an important “partner” for Iran in the region, responsible for a robust and significantly important military infrastructure that Iran has benefited from in achieving its encirclement of Israel through what is known as “Unity of the Arenas.” Hamas succeeded in expanding its geographical range in the region by spreading in the West Bank, southern Lebanon, and southern Syria through some resistance factions affiliated with the Qassam Brigades. In this context, the Iranian president stated on October 29 that “it is Iran’s duty to support Hamas and Hezbollah in facing Israel, which has crossed the red lines.”

*Based on the above, the Iranian position’s paths can be estimated as follows:*

Iran sent a message through a back channel to the United Nations, saying it does not aim to escalate the current war between Israel and Hamas, as reported by Axios, but it will be forced to intervene if Israel proceeds with its anticipated ground invasion of Gaza. Iran does not explicitly state that its ‘red line’ is the overthrow of Hamas in Gaza, recognizing that Israel wants to drag Iran into a regional war to justify American military action against it.

Iranian escalation rhetoric points to the growing threat of Tehran’s greater involvement in the conflict, risking its spread to other regional countries and possibly beyond. So far, the war has largely been confined to the theater of conflict between Israel and Gaza, with regional powers and the United States seeking to limit the risk of escalation. This explains the American pressure on Israel not to expand the ground operation, limiting it to a small-scale operation with realistic objectives, indicating the irrationality of Israel’s goal to overthrow Hamas.

If Iran gets involved, it will have multiple means to launch direct and proxy attacks in neighboring countries and cyberspace, threatening to open new fronts in the war and/or disrupt global energy markets.

The most pressing ways for Iran to engage more deeply would be through using its regional proxy groups in neighboring Lebanon or Syria, or further afield in Iraq and Yemen. Besides Iranian forces on the ground in the first two countries at least, Tehran has a network of allied militias in the four countries that it could use to attack Israeli, American, or other Western targets. This could lead to more aggressive rocket or drone attacks.

It might even amount to direct ground incursions from Lebanon or Syria into Israeli-controlled territory in the most pessimistic estimates, forcing the Israeli soldiers to fight on multiple fronts.

In Iraq, Iran could use its militias, which have already vowed to attack American interests locally if Washington provides more support to Israel, to attack American forces or Western oil and gas companies or other foreign business operations.

Meanwhile, in Yemen, where Iranian-backed Houthis have also vowed retaliation if the U.S. intervenes, they could recommence attacks weakening the de facto ceasefire, adjusted to the desired level of escalation.

Given a certain degree of Iranian-Saudi rapprochement, any attacks are more likely if the U.S. becomes more militarily involved in the conflict, as Iran and the Houthis might target Saudi Arabia, such as its oil and gas infrastructure, regional shipping, or perhaps farther afield in the Gulf as a proxy for their pro-Western orientations and the hosting American forces in places like Bahrain.

Based on current indicators, it can be said that the Israeli ground incursion is still “limited” only, accompanied by Western pressure on Israel not to expand the operation, which is likely to include not proposing the idea of overthrowing Hamas unless there is complete Arab and regional will on the viability of the idea to prepare for its negative consequences. Current indicators suggest that, despite many accumulating indicators of regional tensions in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen, they do not yet amount to a regional conflict that could threaten to ignite an open, direct regional war.

Finally, the U.S. military position can be identified as a key indicator for measuring the paths of the Iranian military intervention, meaning Iran’s involvement is limited by the extent of the American military involvement in the region.

## **Second: The Security–Military Dimension:**

The military dimension controls the escalation scene between Israel and Gaza, manifested in several aspects related to Hamas as follows:

### ***1. Training Before the War:***

According to Israeli intelligence estimates, Hamas prepared its plans in October 2022, a year before the operation. Reports indicate that the 9900 unit of Israeli military intelligence had photos displaying Hamas setting up engineering structures resembling the border fence around Gaza and the envelope settlements, training on breaking through and controlling them. Israel likely over-relied on the protection provided by its advanced capabilities and disregarded the possibility of low-tech innovations.

### ***2. New Military Capabilities:***

During the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation, Hamas revealed new qualitative weapons that surprised everyone, even the Israelis themselves. These contained locally made drones and Black Bat gliders that carried Hamas fighters 25 kilometers into Israeli towns. These gliders, equipped with an energy motor and control capabilities, can take off from the ground without the need for an airborne drop, can fly for three hours at an altitude of about 5,000 meters above sea level, and can carry a weight of up to 230 kilograms. The motor provides thrust up to about 56 km per hour.

- Hamas also used incendiary bombs for the first time, destroying Israeli vehicles and tanks, as well as new long-range missiles reaching Tel Aviv, and a locally made air defense system called “Matar 1.”
- Ali Baraka, Head of Hamas National Relations Abroad, later stated, “We have local factories for everything, for missiles ranging 250 km, 160 km, 80 km, and 10 km. We also have factories for mortars and their shells.”
- Hamas fighters used North Korean-made weapons, where one Hamas member appeared to be carrying a North Korean-made rocket, as reported by the military blogging account War Noir on X. The rocket launcher held by one of the fighters was recognized and identified as a North Korean-made F-7 HE-Frag.
- Drones, whether for bombing or suicide missions, were among the surprises Hamas showed in this confrontation. The group posted a video of an attack on Israeli soldiers with a bomb released by a locally made drone,

and another video of a drone targeting machine gun towers at an Israeli site along the border.

- Missiles represent Hamas' striking force in this war, and it managed to use developed types, including the "Ayash 250," which hit long-range targets and reached Tel Aviv, alongside other locally developed systems that disrupted the Israeli defense systems.
- Hamas is currently working on a development program for jamming and sensing systems, and reaching electronic warfare systems would pose a "direct threat to Israel and its ability to detect, deceive, and even strike radars."

### ***3. Tunnel Network:***

Throughout its rule of the Gaza Strip since 2007, Hamas has managed to build a vast network of tunnels known as the "Gaza Metro." In reality, it is another underground city designed to increase Hamas' tactical military capability. These tunnels are divided into three types:

1. **Offensive Tunnels:** Designed for rapid offensive operations against invading forces, used for kidnapping or assassination.

2. **Defensive (Tactical) Tunnels:** Designed for escape to deceive the enemy, containing planning rooms and shelters for holding hostages.

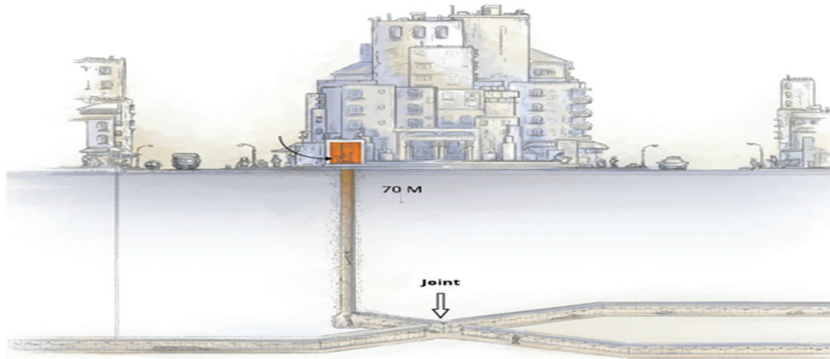
3. **Logistic Tunnels:** Used for storing goods, weapons, and ammunition, and also containing ventilation rooms.

#### **Some estimates suggest the tunnel network has special characteristics:**

1. **It stretches over 500 kilometers**, mostly concentrated in northern Gaza, with some of the underground network in the Rafah area.

2. **The deepest point is 70 meters deep**, surpassing the heaviest strategic bomb used by Israel, as Israeli bombs do not reach more than 30 meters underground.

3. **There are 300 junction points**, meaning the tunnels do not connect on a single path but branch out 300 times underground from north to south and east to west.



Israel needed two weeks to try to uncover the tunnel network through ground surveys on foot, but specialized Israeli forces in urban warfare and tunnel detection, as well as American Delta Force troops, did not succeed. Even if an entrance or exit of a tunnel was discovered, Hamas would immediately detonate it, causing injuries among the Israeli forces. Therefore, Israel used a scorched earth policy, deploying the heaviest missiles and strategic bombs to create intense ground shakes, causing the tunnel to collapse due to the pressure exerted by the earth's layers from the impact of a 3000 kg bomb.

Tunnels are the main strategic weapon Hamas uses to resist the Israeli ground invading forces, explaining why Hamas elements succeeded in targeting Israeli armored vehicles from point-blank range. However, the movement uses the tunnels cautiously to prevent the openings from being discovered and subsequently bombed by Israel. Therefore, Hamas set up ambushes in residential buildings used as shelters and gathering points for Israeli soldiers and officers during resistance and engagement operations.

Hamas uses hostages as shields to prevent Israel from targeting the tunnels, which it hinted at through statements saying hostages are dying in the tunnels due to the Israeli airstrikes.

### **Third: The Future of Hamas:**

There remains a state of ambiguity surrounding the perceptions regarding the future of Hamas itself, especially given the current difficulty of foresight during

the escalating events, multiple actors, and complex maneuvers. However, the future of Hamas remains a crucial focal point and a key factor in deciphering this highly complex scene.

It cannot be overlooked that the insult and defeat Israel suffered on October 7 and 8, 2023, will drive a complete ground invasion of Gaza to crush Hamas. However, several questions arise in this context: Are these objectives realistic? How can the Occupation army achieve them? And is Israel prepared to deal with the post-Hamas phase?

Regarding the first two questions, it can be said that eliminating Hamas is not easy; rather, it will be an extremely complex task due to several factors. The first is the difficulty of combat inside Gaza with its population density of about 2.3 million people. The second is the existence of over 200 hostages held by Hamas. The third is the existence of a network of tunnels that the Israeli occupation forces would need to penetrate deeply into Gaza to destroy. The fourth is the ability of Hamas leaders to hide, with some located outside Palestine.

Historical experience in this regard is notable, where the Occupation army attempted ground operations in Gaza but failed to achieve their objectives, such as Operation Cast Lead (2008–2009), aimed at stopping rocket attacks from Gaza. However, Hamas was able to resume these attacks in the long term. Similarly, after Operation Protective Edge (2014), Israel announced it had weakened Hamas, but this proved false over time.

As for the third question, Israel has not developed a plan for Gaza's future if it succeeds in eliminating Hamas. Israeli officials' statements themselves indicate they do not have a clear vision for Gaza's future in the post-Hamas phase. Thus, overthrowing Hamas could likely lead to a power vacuum in Gaza, resulting in massive chaos and instability, as eliminating Hamas does not automatically mean eradicating other resistance factions that may continue escalating against the occupation.

Given this issue, a scenario unfavorable to Israel emerges: taking direct control of Gaza. This scenario is not new, as Israel controlled Gaza from 1967 until 2005, withdrawing due to the intense security threats from Palestinian resistance factions. Returning to control Gaza again would likely improve the Palestinian resistance and increase internal Israeli divisions due to the high costs Israel would likely tolerate in managing Gaza.

In this context, a 2017 study by the Rand Corporation, titled “Lessons from Israel’s Wars in Gaza,” examined the conflict between Israel and Hamas from the end of Operation Cast Lead in 2009 to the end of Operation Protective Edge in 2014. The study implied that Israel has the military capability to eliminate Hamas, but doing so could be more dangerous than not, as it could lead to a more extreme group taking power or end with Israel having to govern Gaza itself.

Some current trends argue that among the options the United States and Israel are considering for managing Gaza in the post-Hamas phase is the possibility of establishing a multinational force that might include American troops. Additionally, there are increasing notions about placing Gaza under temporary United Nations supervision. However, these options’ chances of realization seem weak, especially with key and influential parties, such as Egypt, preferring that Gaza’s future be in Palestinian hands through supporting the Palestinian National Authority.

Based on the above, several key scenarios regarding Hamas’ future can be sketched out as follows:

**1. Scenario One:** A comprehensive Israeli ground operation successfully achieves its objectives and destroys Hamas. However, the probability of this scenario remains questionable given the limitations previously outlined.

**2. Scenario Two:** The ground operation fails to achieve its objectives, unable to eliminate Hamas due to the difficulty of long-term ground engagement in Gaza, and historical precedents suggest this.

**3. Scenario Three:** Adopting a strategy of special operations, where the Israeli occupation army enters Gaza with limited ground forces without full-scale engagement, allowing Israel to promote this operation as a major success, restoring its ‘dignity’ and inflicting substantial losses on Hamas.

Regardless of the scenario, several determinants can tilt the balance, including Hamas’ ability to endure, the extent of American support for Israel, the progress in hostage release negotiations, and international pressure for a ceasefire. Despite the countless scenarios and intertwined determinants, amidst the current uncertainty, all possibilities remain on the table.

## Section Three

# The Internal Israeli Calculations Before and During the War

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In the context of our following of the Gaza war, few of us pay attention to the ongoing debate within Israel, even though this debate may provide us with indicators that help answer several important questions, such as: When will the war end? What goals is Israel seeking to achieve? What does victory mean? What is the future of Gaza and Israel as well?

Initially, before delving into the debate, it can be said that there is an Israeli consensus that the October 7, 2023 attack shook the Israelis' belief that they live in a secure state. Some even speak of a "doomsday scenario," which is the possibility of opening three fronts in Gaza, the West Bank, and southern Lebanon, therefore posing a threat to the very existence of the State of Israel. There is also a feeling among the Jews abroad that Israel is no longer the place they can go to in case they face danger in their current locations because Israel itself is no longer safe.

Restoring a sense of security is the main goal the Israeli leadership is striving to achieve in the Gaza war now. Some describe the current war as not necessarily a war against Hamas but a war against October 7 and the deep shock it triggered in Israeli society.

However, a debate has begun to arise in Israel about the meaning of victory and when the mission can be declared complete. Here, there are no definitive

answers. With the growing belief in the difficulty of completely destroying Hamas, the goal has now become the destruction of Hamas's infrastructure, both civilian and military, as seen in northern Gaza, which could extend to the center and south. It is believed that scenes of destruction may give Israelis a sense of victory, and there is also talk of killing or capturing senior Hamas military leaders as an indicator of victory.

In any case, it is clear that the war continues and may last longer, even if there is a humanitarian truce or a temporary ceasefire aimed at exchanging prisoners. But battles will continue again. This justifies the talk of creating a safe zone in southern Gaza, in the Mawasi area, for Gaza residents, including those living in the center and south, where humanitarian aid is provided under UN supervision. All these indicators point to Israel's intention to continue ground military operations.

The bigger Israeli debate, which grows every day, revolves around Israel's future post-war. While the extreme Israeli right is currently promoting the idea that all Palestinians are Hamas, and calls for reoccupying Gaza and establishing settlements there, the prevailing trend is to direct criticism at the right, including Netanyahu's government, holding it responsible for what happened on October 7. The argument is rooted from the fact the government spent billions on building a land, sea, and air barrier with Gaza, but it failed in its mission. Additionally, the Israeli forces were preoccupied with protecting extremist settlers in the West Bank, leaving Gaza border residents unprotected.

The main dimensions of internal Israeli society and politics, representing the most significant aspects of Israel's impact from the Gaza war, are outlined as follows:

## **Israeli Society Before and After the War:**

Although Israeli society is now united behind the political and military leadership during the war, as expected when there is a significant security threat like October 7, this does not mean that this was the ongoing state before that. Israel was facing a complicated internal crisis, which broke out in full force when the Israeli government coalition launched its judicial reforms on January 4, 2023, just days after it was sworn in. This crisis has many dimensions and repercussions, as it is linked to a mix of economic, social, and political factors.

This crisis exposed the truth that Israel is a non-homogeneous and divided state, characterized by deep divisions fueled by its diverse population's composition. The result is a multicultural society in which the existing commonalities have not succeeded in achieving full integration or harmony but have created an "artificial" cohesion to establish a unique, unified Jewish society in Israel.

This crisis crystallized with the proposal presented by the ruling coalition, which includes far-right and ultra-Orthodox religious parties, in January 2023 for judicial reforms. This led to a division among Israelis and sparked one of the largest protest movements in Israel's history. The crisis escalated as the Israeli government faced it, with conflicting opinions within the ruling coalition on how to contain these widespread protests. This situation resulted in a significant crisis of trust between the ruling coalition and citizens that was not easily overcome, as well as a division of opinion within the military establishment.

The Israeli economy was not immune to the internal crisis's repercussions. The uncertainty associated with judicial reforms damaged the economy, causing the Israeli shekel to drop to 3.67 against the dollar, its lowest level in four years. The Tel Aviv Stock Exchange also fell, experiencing a 5.7% drop in the month following the protests' outbreak. Israel's credit rating dropped, impacting the market stability and investment flow into the country.

In brief, the scene inside Israel before the Gaza war was tense, as the severe popular protest crisis aggravated deep divisions between the right-wing nationalist and religious sector on one side and the liberal and secular public on the other. The prolonged political crisis also posed a serious challenge to Israel's political leadership. Political circumstances increased the power of small extremist parties, which in turn raised their expectations for clear, quick, and sustainable achievements, further weakening mutual trust between competing camps and parties, limiting political leaders' maneuvering space, and contributing to the leadership crisis. Extreme organizations also appeared in Israel's political scene, supported by right-wing government supporters like "La Familia" and "Lehava".

The heart of Israel's internal crisis before the Gaza war was primarily a deep identity crisis. Outwardly, it appeared to be a power and influence struggle within Israeli society, while in reality, it was a fierce conflict between the new elite, leaning towards the far-right or extremist right, and the old elite, leaning towards the center-left. Therefore, after the war began, voices emerged calling for a change in Israel's ruling structure, away from the far-right and

towards centrist political forces. Leftist voices and peace groups began to offer themselves as alternatives, despite the continued dominance of the far-right in Israeli public sentiment.

Specialized studies in “Israeli sociology” indicate that the Israeli society has changed more in the past thirty years than it did between 1948 and the early 1990s. This view was adopted by Israeli academics like Itamar Rabinovich and Mordechai Kremnitzer, as well as foreign academics like Pierre Villanova, who discussed this in his 2009 study titled “Political and Social Restructuring in Israel and Palestine.”

This division was clearly reflected in the parliamentary elections held after Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination, described by some as a turning point in Israeli politics, leading to weak coalition governments that struggled to complete a full four-year term. The right-wing dominated Israeli party politics, with the Israeli public becoming more assertive on security issues, especially the conflict with the Palestinians. This hardening intensified after the Al-Aqsa Intifada and successive military operations against Gaza, climaxing in the war that began on October 7, 2023.

With the right-wing’s control of the government, disagreements over state and societal issues surfaced, reflecting the disagreements among political parties. This division peaked between 2019 and 2022, demonstrated by five parliamentary elections, a first in Israeli history. Finally, Netanyahu’s latest government, formed in December 2022, was classified as the most right-wing in Israel’s history.

## **The War and Israeli Society:**

Some analyses suggest that the impact of the Gaza war on Israeli society is linked to the shock experienced by the society and the real, rather than fake, sense of insecurity. Therefore, security issues are expected to dominate political life and Knesset elections for the next decade. This opens the door to more right-wing policies and personalities that can convince the Israeli public they can manage the country’s security equation. This could explain the resignation of Yisrael Avishar, head of the firearms licensing department at Israel’s Ministry of National Security, on December 4, 2023, in protest against the ministry’s policy of arming settlers, which he believed would lead to chaos and crime. This sentiment was confirmed by an Israeli Democracy Institute poll conducted days

after the war began and published on October 31, 2023, which showed that 52.4% of Israelis were “pessimistic” about Israel’s future security, compared to 41.1% who were “optimistic.”

In essence, the Israeli society is “extremely angry” and does not feel that the moral burden falls on Israel in its wars against Gaza. It equates Hamas with the entire Gaza Strip, and from the beginning, Israelis supported a complete war on the Strip, with Israeli military actions there enjoying public support, viewing it as a “Just war.”

However, as the war drags on without clear prospects, internal divisions in Israel have materialized over who is responsible for the failures, after the Al-Aqsa Flood operation revealed the glaring failure of Israel’s military, security, and intelligence systems. This failure included the inability to predict or gather information about the operation, despite Gaza being under strict Israeli surveillance using various human and electronic means. The fragility of the security barrier built around Gaza, which Israel claimed no Palestinian fighter could breach, was also exposed. Contrary to the Israeli claims, Hamas fighters managed to breach it and cross into more than 20 sites.

Some experts believe that the division that prevailed in Israeli society before the war, which receded somewhat in the first two months of the conflict, is slowly reemerging. As the Palestinian resistance in Gaza holds out and the war prolongs, distrust in Netanyahu’s government and its handling of the hostages and its goal of eliminating Hamas grows. There is a growing belief that the goal is unrealistic, especially given the war’s economic consequences. Some studies indicate that current discussions in Israel are increasingly questioning the war’s goals in Gaza and their viability, suggesting that the problem in Israel is that the military is more hardline than the politicians, and the ongoing debate may resolve this hardline stance. Some estimates suggest that the Israeli society is undergoing a transformation, although it has not yet reached a decisive pressure point, but the level of this transformation should not be underestimated.

## **Impact of the Gaza War on Israeli Political Forces:**

After the war broke out and Hamas successfully achieving the element of surprise on the Israeli army, according to Israeli newspaper polls on October 8, 2023, 85% of Israelis blamed Netanyahu himself for the military and security failure. His popularity, even in the most optimistic estimates, dropped from 67%

before the war to 28% after it started, creating unprecedented pressure on the Prime Minister and the entire right-wing government. This situation led to numerous new phenomena, such as:

### *1. Changing the War Management Structure:*

Traditionally, crisis and emergency management in Israel were referred to the security cabinet, known as the “cabinet.” However, after the Prime Minister declared a state of war in Israel, he began holding talks with opposition leaders Benny Gantz (head of the National Unity Party) and Yair Lapid (head of the Yesh Atid Party) to form an emergency government responsible for management of the war. Only Benny Gantz agreed to join the war management government, which was formed as follows: the Prime Minister along with the “Special Forum for Crisis and Disaster Management,” which includes the Chief of Staff, the Minister of Defense, Mossad, Shin Bet, and other agencies, in addition to “observers” like Benny Gantz, Gadi Eizenkot, and the Minister of Strategic Affairs, Ron Dermer.

**The reasons for this decision (to change the war management structure) include:**

- The dominance of extremist political leaders in the security cabinet, which in turn creates a significant burden on military decision-making in Israel and weakens military coordination with the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM).
- The lack of military experience among the coalition leaders, like Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, which could lead to serious errors impacting Israel’s security.
- Distributing the responsibility for potential failure or mistakes in the war across different political factions, not just the right-wing, to avoid the risk of its collapse after the war.
- Mending the civil-military relations rift, as Netanyahu realized that the phenomenon of reserve soldiers and several officers rebelling in the Israeli army was due to his extreme right-wing policies. Therefore, he involved Benny Gantz and former chiefs of staff in decision-making, who comprehend how to deal with the Israeli army at the individual level.
- Involving other officials like the Minister of Strategic Affairs, Ron Dermer, and the National Security Council head, Tzachi Hanegbi, in managing

communication and coordination with the U.S. and Western countries, away from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose head (Eli Cohen) lacks adequate experience.

- Preparing some Israeli agencies and institutions for the “day after” scenario in Gaza. For example, Netanyahu is preparing “Shin Bet” to manage the security situation in northern Gaza after the fighting ends.

Differences emerged between the political and military leaderships in Israel regarding the nature and scale of the war in Gaza and the combat tactics used. Various statements from Israeli officials have shown clear competition between military leaders, especially the Minister of Defense and the political leadership represented by the Prime Minister, as the war drags on.

## *2. Prioritizing Partisan and Personal Interests over Political and Military Considerations:*

The insistence of Netanyahu’s government to continue the war is due to personal interests for himself and the members of the emergency government managing the current war phase. They are accountable to the Israeli electorate, who aim to eliminate Hamas but not at the current human, economic, and political costs. Therefore, the government seeks to achieve some success to justify these losses and the moral defeat that Israel has suffered, at least the collapse of Israel’s security doctrine. In this context, Israeli writer Yossi Klein stated that “Netanyahu is looking for a victory that will pardon him for his failure in the October 7 blow,” considering that the victory Netanyahu seeks is not what Israel is looking for. Similarly, writer Yossi Verter highlighted that Netanyahu is fighting “his own war to save his reputation and stay in power.” An Israeli Democracy Institute poll in late October 2023 indicated that 50% of the Israeli public have confidence in other military and security leaders more than Netanyahu in managing this war, compared to only 7.3% who gave their trust to Netanyahu.

Bezalel Smotrich, as an ideological settlement minister, aims to exploit the war’s circumstances to advance his “ethnic cleansing” project for Area C from Palestinians and to implement the plan to expand the existing settlements while legalizing all settlement outposts. Smotrich represents a large faction with a strong and steadily growing electoral base, working continuously for their benefit according to an extremist and racist methodology mixed with religious

myths. He uses tools like settlement councils, most notably Shlomo Neeman, head of the Settlement Council (Yesha), and Yossi Dagan, head of the Northern West Bank Settlement Council, to proceed with legalizing the occupation of more than 150 settlement outposts at once.

### *3. Defining the Future Political Map After Netanyahu:*

The Gaza war may have ended the popular protests in Israel, but it did not end the public anger directed at Netanyahu. There is wide agreement among many factions and currents within Israeli society on Netanyahu's responsibility, and his policies over the past 14 years, for the current war's failure. While the hardliners' public supports continuing the Gaza war at any cost to eliminate Hamas, leftist factions and some moderate right-wing factions may not oppose the war's logic itself, but they oppose Netanyahu leading this war, driven by his political agenda rather than "Israel's security agenda."

Some estimates suggest that the current Gaza war may write the final chapter of Netanyahu's political career. Therefore, the main question now revolves around the post-Netanyahu phase: who will succeed him? Which faction can take the lead? In this regard, surveys by Maariv and Israeli Channel 12 conducted in late November 2023 indicate that Benny Gantz, head of the National Unity Party and former Defense Minister, is the most likely to become the next Prime Minister, with his party expected to win between 36 and 42 seats, about two-fold the expected seats for Likud. Generally, the public has greater confidence in military and security figures during security crises. Hence, many experts predict that Gantz is the most probable to form a national government, given his military and political experience and his connections with Western military circles (European and American). It is not unlikely that he could be Israel's next Prime Minister, provided that several key conditions are met: the return of Naftali Bennett to politics, a primary election in Likud won by Yisrael Katz instead of Netanyahu, and Yair Lapid agreeing to be an alternate Prime Minister after Gantz. Additionally, strengthening the Palestinian Authority financially and politically in the West Bank and Gaza, and organizing the civil-military relations and integrating the Haredim in a consensual manner that satisfies all parties.

Although some secular and leftist factions expressed different views from the dominant right-wing, arguing that eliminating Hamas, even if achieved, will not bring the conflict with the Palestinians to an end, it is necessary to address the roots of this conflict and restore the two-state solution to reality, as the military

alternative will be costly. However, it is clear that the right-wing bloc seeks to rid itself of Netanyahu, who lost most of his popularity before the war and almost all of it afterward. Despite Netanyahu's attempts to use religion to rally internal political support for himself and restore his increasingly diminishing popularity, he also appeals to the Haredim to push them to conscription and agree to mandatory military service to participate in the war against Hamas, especially using the prophecy of Israel's disappearance in its eighth decade as leverage.

Right-wing coalition members are seeking a place in the new government that will be formed after the Gaza war ends. Current predictions indicate the coalition government's end is near, with its full responsibility for what happened on October 7 in light of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation. This is evident in Ben Gvir's criticism of the Prime Minister and his policies and his criticism of the war cabinet, reflecting his desire to remain in the new government. He has sought for years to join the government, and it is clear he is trying to sway like-minded government members such as Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich. Netanyahu's battle may strengthen the influence of far-right parties, making these parties stronger if Netanyahu falls.

#### *4. The Far-Right Israeli Ambitions in the Gaza War:*

From the beginning of the Gaza war, the policies of far-right parties, which are the current coalition government's policies led by the Religious Zionism Party and the Otzma Yehudit Party, have been well-defined. These policies revolve around calls to continue the Gaza war and take extreme measures, such as supporting strikes on Palestinian hospitals and schools, intensifying the arrests of Palestinians in the West Bank, arming settlers, insisting on passing the Palestinian prisoners' death penalty law, and enacting discriminatory laws against Arab citizens holding Israeli citizenship.

The formation of the war cabinet and the exclusion of the most far-right ministers from it, after Yair Lapid refused to join due to the presence of extremist ministers, and the acceptance of former Defense Minister and National Unity Party leader Benny Gantz on the condition of forming a miniature war council without these ministers, incited these ministers, particularly National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir of Otzma Yehudit and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich of Religious Zionism, to take an opposite course to the war cabinet's policy and prepare for the post-Al-Aqsa Flood political scene.

These far-right ministers in the Israeli government responded to their exclusion from the miniature war cabinet by implementing a series of policies and actions, which embarrassed Netanyahu's government internally and internationally. For instance, scenes of Ben-Gvir supervising over the distribution of weapons to settlers contributed to a relative complication in Israel's negotiations to purchase new American M-16 rifles. Washington only approved the deal after ensuring they would not go to settlers, according to American and Israeli sources. This is an unprecedented situation, reflecting the impact of Ben-Gvir's policy, especially since it escalated settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank significantly and met multiple international criticisms.

Despite the exclusion of far-right ministers from the miniature war cabinet, they remain in their positions within the expanded emergency government, whether it is Ben-Gvir as Minister of National Security or Smotrich as Finance Minister and a minister in the Ministry of Defense, responsible for the Civil Administration in the West Bank and managing settlement affairs. These ministers have used their powers, even if limited during wartime, to achieve their goals related to the future political scene post-war.

**Key policies adopted by far-right government members in Israel include:**

▪ *Arming Settlers:*

After the Al-Aqsa Flood operation on October 7, 2023, the Israeli security and defense ministries raced to facilitate the arming thousands of settlers and training them to obtain combat licenses. National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir directed this plan, known as the "Empowering Civil Security Units." Such a plan had been implemented in previous years without an official announcement or government decision, where the policy was limited and constrained by many conditions.

In late October 2023, the Knesset's National Security Committee, led by a member of the far-right Otzma Yehudit party, approved amendments to firearm licensing regulations, making the conditions for obtaining a weapon license more lenient. Despite the Justice Ministry, headed by the Likud member, Yariv Levin, stating that these leniencies were temporary for one year due to the current emergency, the committee chose to make the orders permanent. The

new firearm licensing regulations specify that men aged 21 and above who served in combat positions for one year or completed two years of general military service, and women who completed one year of national civil service, are eligible to carry weapons. Remarkably, during this year, the National Security Ministry issued firearm permits to nearly 25,000 Israeli civilians. Since October 7, Israel granted approximately 40,000 firearm licenses and intends to increase this number to 400,000 armed settlers in the West Bank alone. The National Security Ministry issues 1,700 firearm possession permits daily in light of the war on Gaza.

▪ ***Proposing the “Palestinian Prisoners’ Death Penalty” Bill in the Knesset:***

Since 2015, the idea of a Palestinian prisoners’ death penalty bill has been proposed several times in the Knesset but often faced rejection from leftist and conservative parties. However, rejection did not discourage right-wing parties from attempting to reintroduce the idea. Previously, the bill was proposed by the far-right Israel Beitenu party, supported by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and a Likud member in 2018.

Since March 2023, the far-right Otzma Yehudit party has adopted calls to approve the “Palestinian Prisoners’ Death Penalty” bill. These calls led to the Knesset’s preliminary approval of the bill, to be passed through subsequent stages for the final approval, requiring three readings plus the preliminary reading.

After the October 7 events, far-right party members renewed calls to pass the bill’s first reading. On November 20, the Knesset’s National Security Committee, chaired by far-right extremist Tsvi Fogel and a member of Otzma Yehudit, discussed the bill under the name “Execution of Palestinian Terrorists.” However, the bill faced criticism from relatives of Israeli prisoners and coalition government members, especially Likud members, leading to the postponing of the final discussion session in the Knesset due to concerns about harming hostages in Gaza and other security reasons, pending a new notice from the Israeli miniature cabinet.

▪ ***Opposing Gaza Truce and Prisoner Exchange Deal with Hamas:***

Most coalition government members and emergency government members agreed to the truce decision and prisoner exchange deal, along with all

security agencies, including the Israeli army, Shin Bet, and Mossad. Only three ministers from the far-right Otzma Yehudit party voted against the deal, while the Religious Zionism party voted in favor despite initially announcing its intention to vote against it, and the Shas party also voted in favor. Minister Ben-Gvir criticized the agreement for not including the release of all women and children held in Gaza and urged intensified military operations against Hamas to pressure the movement into agreeing to a comprehensive hostage deal.

Later, after the truce was extended by two days, Ben-Gvir threatened to dissolve the Israeli government if a permanent ceasefire in Gaza was reached. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich of the Religious Zionism party also submitted an objection paper, stating that a ceasefire in exchange for the release of all detainees in Gaza is effectively a “plan to destroy Israel” by Hamas and its partners.

▪ *Far-Right Mechanisms for Influencing Future Internal Israeli Politics:*

Besides the aforementioned actions, the ideology of the far-right parties in Israel (Religious Zionism and Otzma Yehudit) is based around eliminating Arabs, as Ben-Gvir previously declared “death to all Arabs,” and establishing a unified Jewish state without Arabs. They oppose the two-state solution, which Netanyahu outwardly supports. In early 2023, Netanyahu stated, “We are open to establishing a Palestinian state as long as it lacks military or security power,” suggesting a lack of sovereignty for the proposed Palestinian state. Analysts also indicate that Netanyahu was never a strong supporter of this solution.

The far-right bloc seeks to capitalize on the October 7 attack to rally Israelis around the far-right vision that cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians will not achieve peace for Israelis. They advocate for peace based on strength and the fear of retaliation by the other side for attacks on Israel, claiming that there are no peaceful Palestinian civilians, only aggressive ones who should be met with aggression. This aggression will incite violent Palestinian reactions, which these parties use to promote the idea that Palestinian “terrorism” in the West Bank is no different from that in Gaza, serving the strategy of clearing West Bank cities and expanding settlements. In other words, eliminating Palestinians is the path to security and peace, even the ones holding the Israeli citizenship.

Predicting the future of far-right parties in Israel after the Al-Aqsa Flood operation and the exclusion of their leaders from the miniature war cabinet managing the Gaza war is challenging. However, it can be said that these parties currently bet on several factors to secure their political future in Israel. The main factor is the Israeli public's tendency towards the far-right ideologically in terms of the conflict following significant security events like the Al-Aqsa Intifada or perhaps the Al-Aqsa Flood operation. These parties aim to transform this short-term direction into a long-term affiliation, particularly between settlers who are most likely to vote for far-right parties traditionally in recent elections.

Consequently, it is not far-fetched that ultra-Orthodox right-wing parties, such as the Religious Zionism party led by Bezalel Smotrich and the Otzma Yehudit party led by Itamar Ben-Gvir, will expand their electoral base, convincing large segments of society of their security vision towards Gaza and Hamas, and the overall handling of the Palestinian issue. Seats may shift in the next five years, with Smotrich or Ben-Gvir potentially forming a more extreme right-wing government than the current one. However, some opinion polls indicate a general decline in the ruling coalition's popularity, suggesting that these parties, despite their actions to obstruct the government and serve their political goals, may find it difficult to escape responsibility for the October 7 failure, and thus may not be represented in the post-war government. Nevertheless, their policies and orientations will likely continue to influence, especially regarding settlement expansions.

### *5. Exploiting the War to Implement Previous Plans:*

With the prolonged war and Israel's refusal to cease fire, various theories have emerged. Some suggest that the Israeli government aims to reach a milestone to avoid accountability to voters in the next parliamentary elections. Others believe that extremist right-wing politicians seek to enforce a new reality on Palestinians in the West Bank, as in Gaza. This theory can be explained as follows:

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich exploits the ongoing war on Gaza to call on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, not only to prevent Palestinians in the West Bank from performing their normal activities, particularly olive harvesting, the main activity for most residents at this time of year, but also to reinforce existing restrictions with government decisions. In a letter to the Prime Minister and Defense Minister, Smotrich

called for establishing “purified” (completely Palestinian-free) security zones around settlements and access roads. This aims to prevent Palestinian citizens from entering these areas, even to access their olive fields, accusing the Israeli Central Command of “leniency” in allowing farmers to harvest their olive fields.

Smotrich’s letter is filled with extremism and “one-upmanship” on Israeli army measures. As a settlement minister in the most right-wing and extremist Israeli government, he describes the army’s extremely limited allowance for Palestinian farmers as madness and unacceptable leniency. He continuously promotes the idea that there are lessons to be learned from the “Joy of the Torah” events, referring to the October 7 attack on Gaza’s envelope.

Aside from his letter to the government, Smotrich urged the miniature cabinet last week to discuss the Israeli army’s preparations in the West Bank in detail for the scenario of a “reverse situation” by the Palestinian Authority. The government feels significant embarrassment before the U.S. administration regarding controlling settler practices against West Bank Palestinians to avert the escalation of chaos and the transfer of Gaza events to West Bank cities.

Netanyahu has not responded to Smotrich’s request to include his letter on the urgent government agenda and tries to ignore his demand for the political and security mini-cabinet. He knows, as does the defense minister, that the current practice on the ground categorizes the areas forming 160 settlements and almost twice as many settlement outposts as “security zones” that Palestinians are forbidden from approaching during the war. Therefore, Smotrich’s letter and demands aim to formalize and secure what already exists with a government decision. If issued, this decision will find its way to the Knesset to become an Israeli state law, which means pouring more fuel on the fire and inevitably sparking direct conflict in the remaining West Bank cities and villages.

Smotrich and his faction see the war as an opportunity to bypass the government’s sluggishness in implementing this pre-agreed plan when forming the government and their approval to join the coalition with Likud’s leader, granting him the Prime Minister’s position. This was one of their main conditions. Therefore, there was no alternative to insisting on Smotrich holding the settlement minister position to continue attacking the government throughout his term, accusing it of “installment” and maintaining arrangements allowing Palestinians access to their fields. There have been complex administrative and security procedures during successive Israeli governments regarding Palestinian

lands, whether behind the separation wall or, more importantly, around more than 120 settlements in the West Bank. Access to these areas required prior coordination with Israeli authorities, usually taking three to five days at best during agricultural seasons or harvesting.

The far-right's aim within the Israeli public is to accelerate the theft and annexation of as much Palestinian land as possible under any security pretext and secure the annexation with government decisions, making its recovery impossible. The powerful network managing all state affairs, including the government, comprises influential ministers and strong Knesset members capable of implementing many details of this plan, most notably Itamar Ben-Gvir, Smotrich, Simcha Rotman, Orit Strock, Avi Maoz, Zvi Suktot, Limor Son Har-Melech, Tali Gottlieb, Shlomo Neeman, Yossi Dagan, and Bentzi Gopstein.

These well-organized and precise network members are closely connected and share admiration and reverence for figures like Rabbi Meir Kahane and extremist Baruch Goldstein. This network pushes its members to take positions enabling them to implement the necessary steps for the right-wing plan. A prominent example during the early weeks of the ongoing war was the appointment of Israeli Knesset member Zvi Suktot as chairman of the Subcommittee on Judea and Samaria Affairs, overseeing settlement affairs in the West Bank. This committee is one of the main subcommittees of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. Suktot, a prominent member of the network and a leader in the Religious Zionism party led by Smotrich, is responsible for overseeing all government activities related to security issues in the West Bank, not only concerning Palestinian lands but all activities of the Israeli army related to settlers as well.

## ***6. Reorganizing Civil-Military Relations:***

The Israeli army faces a significant public trust crisis among Israelis due to the strategic failure of the October 7, 2023, war. Israelis are beginning to question the readiness of the Israeli army and the effectiveness of the military technology relied upon to protect Israel's national security. Negative phenomena in civil-military relations include the "brain drain", where Artificial Intelligence engineers prefer to emigrate to Europe and the U.S. over working in Israel or for the Israeli army, which does not offer the minimum salaries provided in the private sector (120,000 shekels monthly in the army compared to 300,000 in the private sector). Civil-military relations also include the level of government

intervention in the Israeli army's work, organizing its allocations, and increasing them for development. It is also noted that the Israeli army could not provide the necessary financial allocations to organize military training for reserve forces under the five-year "Momentum" plan, which began in 2021 and ends in 2026. Netanyahu's policies focused military effort and training on confronting Iran at the expense of the southern front in Gaza.

Integrating the Haredim in Israel is another aspect of these relations, as there appears to be a deep political flaw in the government's inability to persuade the Haredim to work, particularly in the private sector in AI and high-tech. This sector in Israel faces a major challenge due to a decreasing workforce and educational challenges, as Haredim education and other societal sectors lack the necessary education for Artificial Intelligence and high-tech. The Haredim also refuse mandatory military service, threatening the concept of the "people's army," which no longer includes all Israeli society sectors.

In summary, the situation inside Israel was already tense before the Gaza war, and the war is causing even more severe changes at all societal, political, military, and economic levels. This section covered the societal and political levels, with the other two sections to be addressed separately in this book. It is clear that it is difficult for Israeli political society to return to the Likud-dominated coalition of nationalist and religious right, as indicators point to the continued dominance of the religious right with the growing influence of the centrist secular trend, though this growth is not comparable to the sustained popularity of the right. Therefore, it is expected that Israeli public opinion will remain hardline, seeking to regain a sense of security and strength after being shaken by the war.

## Section Four

# Analysis of The Israeli Military Performance

MAJOR GENERAL OSAMA IBRAHIM - MAJOR GENERAL EMAD ABDEL MOHSEN  
MAJOR GENERAL MAGDY HEGAZY - DR. RAGHDA ELBAHY - MINA ADEL - MOHAMMED MANSOUR

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Israel's concept of "national security" is based on Zionist principles such as "to be or not to be," considering itself in "permanent threat" from Arab countries. The issue of "security" is the key driver for all political frontiers and methodologies of governments and security and military leaderships. Israel's security theories are built on demographic, economic, and geopolitical factors.

Israel presents its security theories on the basis that there is continuous development based on the military and security leadership's awareness, acknowledging the difficulty of maintaining static theories, especially given the Zionist ideological concepts centered around expansion and control. Despite this, Israeli security theories subjected to political and security analysis and evaluation suffer from numerous gaps in their strategies, tactics, and development plans in all military fields. This became evident in the October 1973 War, Israel's failure to eliminate Palestinian and Lebanese resistance organizations, and more recently, the confusion in Israeli military performance during the surprise attack Hamas carried out in the Al-Aqsa Flood operation.

Tzvi Tzur, the Israeli Chief of Staff in the 1960s, stated, "The defensive situation of the State of Israel differs from that of most nations. The continuous military threat since Israel's establishment by Arab countries poses a fundamen-

tal existential problem, necessitating a military force strong enough to face and counter this threat. No country in the world considers the issue of national security as vital to its existence as Israel, where national security is a matter of life or death for its citizens, and there is no place in the world where John F. Kennedy's statement, "In the field of national security, a single mistake can be fatal," applies more fittingly than to Israel."

To clarify and explain the Israeli military performance since October 7, 2023, it is important to outline the Israeli military objectives, show how military operations developed, and evaluate the performance of the main Israeli branches involved in military operations.

## **First: Military Objectives and Development of Military Operations:**

The main motives for the recent military operations between Israelis and Palestinians are diverse, but revenge is believed to be the primary driver. Without a doubt, the October 7, 2023 attack, the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation, was one of Israel's greatest failures since the October 6, 1973 War. The reasons for Hamas's attack, while multifaceted, are under study by most research institutions worldwide. The main reason, as mentioned in a CSIS study dated December 6, 2023, is retaliation for a series of attacks, the lasting Israeli occupation of the West Bank, and the ongoing arrests of Hamas leaders, actions that were largely ignored by the Israeli public opinion.

Therefore, the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation had a significant psychological impact on the morale of Israeli military leaders and soldiers, which influenced the setting of military objectives for the invasion of Gaza, adopting a clear retaliatory strategy. Due to a strong sense of failure, the Australian strategic analyst, Mick Ryan, wrote after visiting Palestine in December 2023, "Every officer in the Israeli army I spoke with this week, every retired senior officer, admitted to a deep sense of shame for failing to defend their people. They underestimated an enemy with a known agenda to destroy the State of Israel and who had trained openly for the battle. There were many types of failures leading up to October 7, but the failure to appreciate Hamas's military capabilities by the Israeli army and government might be the worst of its kind."

*The Israeli objectives for the military operation in Gaza can be outlined as follows:*

1. Destroying Hamas's leadership pyramid to weaken the organization as a whole by killing its leaders. Although completely destroying Hamas and its ideologies might be impossible, killing leaders can hinder the decision-making process
2. Destroying Hamas's ammunition and equipment stockpiles. According to Israeli sources, Hamas used about 50% of its rocket stockpiles since the October 7 attack. Thus, thousands of rockets remain hidden around Gaza, which Israel aims to find and destroy to reduce the chances of rocket attacks from Gaza and provide positive material for Israeli strategic and morale campaigns.
3. Finding and destroying Hamas's supporting infrastructure, including the tunnel network, safe houses, bunkers, and other facilities used to support Hamas's leadership, control operations, produce and broadcast propaganda, raise funds, and logistics.
4. Freeing the hostages, which is the most critical issue for the Israeli public opinion that absolutely lost confidence in its armed forces after the October 7 attack.

However, the battle against a non-conventional opponent in densely populated cities differs from conventional battles, which imposes significant challenges. According to urban warfare expert John Spencer's report at the Modern War Institute in December 2021, to understand these challenges, they include:

- Defenders Always Have the Advantage: Defense is the stronger tactical position, which necessitates much greater force to attack and defeat a well-entrenched defender than an enemy in the open. Urban terrain provides many physical structures and defensive positions that offer tactical advantages to the defender and negatively impact the attackers' intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and engagement capabilities from a distance.
- Defenders Have the Advantage in Observation and Maneuver: Attackers move along known roads, streets, and alleys, making it impossible to surprise defenders, unlike the defenders who can hide and maneuver better to achieve the element of surprise.

- Using Explosive Force to Breach Buildings: Buildings act as fortifications, forcing attackers to either destroy the building or use explosives to breach the building and then clear it with soldiers.
- Tunnels are Safe Havens for Defenders: Tunnels provide significant maneuvering advantages, allowing defenders to withdraw, move beneath the battlefield, conduct counterattacks on the attackers' rear lines, or isolate forces in safety.
- Urban Warfare Denies Both Sides Combat Momentum: One of the main principles of military operations is concentrating combat power at the most advantageous time and place to achieve decisive results, but this is difficult to achieve in cities due to residential buildings and the limited street space.

## Second: Development of Military Operations:

The war began with a Hamas attack based on a strategy centered on three main factors:

1. Embarrassing the Israeli political leadership through the “Israeli Hostage Crisis” inside Gaza and disrupting the invasion plan to prevent further ground expansion.
2. Depleting the Israeli military resources and equipment through urban battles.
3. Attempting to destabilize Israeli control over the West Bank to attract more Israeli forces and reduce the pressure on Gaza.

To succeed in these factors, Hamas relied on a long-term policy, believing that over time, the Israeli public opinion would doubt the army's ability to achieve victory in the short term, potentially leading to severe economic and social consequences for Israeli society, reminiscent of many bad times in history. According to Australian strategic expert Mick Ryan's report on ABC Australia dated December 19, 2023, “The Hamas leader, Yahya Sinwar, studied Israel and learned Hebrew during his imprisonment. He understands Israelis well. He comprehends that if he can continue the war, Hamas may weaken Israeli citizens' confidence in their army's ability to secure border areas, which will have economic consequences and ultimately increase internal political instability and migration out of Israel by families who no longer feel safe there.”

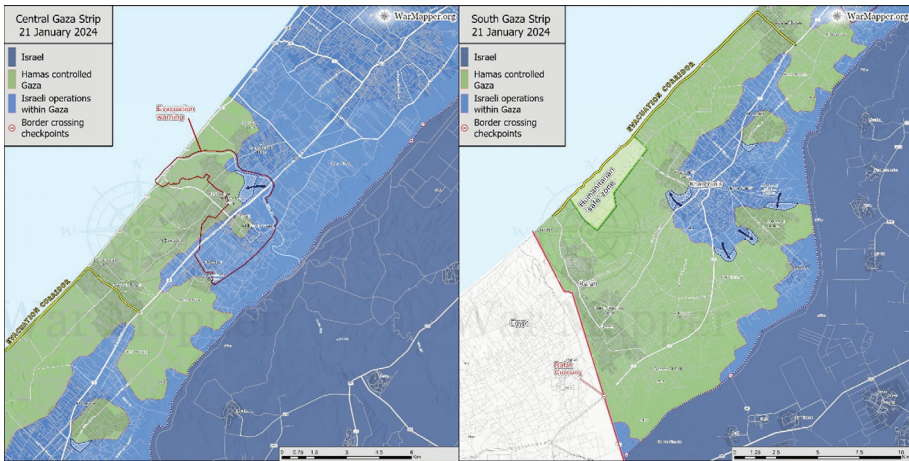
According to reports from various experts, including German strategic expert Franz-Stefan Gady on Foreign Policy in November 2023, “As Israeli operations in Gaza continue, despite the Israeli army’s advanced technological advantage in weaponry, this became a point of weakness, negatively impacting strategic and political levels. Israeli policymakers and senior military officers fell victim to the illusion that no difficult choices had to be made in Israel’s military strategy due to their confidence in technological superiority. On a tactical level, over-reliance on such technology led to a defensive mindset within the Israeli Defense Forces, potentially allowing critical skills like joint arms operations in complex offensive operations to waste.” Gady concluded, “The strategic myopia and arrogance of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu left him stunned from October 7 onward due to the overconfidence in the technological development of the army and other Israeli security agencies, believing that Israel could have its ‘cake’ and eat it too without making any compromises or striving to improve relations with its Arab neighbors and contain Hamas and its allies.”

In fact, this is not the first time the Israeli army has shown weakness in joint arms operations, especially in the offensive aspect, due to the political leadership’s eagerness to support offensive military operations. The situation is similar to the 2006 Lebanon War against Hezbollah.

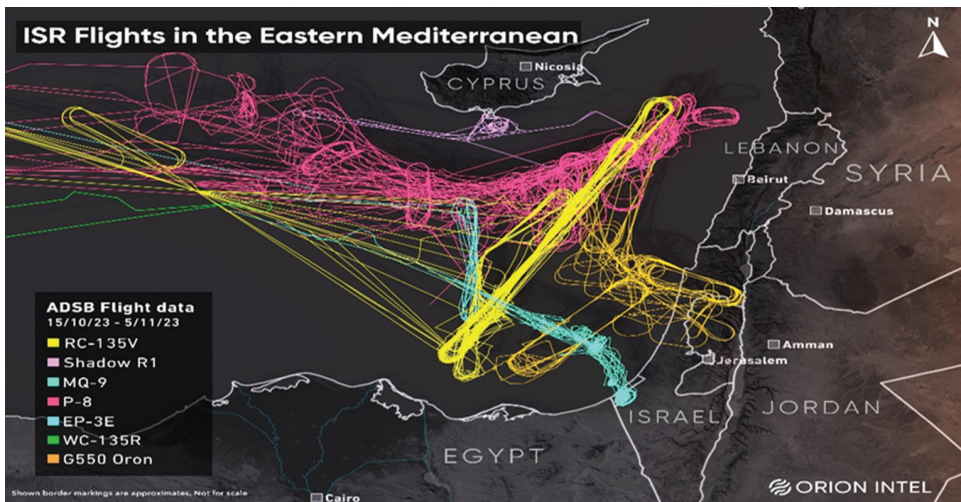
It is noteworthy that the Israeli army has been developing a new operational concept called “Deceive Victory” to balance defensive superiority and offensive endeavors, which are essentially weaknesses of the Israeli army. This concept aims to utilize various reconnaissance means to form a complete picture of the battlefield, process it with artificial intelligence, and combine manned and unmanned systems in a single ‘scenario’ involving precise and focused airstrikes to support light, adaptable ground forces using artificial intelligence to detect, track, and neutralize targets. This new concept is still in the experimental phase, used by an elite special forces unit known as the “Egoz Unit - 621,” whose commander Colonel Roy Levy was killed while engaging Hamas fighters in the Re'im settlement on October 7, 2023.

### *The Israeli Side:*

The Israeli army prepared for the invasion by conducting fake ground infiltration operations of Gaza in the nights leading up to the actual invasion through:



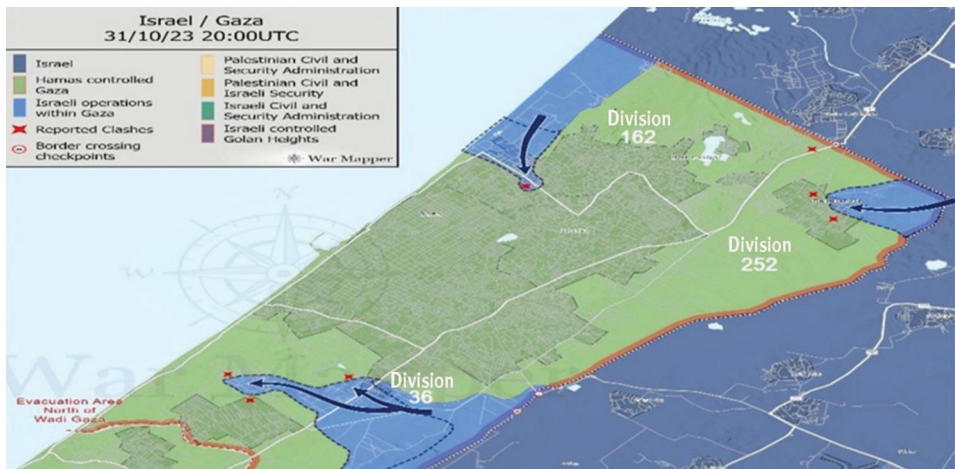
- Intensive reconnaissance efforts using all available Israeli means, and even allies' capabilities, particularly various American and British reconnaissance aircraft, to form a complete idea of the field situation.



- Preliminary bombardment by ground and naval artillery, continuing the process of discovering Hamas command center locations and field commanders, targeting them with intensive bombardments that could attack up to 200-400 targets in one night.

The Israeli invasion plan adopted the latest urban warfare strategy known as “Slicing” (strategize, locate, isolate, constrict, and eliminate), aiming to divide the city into multiple small sectors, then locate, isolate, and neutralize hostile elements. This strategy was first applied in the “Battle of Marawi” in the Philippines in May 2017. The second phase of the Israeli ground invasion of Gaza began, preceded by an intensive effort to jam the entire sector electronically, cut off internet services, and locate and destroy anti-tank defensive positions to secure the path for ground forces.

*Three military divisions advanced through three main axes within the sector:*



1. First Axis: “Division 162” heading south along the coast (“Beit Lahia”), including: Brigade 933 Nahal (Infantry), Brigade 401 (Armored), and Brigade 84 Givati (Infantry), with attached units from the 7th Armored Brigade.
2. Second Axis: “Division 252” heading northeast (“Beit Hanoun”), including: Brigade 14 (Armored), Brigade 60 Search and Rescue, Battalion 636 specialized in urban warfare, Battalion 94 (Infantry), Battalion 13 Golani (Infantry), attached units from the 7th Armored Brigade, and an attached battalion from the 84th Givati Brigade (Infantry).

- Third Axis: “Division 36” heading east of Gaza City, including: Brigade 188 (Armored), with attached 10th Armored Brigade, Brigade 900 (Infantry), and Battalion 429 (Armored).

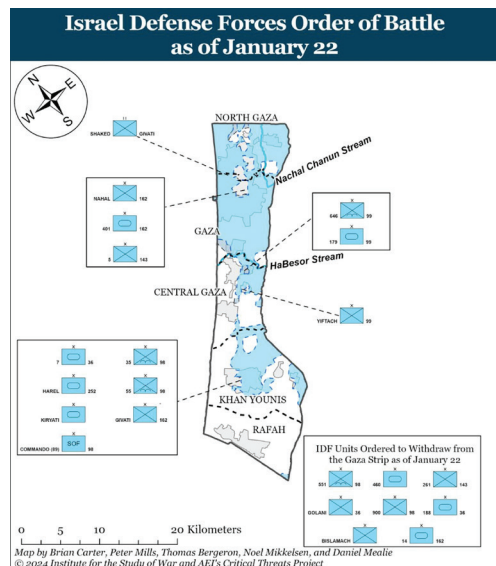
The first axis met with the third axis to secure control over northern Gaza, starting the process of dividing and selectively isolating main neighborhoods to control them, prevent logistical support, and deny Hamas fighters entry or exit.

On December 3, 2023, the third phase began, with Israeli ground forces heading to “Khan Younis” with the 98th Paratroopers Division, including Brigades 35, 55, and 551, reinforced with the remaining units of the 7th Armored Brigade. Additionally, the 89th Duvdevan Special Forces Brigade joined the battle on December 19, 2023.

On December 18, 2023, it was announced that the gradual transition to a new phase would be less intense, described as “surgical,” permitting Palestinians to gradually return to northern Gaza. This announcement from the Israeli Defense Minister came after talks with the U.S. Defense Secretary to decrease civilian losses.

On December 21, 2023, Channel 13 Hebrew announced, citing military sources, that the army had withdrawn the Golani Brigade from Gaza to reorganize alongside withdrawing a paratrooper brigade from northern and southern Gaza to also “organize ranks” after heavy losses among them.

Since then, the sequential withdrawal of Israeli combat units from Divisions 252, 36, and 98 has begun, while most units from Division 162 remain, resulting in the current situation on the ground for Israeli forces as follows:



### **Third: Evaluation of The Israeli Air Force Performance:**

The combat doctrine of the Israeli army is similar to Western doctrines in wars, relying primarily on the air force not only for offensive operations but for all reconnaissance, combat, and logistical support missions. Although the invasion of Gaza falls under “Counter-Terrorism” operations, mainly relying on ground forces for combat, the Israeli Air Force was a critical factor the Israeli army depended on through:

- Various reconnaissance missions.
- Air defense missions.
- Offensive missions and selective sniping missions.
- Logistical support and evacuation missions.

**Before reviewing how the air force carried out these tasks in the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, it is worth mentioning Hamas’s capabilities at this level.**

#### *Hamas’s Aerial and Air Defense Capabilities:*

Hamas had two types of drones for missions:

##### **1. Suicide Drones:**

- “Shihab”: A Palestinian version of the Iranian “Ababil” drone used to attack enemy gathering points.
- Besides transferring manufacturing techniques to the Palestinian side, they designed and manufactured the “Zawari” suicide drone designed to targeting advanced Israeli field command locations near the front lines.
- Quadcopter Drones “Proton Olek”: A modified Turkish military version of the Chinese DJI 600 drone used to drop bombs from above, targeting enemy reserves and support coming to the front lines, especially tanks and armored vehicles. This forced the renovating of Israeli armored units by adding cage armor to cover tank and armored vehicle roofs.

Hamas drones succeeded in targeting Israeli forces despite Israel’s advanced electronic warfare systems, particularly the “Drone Dome” systems designed to counter drones. This indicates Hamas’s capabilities in conducting electronic

reconnaissance missions to find gaps within Israeli radar coverage and exploit them to map a safe course and execute successful drone infiltrations.



## 2. Reconnaissance Drones:

- Hamas relied on low-cost commercial Chinese-made DJI Phantom drones to monitor and track Israeli ground forces and assess the results of attacks.



*Hammas also relied on two types of air defense missiles:*

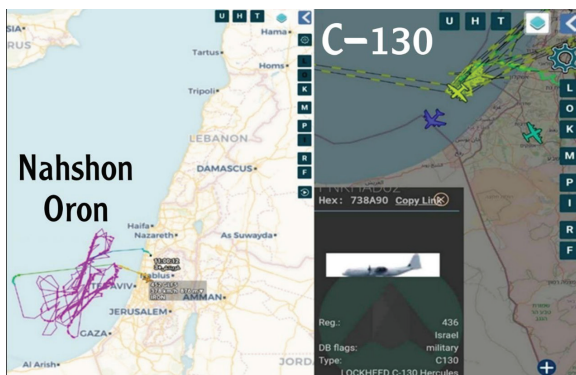
1. SAM 7: A short-range system with a range of 3.5 km and a maximum altitude of 2 km.
2. Locally Made System “Matbar”: Resembling the design of the Iranian “Shahab Thaqib” missile used in the “Ya Zahra” system, which is an Iranian version of the Chinese HQ-7 system, which is similar to the French “Crotale” system. The Palestinian version lacks maneuvering wings, weakening its targeting capability with an estimated range of up to 10 km.

Neither system succeeded in targeting Israeli aircraft effectively, likely due to the aircraft’s electronic defense equipment. However, they still had value in harassment and sometimes pushing aircraft away from operational areas, especially helicopters and Israeli drones.

## Performance of the Israeli Air Force:

### 1. Various Reconnaissance Missions:

- “Gulfstream G550” Aircraft from the 122 Squadron at Nevatim Airbase, named “Nahshon,” including versions “Eitam” and “Shavit,” and the latest “Oron,” modified for command, control, intelligence reconnaissance, and eavesdropping missions. These aircraft play a vital role in creating a comprehensive map of various threats on the battlefield, directing air formations for various missions through data links. Using these aircraft is necessary in any offensive or defensive planning. They act as complete operations rooms, gathering information from various aerial, maritime, ground, and even space platforms, obtaining conclusions, and sending them back to various combat units.



- “C130HI” Aircraft designated for eavesdropping on communications, identifying certain locations, isolating, and jamming them, operating from the Israeli unit “555” known as “Sky Ravens” at Tel Nof Airbase. Their purpose is to detect field commanders or fighters of Hamas or warn Israeli forces on the ground of specific risks.



- “Hermes 450 Drones” from the 161 Squadron at Palmachim Airbase and “Heron Drones” from the 200 Squadron at Hatzor Airbase, used to continuously cover ground forces from overhead during operations, assess the results of airstrikes, and assist in targeting, whether by guiding munitions or direct targeting with their own munitions. A Hermes drone was shot down by Hezbollah’s air defense with the Iranian “Saqar-358” system.



- “F-35” Aircraft assisted in reconnaissance operations in northern and southern Gaza throughout the war, capable of performing this mission with their integrated sensors on the aircraft’s body known as the “AN/AAQ-37 Electro-Optical Distributed Aperture System (EODAS).”

## 2. Air Defense Missions:

With increasing Houthi attacks using cruise missiles and drones, and threats from Lebanon with suicide or reconnaissance drones, the Israeli Air Force designated specific aircraft for air defense missions such as:

- F-15 Fighters of the “A/C” versions in two squadrons, the oldest fighters in the Israeli Air Force, upgraded to the updated AUP standard to use advanced air-to-air missiles like “Aim 120/Derby” for long-range combat or “Aim 9/Python” for close-range engagements. They play a crucial role in imposing air control and aerial combat, their role was mainly intercepting drones.
- F-16 Fighters of the “Sufa” version in four squadrons, the local upgrade of the “F-16 Block 52” fighters with Israeli technology in radar, electronic warfare, and self-protection. Though mainly for offensive operations, their advanced air-to-air combat capabilities made them crucial in defensive operations, as its role was intercepting drones.
- F-35 Fighters in two squadrons, the newest addition to the Israeli Air Force with exceptional detection capabilities using a revolutionary radar and an electro-optical system providing 360-degree detection and a mission computer that can autonomously process air situations, utilizing various detection means. They carry air-to-air armament for close and long-range engagements, intercepting the Houthi “Quds” cruise missiles.



To date, Israeli aircraft have successfully conducted five interception missions, three involving drone interceptions over the Red Sea, one drone interception over the Mediterranean, and one cruise missile interception near Israel's southern border.

### 3. Offensive Missions and Selective Sniping Missions:

The Israeli Air Force executed attacks on Gaza using its multi-role aircraft with various weights of guided bombs ranging from 500 to 5,000 pounds, determining the load based on the target. For surface targets, they used multi-purpose high-explosive bombs like American "Mark" bombs with "JDAM" guidance systems and Israeli "SPICE" bombs to soften the battleground, while for underground targets, they used bunker buster bombs like "JDAM" with "BLU" penetrating warheads to destroy Hamas tunnels, operations rooms, or ammunition depots.

The aircraft used for this mission included:

- F-15 "Baz" Fighters of the "B/D" versions in two squadrons, initially for air-to-air training missions but modified to carry air-to-ground munitions with no targeting systems, relying on "Heron" and "Hermes" drones for guidance instead.
- F-15 "Ra'am" Fighters, the locally upgraded version in one squadron of the "F-15" Strike Eagle, the spearhead of the Israeli Air Force for long-range missions, capable of carrying multiple bombs of various weights.
- F-16 Fighters of the "Barak-D" and "Sufa-I" versions in six squadrons, locally upgraded versions similar to the American "Block 50 and 52" models, primarily for offensive operations using smart guided munitions.
- F-35 Fighters participated in offensive operations using guided bombs in close support missions for Israeli ground forces.



- AH-64D/A Helicopters in two squadrons, the locally upgraded “Peten and Seraph” versions of the American “Apache,” equipped with long-range radars to support targeting from safe distances with various guided and unguided munitions, specifically the “Hellfire” missile in laser-guided and radar-guided versions with a range of up to 10 km, and the “SPIKE” missile in heat-seeking target mode with a range of up to 25 km.



Selective sniping missions targeting Hamas leaders with high precision involved two types of munitions under direct intelligence management:

- Small Diameter Bombs of the “GBU 39” American-made and “Spice 250” models with an accuracy margin of less than 3 meters, equipped with either impact or penetrating warheads, and a range of 100 km. These were used in infiltration by “F-16 Sufa” and “F-15 Ra’am” aircraft.
- Hellfire Missiles in the “Ninja R9X” version for assassinations, equipped with six sharp blades to cut the target using the missile’s kinetic energy, and the “Thermobaric-M” incendiary version capable of destroying a single floor in a residential building without directly affecting the other floors. These missiles were used by Israeli “Apache” helicopters.



Unguided bombs like the “MARK MK” and “M117” models were also used, criticized by human rights organizations due to their lack of precision guidance, increasing human error rates. These bombs, ranging in weight from 1,000 to 2,000 pounds, were deployed using the CCIP system, continuously calculating the bomb’s drop point considering factors like attack angle, gravity, wind speed, altitude, and aircraft speed. Any change in these calculations increases the bomb’s error margin. Airstrikes were conducted using these bombs and unguided missiles of the “LAU” type.



Aircraft designated for offensive operations were equipped with “ELISRA” systems from “Elbit” for radar and missile warning and avoidance. The PAWS (IR Passive Airborne Warning Systems) specifically detects and tracks any incoming air defense missiles, alerting the crew with audio and visual warnings, automatically deploying flares at the right moment, and using directed infrared countermeasure (DIRCM) technology to disable air defense missile warheads.

This system proved effective during the Gaza military operation, with numerous missiles fired at fighters and helicopters without a single shutdown.

#### 4. Logistical Support, Evacuation, and Airborne Assault Missions:

The Israeli Air Force relied on three primary aircraft for these missions:

- CH-53 Heavy Helicopters, locally upgraded as “Yasur,” which were the first to engage in combat by deploying special forces. One was hit by ground fire, which forced it to make an emergency landing, and it subsequently burned, marking the only loss in the Israeli air fleet to date.
- UH-60/S70 Multi-role Helicopters, locally named “Yanshuf,” operating with the “669” search and rescue unit for evacuating the wounded.
- C-130 Aircraft, it conducted precise airdrops of equipment and ammunition needed for combat units on the front lines.



In conclusion, despite the significant technological advancements Israel has achieved since the October War, a poorly organized and equipped organization managed to execute a strategic surprise deep within Israel. Despite thousands of tons of munitions dropped on Gaza, Israel failed to achieve a single objective of the Iron Swords operation and will struggle to weaken Hamas’s capabilities due to the relatively simple technology Hamas relies on, utilizing dual-use equipment in its weapon workshops, with members retaining acquired knowledge to rebuild this infrastructure.

## Fourth: Evaluation of Israeli Air Defense Systems:

The Israeli army leads the world in defense manufacturing and the development of defense systems, especially in radar systems, self-defense systems, electronic warfare, drones, and missiles, enjoying substantial global popularity. According to “Times Of Israel” on June 14, 2023, Israeli defense companies’ sales reached \$12.5 billion in 2022, with defense systems, cyber intelligence systems, and electronic warfare accounting for the largest share at 35%, reflecting high confidence in these products. However, all these systems crumpled on October 7, 2023, raising many questions about Israel’s defense system.

Israel’s defense system consists of early warning systems, operating radars, air defense systems, fighters, and command and control systems, reviewed as follows:

### 1. Early Warning Systems and Operating Radars:

Israeli air defense is part of the Air Force, relying on a combination of American and locally made Israeli radars, including:

- EL/M 2040: An Israeli radar by IAI, an over-the-horizon radar with a range of thousands of kilometers, utilizing radar waves bouncing off the ionosphere to detect airborne, ground, and maritime targets, operating at 3-30 GHz.



- AN/TPY 2: An American radar by Raytheon with a detection range of 870-3,000 km, primarily designed for tracking and targeting ballistic missiles.
- EL/M 2090: An Israeli early warning radar by IAI with a range of 500 km, also designed for tracking and targeting ballistic missiles.

- EL/M 2080: An Israeli radar by IAI with a range of 500 km, designed for tracking and targeting ballistic missiles as well, with the capability to guide Arrow ballistic missile defense systems.
- EL/M 2084: An Israeli radar by IAI with a range of 470 km, designed for detecting and tracking all types of aircraft and ground-to-ground missiles, with the capability to guide David Sling air defense systems.
- ELM 2248: An Israeli radar by IAI with a range of 324 km, designed for detecting low and high-altitude ballistic missiles and airborne targets up to 30 km, with the capability to guide Barak defense systems on Sa'ar naval platforms.
- AN/MPQ 53: An American radar developed by Lockheed Martin and Raytheon with a range of 100 km, designed for detecting aircraft, ground-to-ground missiles, and various airborne targets at high and medium altitudes, with the capability to guide PAC-2 Patriot air defense systems.

These radars are complemented by airborne early warning systems such as:

- Nachshon Oran Early Warning Aircraft equipped with the airborne version of the EL/M 2080 radar, known as EL/M 2085, on a modified Gulfstream G550 airframe, integrating the features of “Eitan” radar aircraft and “Shavit” intelligence aircraft of the current generation to create a comprehensive aerial picture of various airborne, ground, and maritime targets in the operational theater.
- HAAS High Availability Aerostat System: Which are Surveillance balloons equipped with early warning radars like the EL/M 2083 in modern versions introduced in 2023.

These radars are integrated with “Ofek” satellites by IAI, particularly the latest “Ofek 13” launched in March 2023, a surveillance radar designated for ground survey missions, early warning, and tracking targets. Border surveillance systems include radar and electro-optical systems by Elbit, supported by unmanned aerial vehicles like “Eitan” and “Searcher” by IAI and “Hermes” by Elbit.



## **2. Air Defense Systems, Fighters, and Command and Control:**

### **Long and Medium-Range Defense Systems:**

- Arrow: Maximum altitude of 50 km, maximum range of 150 km.
- Patriot PAC-2: Maximum altitude of 40 km, maximum range of 96 km.
- Barak: Maximum altitude of 20 km, maximum range of 100 km.
- David's Sling: Maximum altitude of 15 km, maximum range of 250 km.
- Tamir Iron Dome Missile: Maximum altitude of 10 km, maximum range of 70 km.

### **Short-Range Defense Systems:**

- Spyder Missile System: Range of 15 km.
- Iron Beam Laser System: Range of 10 km.
- Machbet Ground Guns: Range of 8 km.
- Sky Capture Radar-Guided Ground Guns: Range of 3 km.

These systems are complemented by the Drone Dome system designed to detect and intercept drones through electronic jamming or through hard kill using guns or lasers.

### **The Israeli Air Force participates in air defense missions with:**

- Locally Upgraded F-16 Barak Fighters: The lightest fighters in the Israeli Air Force with significant air combat capabilities in both radar and armament.
- Locally Upgraded F-15 Baz-AUP Fighters: The lightest version of the F-15 for air combat with powerful engines, long-range radar, and the ability to carry a large number of missiles.
- F-35 Fighters: The best fighters in the Israeli Air Force due to their exceptional detection systems, revolutionary mission computer, and modern low-radar-signature design of the fifth generation, although it has limited armament.

All these primary detection systems and combat systems, along with various secondary systems, provide a complete air picture to detect all airborne, ground, and maritime targets. All information is integrated and merged in command-

and-control platforms known as C2/C4 in operations rooms, organized as follows:

- ELS 8994 RICent: A platform to analyze all information received from the various radar, ground, and electro-optical detection systems.
- ELS 8994 StarLight: The main operations management platform, receiving final analyses from the previous platform, processing them with artificial intelligence, and providing rapid operational solutions suitable for the current situation, then distributing the tasks.
- Moshav & ELI 4000: Secondary platforms receiving orders from the previous systems, assisting in planning and managing aerial operations and controlling air formations.

Based on the ongoing combat scenario, the operations theater is managed with the existing threats detected by surveillance systems, providing the most appropriate response proposals through artificial intelligence from operations rooms, then using the best means of response through combat systems, whether air defense from land and sea or air force fighters. The selection depends on the nature of the targets and the units present in the operational sector, including expected threats: aircraft, cruise missiles, drones, ground-to-ground missiles, and ground-to-air missiles.

### **Development and Evaluation of the Iron Dome System “Israel’s Most Famous System”:**

The origins of this defense system trace back to the war Israel fought against Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006 when thousands of rockets were fired at Israel, causing severe damage, mass evacuations, and dozens of deaths. Subsequently, Israel announced the development of a new missile defense shield. In April 2010, the Israeli government-owned Rafael Advanced Defense Systems revealed the development of the “Iron Dome,” a defense system capable of intercepting short-range Katyusha rockets fired by Hezbollah during the 2006 war. The deployment of the Iron Dome system began in the summer of 2011 near Gaza, followed by additional batteries near Ashkelon and Ashdod, southern Tel Aviv, and near Netivot, 20 km from Gaza.

### **Advantages of the Iron Dome System:**

The Iron Dome is a full-fledged, integrated air defense system including radar, a control center, and anti-missile and artillery projectiles. Each battery

has three launchers, each carrying 20 missiles, totaling 60 missiles per battery. The system is one of the most highly developed systems designed to counter missiles and artillery shells, designed to operate in all weather conditions, day and night. Its advantages include:

- The system can handle multiple missiles simultaneously.
- The battery can move from one location to another based on operational developments.
- High maneuverability.
- The missile can engage maneuvering aerial targets.
- The ability to engage low-altitude targets.
- Missile range from 4 km to 70 km.
- Probability of hitting the target up to 90%.
- Easy preparation of battery components.

#### **Disadvantages of the Iron Dome System:**

- Inability to deal with targets fired from less than 4 km away.
- High cost, with each missile estimated at \$35,000 to \$50,000, especially when compared to the low cost of the primitive rockets fired by Gaza resistance elements, priced between \$300 and \$1,000.
- The missile's non-straight trajectory, rising up and then descending on the target, taking longer.
- Targeting a 4 km target requires the missile to cover 11 km.
- Inability to deal with mortars of 120 mm or less.
- The increasing number of rocket salvos from the Palestinian side overwhelms the Iron Dome's interception capability.

#### **Reasons for the Failure of Israel's Layered Defense Network:**

The Israeli army designed a seemingly integrated defense network over the years, built on various threat impacts based on the latest technologies, supported by command-and-control systems using artificial intelligence learning from:

- Previous combat missions on a limited scale, often classified as skirmishes.
- Internal and multinational training exercises.

A common trait among these systems is their design to intercept targets of various sizes, thermal and radar signatures, but at medium and high speeds.

**Applying this to October 7, Hamas used two tactics to bypass the Israeli defensive wall:**

1. First Tactic: Using very low-speed, low-altitude, low-heat, and low-radar-signature gliders, making surveillance with cameras or visually the only option. This is similar to the Chinese balloon incident that infiltrated the U.S. airspace in February 2023 due to the same tactic.
2. Second Tactic: Employing multi-directional missile saturation tactics to overwhelm the Israeli air defense systems.

Both tactics exposed significant gaps between the Israeli defense systems and their inability to intercept while causing paralysis in the artificial intelligence-operated command-and-control system, as the scenario and tactics were unexpected and unprecedented, possibly not considered in routine training scenarios.

These tactics are likely to be integrated into the main training system and operations rooms and various missile systems, but what happened reflects the very limited capabilities of the Israeli army commanders to improvise rapid field solutions after being deprived of the indispensable technological command systems. This was evident in the confusion of decisions and delays in mobilizing and maneuvering forces in the first hours of the Hamas fighters' invasion. For Israeli soldiers in the field, they lacked the quick thinking to resist the shock and attempt to hold the ground, preferring random withdrawal instead.

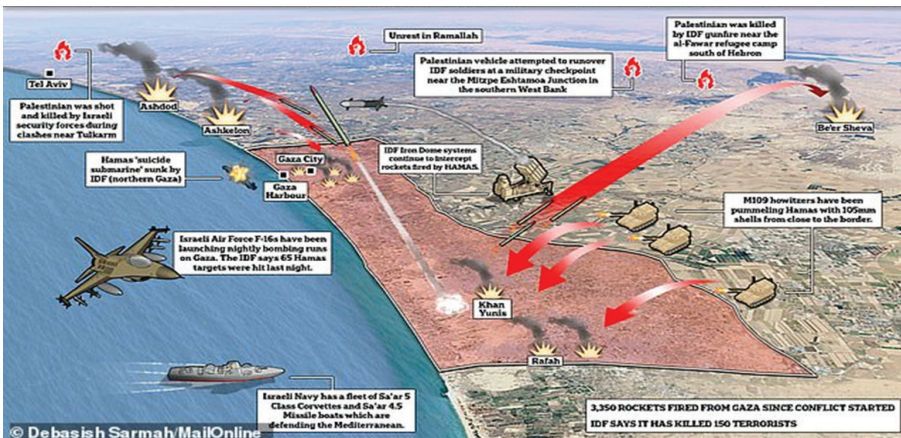
Therefore, it cannot be concluded that the Israeli air defense completely failed to perform its missions, but it certainly did not succeed to the desired extent in preventing the Palestinian missiles from reaching deep into Israel. This supports the view that Israel is likely to reconsider the components, usage style, and locations of defense system batteries or may support them with additional air defense systems. It may be appropriate to consider:

- Are Israeli systems suitable for countering drones and missiles? The answer: Yes, within the systems' capabilities.
- Did the defense systems succeed in performing their missions? The answer: Yes, within their capabilities.
- Is it appropriate for Israel to continue depending on the Iron Dome system? The answer: Yes.
- Will Israel develop the defense systems? The answer: Yes, based on lessons learned from conflict periods, most recently the military operations in Gaza.

## Fifth: Naval Battle in Gaza:

The Gaza conflict predominantly involves ground battles, but other military branches play auxiliary roles in various offensive and defensive missions on both sides. Since the beginning of the Gaza invasion, Hamas's naval units have only engaged in defensive operations, unlike the Israeli navy, which had three main roles: fire support for ground forces, air defense and border security, and raids on Gaza's shores. These roles are detailed as follows:

### 1. Fire Support for Ground Forces:



The Israeli navy participated in daily fire support operations as an essential part of the overall support system for ground forces, particularly near the coastal strip of Gaza. According to electronic, intelligence, and even field reconnaissance,

targets were identified, and the artillery coordinator sent coordinates to the operations room, which then transferred them to the most suitable artillery unit, whether on land or at sea, to begin targeting.

When targeting from the sea, the OTO Melara naval gun of 76 mm caliber is typically used, capable of firing 85-120 shells per minute with a maximum range of 16-20 km. It is used by:

- Sa'ar 4.5 Missile Boats: The navy has 10 of these boats, usually operating in a tripartite formation for rapid bombarding.
- Sa'ar 6 Corvettes: The navy has 4 corvettes, operating individually for shelling.
- Super Dvora MK Patrol Boats: These perform fire support missions with Typhoon 30 mm cannons, typically operating in pairs or triplets.

These units consistently participated in attacking the “Port of Gaza” and the “Beach Camp” in northern Gaza and occasionally and selectively in the center and south of Gaza, depending on the demand from ground units. Attack helicopters also joined them in these targeting operations.



## *2. Air Defense and Border Security:*

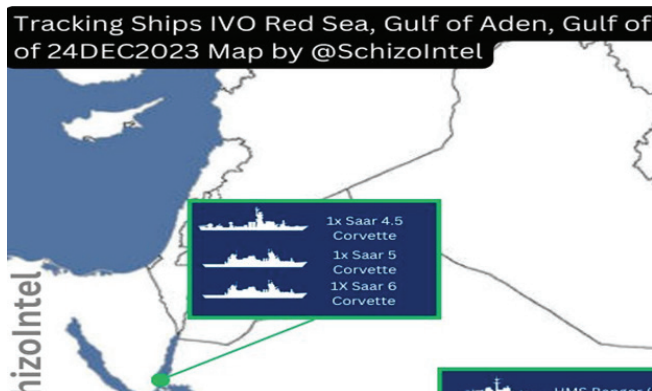
Israeli naval units, especially the Sa'ar 5/6 corvettes, are an essential part of Israel's layered defense system due to their integration with the Iron Dome system under enhanced joint command using artificial intelligence. They feature advanced radars and other surveillance and tracking systems, armed with various missiles such as:

- ELM 2248 Radar: An Israeli radar by IAI with a range of 324 km, designed for detecting ballistic missiles and airborne targets at low and high altitudes up to 30 km, with the ability to guide Barak defense systems on Sa'ar naval platforms.

These corvettes typically use Barak Missiles with a maximum altitude of 20 km and a range of 100 km, alongside the C-Dome System, the naval version of the Iron Dome, using Tamir Missiles with a maximum altitude of 10 km and a range of 70 km, integrated into Sa'ar 5 corvettes since 2021.



Due to the escalation and missile and drone attacks from Yemen, the Israeli naval units positioned in the Red Sea to counter this threat either by participating in surveillance, tracking, or direct interception, have not yet conducted any interception missions as of this writing.



### 3. Raids on Gaza Shores:

The Israeli naval special forces unit “Shayetet 13,” based at Atlit Naval Base, conducted monthly raids on the Palestinian ports in Gaza in three separate missions on the Gaza Port, Beach Camp, and Khan Younis under fire cover from Israeli naval units. The declared Israeli objective of these raids is to destroy the infrastructure of Hamas’s naval commando units, directly responsible for attacking the “Zikim” naval base. These raids also possibly aim to distract Hamas fighters by launching multiple simultaneous attacks.

The “Shayetet-13” unit uses fast inflatable “Morena” boats for raids, usually consisting of two to three boats.

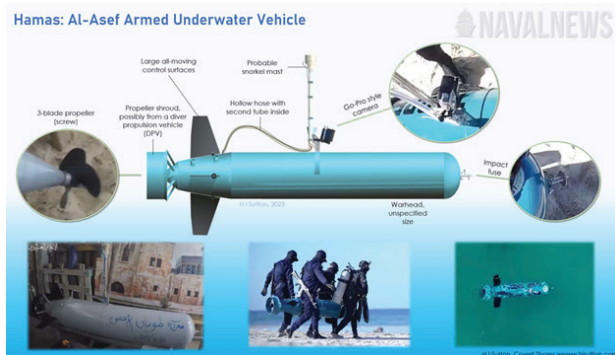
Currently, this unit exclusively operates under the 162nd Division, accompanying the 401st Armored Brigade in engaging Hamas fighters in the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood.



#### Role of Hamas Naval Units:

Hamas naval units focused on defensive roles, attempting to intercept shore raids or prevent Israeli corvettes and boats from approaching and performing their fire support missions, using:

- “Asef” Suicide Naval Drones, which resemble guided torpedoes, believed to be based on transferred Iranian or North Korean manufacturing technology due to their similarity to the “Hail” drones but in a smaller size. However, no confirmed successful hits or operations of these vehicles have been reported as of the writing of this section.



Therefore, it can be said that the Israeli navy did not play a central role during military operations, and were primarily limited to fire support, air defense, and avoiding risks from Hamas's unmanned systems or securing shores to prevent a repetition of the shore raids at the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation by Hamas's elite forces. Limited Israeli naval special unit raids countered these raids. However, the most crucial role the navy played was air defense in both the "Red Sea" and the "Mediterranean Sea" after threats emerged from the south in the form of Houthi missiles and drones, with successful detection but no confirmed success or failure in defense operations.

## **Sixth: Ground Battle in Gaza:**

Gaza's geographical and historical political context closely links it to Egypt's national security due to its location on Egypt's eastern border, serving as a bridge between Egypt and its strategic depth, both Arab and Islamic likewise, on the northeastern strategic front. With escalating military operations in the sector, battles fragmented into small, scattered engagements throughout Gaza, characteristic of "guerrilla warfare," where the defensive force typically has the advantage and the attacking force requires significant efforts to draw the defender's attention, prompting them to reveal their positions for subsequent attempts at encirclement and neutralization.

The impulsive Israeli decision to invade was rooted from a strong belief in the army's superiority and technological advantage over the enemy. However, operational experience proved the theoretical information about various Israeli army weapon systems unrealistic, revealing major training deficiencies and combat doctrine issues. According to German military analyst Franz-Stefan Gady at the International Institute for Strategic Studies on October 8, 2023, "No matter how advanced your technology is, it will not replace the principle of holding the ground."

## ***Development of Military Operations Between "Al-Aqsa Flood" and "Iron Swords":***

The Al-Aqsa Flood operation resulted in approximately 1,300 Israeli deaths and about 250 hostages. This unprecedented blow to Israel in terms of human losses impacted the Israeli military, intelligence, psychological institutions,

and the Israeli deterrence as a whole. Consequently, Israel, supported by the United States and Western powers, aimed to eliminate Hamas and retrieve the Israeli hostages, as declared by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.

On October 8, 2023, Israeli forces launched the “Iron Swords” offensive against Gaza, declaring the intention to eliminate Hamas, using their air, missile, and artillery capabilities. The Israeli army spokesman announced the mobilization of around 300,000 reservists, indicating preparations for a full-scale war rather than a mere round of fighting or a limited military operation, as openly stated by Netanyahu and his ministers.

In his bid to achieve a false victory before the Israeli public opinion, army spokesman Jonathan Conricus announced on October 13, 2023, the intent to launch a ground war unless Hamas surrendered unconditionally and released all Israeli hostages, which the Palestinian resistance rejected entirely. Despite not achieving any objectives in the first phase, the Israeli forces began the second phase inside Gaza following the American warnings against a comprehensive ground invasion without specific objectives, amid President Joe Biden’s concern that Israel lacked any post-invasion plans for Gaza.

Starting on October 27, 2023, Israeli forces advanced to implement the second phase of their military operations with a ground attack on Gaza, as Netanyahu announced on the evening of October 28, 2023, stating, “Israeli forces entered Gaza on October 27 to begin the second phase of the war,” indicating that this phase would be “long and difficult.”

Thus, Israel executed the second phase of the “Iron Swords” operation involving limited ground infiltrations, employing urban warfare tactics with multiple challenges and difficulties exceeding conventional operational levels.

### *Israeli Combat Tactics:*

The ground invasion began with intensive reconnaissance efforts using all available Israeli and allied means, particularly American and British reconnaissance aircraft, to form a complete picture of the field situation while fully jamming communications and cutting internet services. This was followed by ground raids to penetrate and withdraw before the main assault, then intense artillery and naval fire preparation, continuing to identify Hamas command

centers and field commanders and targeting them with heavy bombardments, attacking up to 200-400 targets in one night.

Typically, the Israeli force heading into combat equipped with tanks, armored vehicles, and engineering equipment advanced under artillery fire cover from ground or naval forces, supported by electronic reconnaissance from “Heron” and “Hermes” drones hovering over the targeted area to identify targets using electro-optical and electronic reconnaissance means, eavesdropping on communications, and pinpointing locations accurately, passing them to the attacking force.

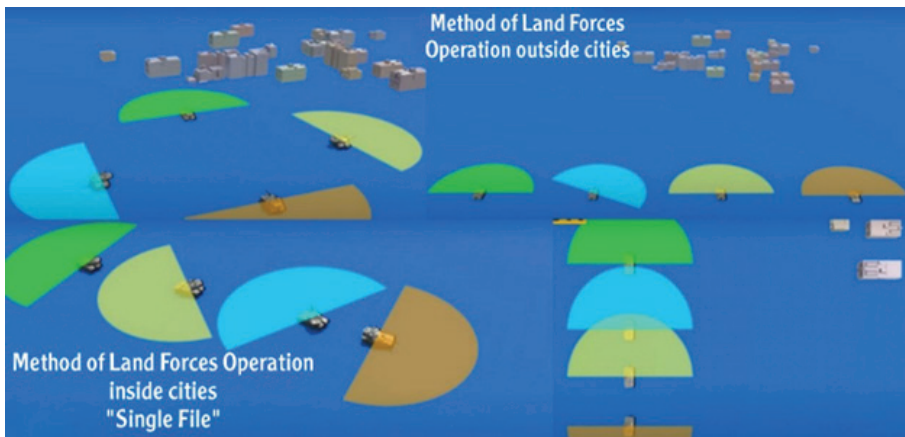


The penetration was carried out by two particular versions of the Merkava tanks, “Merkava 4” upgraded as “Ruach” and the newest version “Barak,” supported by “Merkava 3” tanks upgraded as “Baz,” and combat armored vehicles “Namer” and “Eitan,” all equipped with the “Trophy” system for 360-degree threat detection and hard-kill protection against anti-tank missiles, whether laser-guided or unguided.



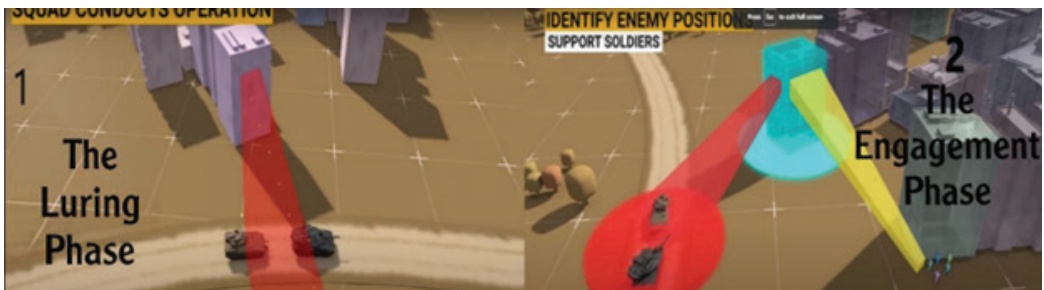
The successful Israeli infiltration operation controlled a large area outside the cities, parallel to the coastal strip, to besiege cities, attempting to isolate them to prevent logistical support or even Hamas fighters' withdrawal. This was the easiest phase for the Israeli armored forces due to the ease of moving in ideal formations, providing defensive coverage for moving units and maintaining the best firing opportunities with high accuracy.

However, the situation changed once entering cities, especially in the deeper penetration into neighborhoods and narrow streets, forcing armored formations to move in single file, sometimes preventing tanks from rotating their main guns 360 degrees. The easiest option is to use only light machine guns, obstructing maneuverability, making them easy prey in case of ambushes by the more maneuverable Hamas fighters.



Although the Israeli ground forces' urban warfare tactics seemed whole, namely through:

1. Tanks advancing in front, followed by armored vehicles to draw Hamas fighters' fire.
2. Bulldozers clearing any obstacles, usually concrete, if they are present.
3. When any threats appeared, infantry dismounted from armored vehicles to encircle, sweep, and secure the threat source.



Israeli forces failed to operate under the “combined arms maneuver” logic, which requires integration between infantry and armored units, evident in Hamas fighters’ ease of approaching Israeli vehicles and tanks without any interception by Israeli infantry tasked with securing their tanks.

### *Hamas Combat Tactics:*

Hamas inflicted heavy losses on Israeli forces by succeeding in two primary factors:

**Firstly:** Thoroughly studying the enemy, implying extensive intelligence efforts by Hamas. Based on this, Hamas identified expected enemy weapons in the battle, particularly armored units and their capabilities. All the Israeli armored vehicles and tanks share common weaknesses: “roof,” “rear door,” “engine,” and the space between the “turret and hull.”

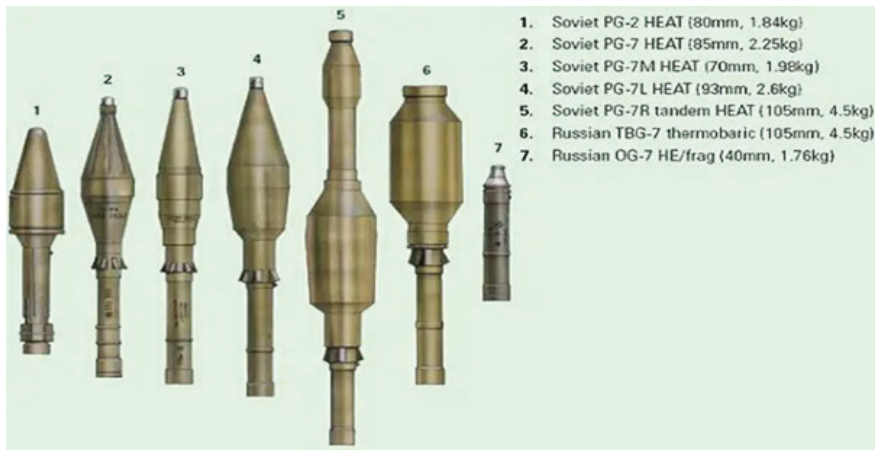


- Also, studying the protective systems, particularly the world-renowned “Trophy” active defense system, used by the United States, Germany, and Britain on their main battle tanks. In theory, it is an ideal system with a radar providing 360-degree coverage to detect any incoming projectiles, a revolutionary computer processing target data and passing it to a small projectile launcher to shred the target and protect the tank. However, operational experience revealed the system’s vulnerability in intercepting projectiles fired from less than 50 meters, such as RPGs, and projectiles with speeds exceeding 340 meters/second, like the SPG-9 recoilless rifles.



**Secondly:** Complete reliance on tunnels for easy maneuvering in the operational theater, with well-camouflaged openings for attacking and quick withdrawal to achieve key objectives:

- Surprise Israeli ground forces from the rear, potentially encircling and isolating them from other forces.
- Approaching Israeli forces as closely as possible to deprive them of artillery or air support.
- Gaining the best opportunity to fire unguided projectiles with high accuracy, as these weapons are not easily detectable. Although not highly accurate, Hamas fighters demonstrated professional use of RPG launchers with varied munitions, specifically the “PG 7R” manufactured locally as “Yassin” of 105 mm caliber and the “PG 7V” projectile with a tandem warhead for additional armor penetration known as “Tandem 85.”



Hamas also repeatedly used anti-armor mines, particularly the “Thaqib” and “Shawaz” mines, attached to the Israeli armored vehicles’ hulls or placed nearby, capable of penetrating armor 60–150 cm thick.



### **Additional tactics used by Hamas included:**

- Attacking support and supply lines and connections between units (LOC) with mortar shells.
- Booby-trapping street entrances or main roads to prevent support and lure Israeli soldiers into buildings and tunnels to detonate them.
- Targeting “Humvee” vehicles of support companies for armored units with “Kornet” guided missiles due to their lower armor and inadequate electronic protection.

In summary, Israel’s failure to achieve success on political, intelligence, and military fronts, coupled with Netanyahu’s attempts to achieve any form of victory before the Israeli public opinion by agreeing to a prisoner and hostage exchange deal with Palestinian factions, reflects the superiority of Palestinian resistance factions in direct confrontations with the Israeli forces, proven by the relatively high rate of Israeli human and military losses due to qualitative operations by Palestinian factions. Despite Israel’s aerial and missile strikes causing significant non-humanitarian losses and extensive infrastructure damage, with many Palestinian casualties, Israel did not restore the deterrence it enjoyed before October 7, 2023, nor was it able to achieve any real or falsely victorious image. Furthermore, Israel failed to inflict any significant damage on Hamas’s infrastructure, suggesting that Israel failed to achieve success on political, intelligence, and military fronts.

### **Seventh: Cyber Warfare in Gaza War:**

In addition to the military war, a parallel war is unfolding in cyberspace between Palestinians and Israelis, characterized by massive hacker support for the Palestinian side, resulting in website takedowns, targeting Israeli information systems and networks, service disruptions, the spread of misinformation and false news, and the involvement of international hacking groups.

Israeli companies have a global reputation in “cybersecurity,” with transactions and deals amounting to \$8.8 billion in 2021, according to the Israeli National Cyber Directorate (INCD), involving 100 core companies. The continuous growth rate (CAGR) could reach 78.12% by 2028. Forty Israeli companies held a 40% market share in private sector transactions globally, totaling \$5.3 million in 2022, with notable companies like “IBM,” “Cisco,” “Radware,” “Check Point,” and “CyberArk.”

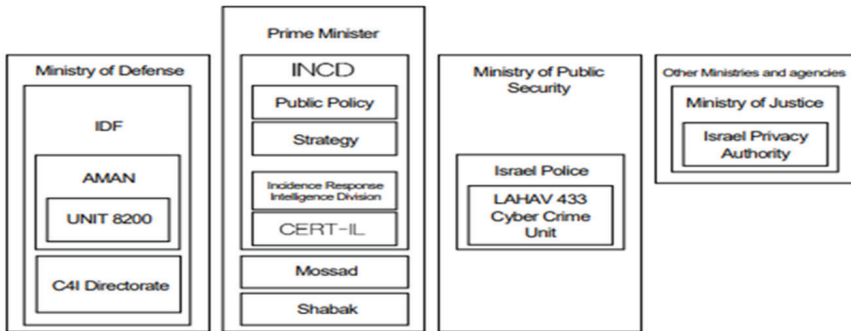
Despite the expertise and technical superiority in “cybersecurity,” Israeli citizens felt the impact of this war on the morning of October 7, 2023, as civilian websites were shut down, government institutions and even Israeli army defense systems were disrupted, causing chaos, which can be examined through cybersecurity confrontations statistics, Israeli preparations, and the sequence of attacks.

### *1. Cybersecurity Confrontations Statistics and Israeli Preparations:*

- Cloudflare’s (Cloudflare) internet traffic monitoring systems recorded a record increase in cyberattacks targeting Israeli websites and systems, reaching 100% on some days. According to the company, Israel experienced a significant increase in internet usage overlapping with the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, with usage rates reaching 170% compared to the normal rate. The company also noted that smartphone internet connectivity accounted for 8.52% of total digital network usage density.
- “Politico Report” on October 15, 2023, reported that 80 various Israeli websites, including government service sites like energy and electricity facilities, private sites, and even defense systems like the Iron Dome, were attacked, negatively impacting the Israeli forces’ performance in repelling Hamas’ attacks. Israeli society had grown familiar to such cyberattacks, but since October 7, there was a significant increase of 52% compared to the period before that day, despite the global decline in cyberattacks during this period by 4%.
- “Check Point” Israeli Cybersecurity Company reported that 133 multinational hacking and electronic intrusion groups participated in the war, divided into 113 groups supporting Palestinian factions and 17 groups supporting Israel, with only three groups attacking both sides, identified by the Israeli Cybersecurity Agency from countries like “Iran, Russia, Lebanon, Malaysia, Algeria, Morocco, and Indonesia” facing groups from “India and Israel,” according to Trustwave on December 5, 2023.

Israel had an organizational hierarchy considered difficult to penetrate under the leadership of the “Shabak” for internal security and “INCD” under the Prime Minister’s Office and Mossad’s management. However, their defensive or offensive performance was subpar, with confirmed successful efforts only on October 9, 2023, after cooperation from the “Lahav 433” unit, and other efforts from the cryptocurrency company “Binance” to stop Hamas’ encrypted accounts and hack official websites of the Palestinian factions.

## Overview of Israel's Cyber Defense Organizations



### 2. Sequence of Attacks:

1. October 6, 2023: The Iranian group “Cyber Av3ngers” hacks the “Noga” operating system, preventing it from connecting to the main servers in what is known as a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack.
2. October 7, 2023: The Russian group “Anonymous Sudan” disables the “Tzeva Adom” alert system used by Israeli citizens to receive warnings about Palestinian rocket attacks.
3. October 8, 2023: The Russian group “killnet” disables the official website of the Israeli government. Simultaneously, the “Anonymous Sudan” group disrupts the “Jerusalem Post” website for two days.
4. October 9, 2023: The Indonesian group “AnonGhost” takes control of the Israeli citizens’ alert system, sending them false warnings.
5. October 10, 2023: The group “Blackfield” announces control over personal information of Israeli soldiers and “Shabak” agents, while the “Cyber Av3ngers” group hacks the Israeli government water company “Mekorot.”
6. October 11, 2023: Various hacker groups breach the Israeli Ministry of Education.
7. October 14, 2023: The “Cyber Av3ngers” group takes control of the ORPAK gas station company’s website and its surveillance cameras.
8. October 15, 2023: The “AnonGhost” group attacks the “The Gaydar” program, which serves the LGBTQ+ community in Israel.

9. October 16, 2023: The group “YourAnon T13x” attacks the “All Israel News” websites. Despite the site’s defensive measures, the hackers manage to breach them twice.

The cyberattacks and server disconnections continued from mid-October 2023 until December 2023, targeting entities such as the “Bank of Israel,” “Cellcom” (the main civilian telecommunications company), the official website of the Israeli Knesset, and others.

### *Analytical Conclusions:*

In light of the above, several analytical conclusions can be drawn as follows:

1. Hacker groups that were mobilizing during the Russian-Ukrainian war are now shifting their focus to the Middle East, targeting not only Israel but also its allies, foremost among them the United States.
2. All the cyber threats that Israel has faced do not rise to the level of a cyber war, particularly as most of them have manifested in the form of Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks.
3. The cyberattacks did not escalate to the level of destroying systems and encrypting information as occurred in Ukraine, which can be attributed in part to the advanced Israeli cyber defense capabilities.
4. The cyberattacks launched by Indian hacking groups against Palestinian websites are linked to the strong diplomatic relations between India and Israel, as well as the close relationship between India and several Israeli startups.
5. The attacks against Palestinian websites have decreased in number but remain just as dangerous as the cyberattacks targeting Israel, considering the targeting of the Palestinian internet service provider in the Gaza Strip.
6. Some hackers, like “ThreatSec,” have not declared allegiance to either side and boast of attacking both. The group stated on their Telegram channel: “As you know, we do not like Israel, but we do not like war.” The group claimed that it had nearly shut down all servers of “Alfanet. ps,” one of the largest internet service providers in the Gaza Strip.

7. Hackers often exploit easy and obvious vulnerabilities to cause widespread damage, and electronic infrastructure is one of the prime targets for hacking attacks. Therefore, institutions managing these systems strive to ensure their security from attacks. However, it can be difficult for all organizations to keep their systems secure, as the “Cyber News” team found that many infrastructure systems are not adequately protected on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides, meaning that hackers can easily exploit these vulnerabilities.
8. Most of the offensive cyber threats targeting Israel since October 7, 2023, have been carried out by hacking groups (cyber proxies) active in Islamic and Arab countries. The vast majority of these threats have taken the form of Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, defacement of Israeli websites, and leaking data from various institutions considered high-value targets.
9. Cyber threats have become a breeding ground for rumors, with some hacking groups claiming to have breached Israeli infrastructure and targeted websites linked to power stations and alert systems, although verifying the accuracy of these claims is difficult.
10. Israel frequently faces cyberattacks from Iranian hackers. However, it remains unclear whether Iranian hacking groups were involved in the recent cyberattacks against Israel.

## **Evaluative Perspective:**

The Gaza War and the confrontations between Israel and Hamas were not confined to the battlefield; they also extended to political, media, and virtual arenas, especially with the intensification of cyberattacks since the onset of “Al-Aqsa Flood.” Although some features of the cyber threats faced by both the Israeli and Palestinian sides have begun to take shape, these initial characteristics may change as the military conflict continues. The current threats have been more about “declaring stances” than about severe security threats, meaning they aimed to show support for one side of the conflict without causing significant harm to the other side. The near or distant future may witness the involvement of more actors, hackers, and hacking groups with varying tools and objectives.

The operation was managed initially through aerial, artillery, and naval bombardment, justified by Israeli politicians as a means to destroy Hamas' infrastructure, with "collateral damage." However, with civilian deaths exceeding 20,000 and hundreds dying daily, the deteriorating health situation among the remaining Palestinians due to a lack of food and medical supplies leads us to believe that the situation contradicts what the Israeli leadership desires. Despite the targeting of Hamas leaders, equipment, and armament, Hamas fighters continue to resist at the time this report is written. According to retired U.S. Army Major General Michael Nagata, who previously commanded special forces in the Middle East, in a conversation with NBC on December 21, 2023, "I wouldn't say it's impossible, but I'm skeptical of the Israeli army's ability to achieve its strategic goal of completely destroying Hamas. They have failed to achieve the primary objectives of the military campaign in the Gaza Strip, which were:

1. The elimination of key military leaders; Hamas still holds many hostages.
2. They claim to have had a significant success in eliminating thousands of Hamas fighters and equipment, but there are still thousands remaining despite the attack involving four full military divisions.
3. Israeli soldier casualties continue to rise due to Hamas ambushes."

However, as the Israeli army's operations in the Gaza Strip continue, clear weaknesses have emerged, including:

- Loss of balance in combat effectiveness among the branches of the Israeli army due to complete reliance on the air force to resolve any problem in the theater of operations. This has negatively impacted the performance of other branches, particularly the ground forces.
- Poor performance of individual soldiers in the field despite intensive urban warfare training in camps specifically designed for this purpose, known as "Little Gaza" in the city of Tze'elim. Additionally, there is a lack of holding ground when soldiers feel they are losing technological or qualitative superiority, especially in close combat, commonly referred to in the media as "zero-distance combat."
- Intelligence failure despite possessing the latest aerial and ground reconnaissance tools and an intelligence agency reputed to be among the best in the world.

However, there is a significant gap between the information known to Israeli intelligence agencies and what reaches the Israeli army units, or a delay in receiving information, which always results in constant surprises on the battlefield. According to a report by the BBC on November 27, 2023, Palestinian factions trained for three years for military operations inside and outside the Gaza Strip in two training areas—one in the south of Gaza and the other in the north near the Erez crossing. Both areas were not camouflaged and were easy to detect, but there was no need for that as a video of these training sessions was filmed and posted on the internet. The video details how the resistance conducted multiple attacks on land and sea, which raises questions about the extent of Israeli underestimation of the adversary, as the Israeli air force did not intervene to destroy or even attack the training areas.



On the other hand, Hamas unexpectedly gained an advantage in intelligence operations since the beginning of the conflict. This was achieved through an extensive study of the Israeli army, as revealed by the acquisition of guidebooks and maps found with Hamas fighters. These documents did not only contain information on the locations and activities of Israeli ground forces but also detailed all land systems and equipment, including the “Merkava” main battle tanks, primary armored vehicles, and troop carriers like “Eitan” and “Namer.” The documents also included an analysis of Israeli tactics and rules of engagement, aimed at understanding their methods in both small and large formations, with clear identification of weaknesses and real photos of the targets.

In addition, Hamas developed various tactics to counter these forces, tailored to the weapons available to their fighters, with real images to help them choose the appropriate weapon for each task. This allowed for significant flexibility in dealing with Israeli equipment in different situations. The tactics and information were written in a simplified manner, enabling any fighter to understand them. The guidelines not only assisted in engagement but also in maneuvering on the battlefield, whether individually or in formations, according to the main plan devised by field commanders. This was done in parallel with specific instructions for each formation to carry out designated missions while minimizing communications as much as possible to avoid detection by electronic reconnaissance.

# Intelligence Agencies: Shortcomings or Other Goals?

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The supreme political leadership in any country is responsible for organizing and strengthening its informational and security institutions to protect its national and strategic interests. This includes planning to manage political, economic, and military activities in the face of potential war, directing its institutions to gather information on the capabilities and intentions of influential and adversarial states to ultimately serve its national security.

This information helps prepare the country's leadership to make well-informed decisions to manage and resolve crises, carry out successful wars, or thwart enemy attacks. Information is closely tied to decision-making processes, requiring a coordinated, comprehensive, and accurate plan to gather information from agencies and sources, processing it through evaluation and interpretation to attain correct conclusions, and contributing effectively to decision-making processes.

Israeli intelligence agencies are among the most influential and effective globally, with the most advanced tools and capabilities. The Israeli intelligence community is comprised of several sections, including the Mossad, which handles information gathering and covert operations outside Israel, the Shin Bet (Shabak), focusing on counter-terrorism and espionage within Israel, and the Israeli Military Intelligence Directorate (Aman).

Israeli intelligence agencies are the largest and most well-funded in the Middle East, with agents and informants within Palestinian groups, Lebanon, Syria, and other regions. They have previously carried out assassinations against leaders of these groups, tracking their movements precisely, sometimes using drone strikes after placing tracking devices on the target's vehicle. On the ground, regular military patrols equipped with the latest surveillance and eavesdropping devices, along with the Gaza border fence equipped with advanced cameras and movement sensors, form a sophisticated network to prevent all types of infiltrations in addition to the short-range Iron Dome air defense system.

Despite the powerfulness and sophistication of Israeli intelligence agencies, they were surprised on October 7, 2023, by a sudden attack from Hamas on Israeli cities and towns around Gaza, including multiple missions on Israeli military bases. Among these was Unit 8200, known for its high security and secrecy due to its sensitive role in cyber operations across the Middle East and various parts of the world. This raises questions about how all these combined Israeli security agencies, including the Shin Bet, Mossad, Aman, and others, were caught off guard by Hamas's attack. There are numerous questions surrounding the failure of Israeli intelligence agencies to predict this operation and their misjudgment despite existing previous indicators of an impending attack. Some sources also suggest the planning for this attack began two years ago.

On the other hand, there are two views regarding what happened on October 7. The first view argues that the failure of Israeli intelligence agencies to anticipate Hamas's attack was intentional, aimed at achieving other objectives, citing the disregard by Israeli security leaders of information obtained before the operation. The second view suggests a genuine failure, with the disregard for the information resulting from misjudgment by the intelligence agencies, coupled with the belief among Israeli leaders that Hamas was not prepared to launch any hostile action, at least in the near future, leading to the dismissal of information indicating Hamas's preparations for a military operation.

## **First: A Historical Overview of the Israeli Security Agencies:**

To understand the development of Israeli intelligence agencies before the establishment of the state and up to the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, it is noted by many historians that the idea of intelligence organizations emerged before the

declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. The concept materialized in 1915 when, under British-Israeli intelligence cooperation, the Jewish agricultural engineer and contractor Aaron Aaronsohn founded the first secret intelligence organization in Palestine called Netzah Yisrael Lo Yeshaker (NILI) or “The Eternal Israel Will Not Lie.” This unit spied on Ottoman forces and conveyed crucial information to the British but ceased operations after most of its members were arrested.

Between 1920-1921, the Jews realized that British protection could not be relied upon to safeguard Jewish lives in Palestine, leading to the establishment of the Zionist “Haganah” organization in 1920, following the weakening of the Hashomer organization responsible for security in Jewish settlements. This shifted intelligence activity to a new phase with the usage of signals intelligence for the first time when the Haganah established the Shin Mem 2 unit in 1929, tasked with monitoring Arabs in Palestinian territories, specifically Jerusalem, to predict riots and unrest in the area.

In 1936, Palestinians revolted against British administration in Palestine, transforming the Haganah into an organized military force, urged by the necessity of having a regular army to achieve Zionist goals. The Haganah continued cooperating with British forces to protect Jewish settlements, resulting in British training and funding for the Haganah members. This led to the formation of the Aliyah Bet organization in 1937, known as the Mossad, initially focusing on organizing illegal immigration. In 1949, David Ben-Gurion established Mossad as an organization dedicated to intelligence gathering, as well as conducting special operations outside Israel’s borders.

In 1940, Shaul Avigur, one of Mossad’s leaders, proposed forming an intelligence unit operating across all the Palestinian territories, leading to the establishment of the Sherut Yediot unit in September 1940, known as “Shai.” This unit received support from British military intelligence, training and arming its members. These intelligence units created a robust Israeli intelligence network, resulting in a developed security infrastructure enabling Israel to achieve numerous victories from its establishment in 1948 to the present day.

In the years following the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, Israel focused on bolstering its state structures and formalizing its institutions, particularly intelligence agencies. The Shin Bet, or the Israeli Security Agency, was developed, and similarly, the Military Intelligence Directorate, known as Aman, was enhanced. Aman established a section for electronic espionage, and with the efforts of Israeli computer engineers

who migrated from the Soviet Union, Unit 515 was formed, later renamed Unit 848 in 1968. This unit was tasked with intercepting enemy communications through monitoring and jamming, earning it the name SIGINT. The unit's name was changed again in 1968 to Unit 8200, but it failed to provide early warning during the 1973 War, leading to insufficient time for the immediate mobilization of defenses. This intelligence failure contributed to Israel's defeat in the 1973 War.

In 2002, a decision was made to establish an official body within the General Security Service (Shin Bet) responsible for information protection, tasked with safeguarding the infrastructure of vital institutions, computer networks, and databases from cyber threats and security breaches, including electronic espionage. This body also had the authority to enforce penalties on institutions that failed to comply with cybersecurity and information protection laws. However, it did not have supervisory authority over all institutions in Israel. Since it is part of the Shin Bet, this limits other institutions' and facilities' interaction with the body independently.

In 2015, the Israeli army published its strategic plan "Gideon" under Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot for the first time, highlighting the need to activate cyber capabilities in Israel's military strategy. The document emphasized Israel's continuous efforts to provide effective defensive methods in all areas, including cyber. The strategy's publication sparked significant debate among Israeli and Arab security elites alike, serving as a message to resistance factions that all components of Israel's comprehensive power would be optimally applied to inflict losses on these factions.

However, recent years have seen notable progress in the Palestinian resistance's use of cyberspace to combat Israel, prompting Israel to acknowledge that the Palestinian resistance managed to penetrate its cyber domain in February 2020, alongside the Iranian attacks targeting Israeli water networks in March of the same year.

## **Second: Israeli Intelligence and Information Agencies:**

Intelligence refers to the distribution of official news, data, and propaganda for national and war efforts, combating enemy propaganda in neutral countries, and gathering important information from foreign sources for national interests. The purpose of establishing intelligence agencies is to protect internal security and existing governance systems during peacetime and support war efforts during conflicts.

The primary duty of intelligence is to gather information, evaluate situations, and provide information to the government for political and military decision-making, ensuring security and protection from the adversary's intelligence activities, safeguarding individuals, facilities, and operations.

Information and intelligence, despite differing concepts and principles, share a common foundation: information represents early data, numbers, sounds, and connections to the real world, organized and structured to enable humans to utilize it for processing and evaluation. Intelligence, on the other hand, is the result of this processing and evaluation, leading to discovery of knowledge. Information and intelligence encompass all data collected, analyzed, evaluated, and interpreted, aiding the decision-making processes at organizational levels.

### *External Israeli Intelligence – Mossad:*

In 1937, the Zionist movement established a secret intelligence organization to organize Jewish immigration to Palestine, continuing operations until the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. A year later, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion approved the formation of an institution to collect and coordinate intelligence and security services, later known as Mossad. Officially, Mossad began its operations outside Israel's borders, playing a crucial role in shaping Israeli policy. Mossad's tasks include gathering information and data in political, social, military, and security fields from various sources worldwide. It also conducts special security and diplomatic operations secretly to protect Israeli interests and prevent potential threats, whether civilian or military, inside or outside Israel. Additionally, Mossad manages espionage networks, evaluates the political and economic situation in Arab countries, and provides recommendations based on the available information.

Mossad is comprised of three main sections: the Information Section, responsible for collecting and analyzing information to understand global developments and events; the Operations Section, responsible for planning and executing special operations such as kidnappings and assassinations within the state's strategic framework; and the Psychological Warfare Section, supervising the development and implementation of operations with a psychological impact to spread Zionist ideology.

### *The General Security Service (Shin Bet):*

Founded by Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, who gathered members of the Haganah, a group that carried out violent attacks against Palestinians and British occupiers before Israel's establishment. The first head of Shin Bet was Isser Harel. Shin Bet supervises collecting information about individuals, movements, and institutions with suspected activities inside Israel, directly reporting to the Prime Minister. Despite being the smallest intelligence agency, Shin Bet is the most influential in Israeli political and military decision-making. The Israeli government cannot make decisions regarding the conflict with the Palestinian people without Shin Bet's approval. Israeli media agree that the government often disregards recommendations from other security agencies if they conflict with Shin Bet's advice. In summary, Shin Bet's primary mission is to protect the state from internal conspiracies and preserve its internal security.

Shin Bet's policy towards Palestinians is unlikely to change, viewing them as "terrorists" and intensifying its efforts to convert them or obtain information to its advantage, exploiting their complex economic, political, and social conditions, which Shin Bet may also help create, remaining Tel Aviv's primary security arm within the occupied territories.

### *Military Intelligence Directorate (Aman):*

The Israeli Military Intelligence Directorate, as it is known today, did not exist before the state's establishment. The real transformation in intelligence came with Ben-Gurion's leadership of the Jewish Agency, leading to the formation of Aman in 1953. Before its establishment, there was an intelligence section within the military operations division of the Israeli Defense Forces.

Aman is a direct intelligence agency under the Israeli army, responsible for gathering and analyzing military information, coordinating with other Israeli intelligence agencies based on objectives, and being the costliest intelligence agency for the army. Aman provides warnings of wars or any hostile military activities against Israel, supervises preventive security within the Israeli army, and is primarily responsible for providing the government with strategic assessments to shape public policies, especially concerning conflicts with Arab countries.

### *Third: Historical Failures of Israeli Intelligence Agencies:*

The effectiveness and failures of any intelligence agency are determined by its performance on the ground, its ability to collect, analyze, and produce information, and its capacity to predict events based on this analysis. The failure lies in the misjudgment of information, the inability of agency personnel to formulate accurate intelligence assessments, and providing leaders with the necessary information needed to make decisions.

Despite the successes of Israeli security agencies in many operations since their commencement, repeated failures indicate they are not as powerful or invincible as they claim. Current internal discourse in Israel highlights repeated intelligence failures, questioning the agencies' responsibility and capability in predicting such operations.

### *Examples of Israeli Intelligence Failures:*

Although Israel possesses advanced technology in information gathering, the problem lies not in obtaining information but in its analysis and the determination of its significance, which forms the basis for decision-making. Prominent examples include:

In 1954, a series of serious operational failures occurred within a security apparatus primarily engaged in information gathering or conducting covert warfare. Historical data also indicates that the Mossad succeeded in assassinating some diplomats who were supposedly under the security protection of the countries they resided in, as well as intellectuals, writers, and artists. However, it failed to assassinate most of the individuals involved in the Munich operation or those who followed strict security measures or possessed a high-security awareness. The Mossad also failed in many other operations and intelligence assessments.

On July 21, 1973, the Mossad failed in the Norwegian town of Lillehammer, where the "Kidon" unit mistakenly assassinated the young Moroccan waiter Ahmed Bouchiki, who resembled Ali Hassan Salameh (1941-1979), a senior security official of the Fatah movement, who was the Mossad's and Golda Meir's most-wanted target, and whose name topped the "List of X" for assassinations at that time. This was not considered a minor failure, as the entire operation was chaotic, despite being under the field supervision of then-Mossad chief Zvi

Zamir and Michael Harari, one of the agency's most famous field officers. Both managed to escape from the scene miraculously, while the Norwegian police arrested six members of the Kidon unit, who were later imprisoned and then released.

In another attempt, Israel launched Operation "Cyrus" in an effort to assassinate Khaled Mashal, then head of Hamas' political bureau, in Amman in 1997. However, the Mossad agents assigned to carry out the assassination by poisoning were arrested, and the entire operation was exposed, leading to a diplomatic crisis between Israel and Jordan.

The assassination of Mahmoud Al-Mabhouh, a senior Hamas official, on January 19, 2010, in Dubai, also represented another scandal for the Mossad in terms of how it was handled. The operation involved 30 agents to eliminate a single person, and the agents' movements were exposed and suspicious, even though they succeeded in executing the plan. The entire sequence of events, which was supposed to be secret and leave no trace, was fully revealed.

On September 28, 2022, the Mossad made a significant mistake in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, similar to the Lillehammer incident, when an intelligence operation aimed at kidnapping a Hamas activist went wrong. Mossad agents failed to identify the target and instead kidnapped his companion sitting next to him in the car. Malaysian security forces intervened promptly to free the kidnapped person and managed to dismantle a cell of 11 Mossad agents. It was later revealed that a spy network had penetrated the central police department's computers under the guise of two experts working for a computer company called "Asia Soft Malaysia," which was developing the police department's information systems.

Some attribute the reasons for these failures to several factors, including the Israeli security agencies' persistent efforts to conduct continuous and wide-scale security surveillance, which requires constant work without interruption. This is challenging to apply broadly and becomes a heavy burden on all security agencies within Israel. The presence of daily routines within these agencies is also one of the most significant factors leading to security failures; routine daily reports often result in the failure of the intelligence entity, as this routine tends to overlook urgent and important information. Many assessments indicate that the most crucial and impactful reason behind the failures of Israeli intelligence agencies is the competence level of the personnel within these agencies, which is considered limited according to these assessments.

These failures do not indicate a complete collapse of the Israeli intelligence and security agencies but suggest that they are not as invincible as Israel often portrays them to be. Most failures result from poor information analysis and situation assessment, and throughout Israel's brief history, there are examples of such failures, including the major failure during the October War in 1973 and a new failure demonstrated by Operation "Al-Aqsa Flood" in 2023.

#### **Fourth: Israeli Perception of October 7 Events:**

Many Israeli political and military analysts view October 7, 2023, as a collapse of Israeli agencies, particularly the intelligence agency, which failed to predict the attack, and the operational agency responsible for defending Gaza's border. Additionally, event management did not meet the necessary level.

The Palestinian resistance operation was planned for two years under complete secrecy, despite ongoing training of resistance elements and the simultaneous information gathering on the Israeli side.

Opinions and analyses of the October 7 events vary, with some considering it an intelligence failure due to misjudgment of the situation and analysis of the information obtained before the attack. Others believe that leaders ignored intelligence reports either due to the routine nature of daily reports or the conviction that Hamas was incapable of launching an attack at that time, and that it doesn't need to do this in the meantime.

Reports indicated that on the night before the attack, the Israeli Chief of Staff, the head of Aman, and the head of Shin Bet were informed of sensitive information indicating an imminent Hamas move. Each consulted with senior officers but eventually disregarded the information and returned to their routine activities. Specifically, the head of Aman went on a family vacation in Eilat. A week later, the three acknowledged their direct responsibility for the failure.

On the other hand, many analyses have focused on how Israeli security agencies could fail in such a complex operation. Analyzing such failures may be difficult due to the secrecy surrounding intelligence matters. Another issue arises: is this an intelligence failure or a political one? Many Israeli media outlets published a letter from the head of Israeli Military Intelligence, General Aharon Haliva, to his subordinates, acknowledging that military intelligence failed to predict the Hamas attack and that he bears full responsibility. This message was

also reported by Reuters, quoting an Israeli military spokesperson. Meanwhile, Israeli National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi publicly admitted to errors in the intelligence assessments prior to Hamas' surprise attack, which shocked Israel. He stated, "This is my mistake."

In the same context, the Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defense Forces, General Herzi Halevi, in his first public statement since the beginning of the war, acknowledged the failures surrounding Hamas' invasion but said that now is not the appropriate time to investigate the mistake that occurred. Similarly, the Commander of the Israeli Air Force, Tomer Bar, stated, "The Air Force, like all parts of the Israeli military, bears direct responsibility for this failure." The failure attributed to the Air Force was its lack of immediate activation of its offensive capabilities once it became clear that a large-scale attack was underway on the settlements surrounding Gaza. Numerous reports also indicate that the coordination among the aircraft that were launched hours after the attack was minimal. According to the reports, Israeli planes significantly increased the number of Israeli casualties due to the indiscriminate bombing they carried out.

The statements from Israeli officials and reports indicate a severe intelligence failure, whether due to lack of information, inaccurate analysis, or the leaders' and officials' disregard for information. The Hamas attack and Israeli intelligence failure will likely be studied by armed forces worldwide; as recent debates among military thinkers and strategists suggested that advanced technological sensors and precision weapons made it difficult for any army to launch an attack due to the likelihood of detection and striking.

In an attempt to address the issue, Israel used its security agencies, particularly Unit 8200 responsible for information analysis, and other agencies to project an image to Western society that the October 7 attack was the most violent in a long time, resulting in the deaths of 1,200 people, including children and the elderly, the taking of hundreds of hostages, and the resistance committed atrocities against Israelis. Israeli intelligence agencies launched an information war, flooding social media with lies, fake news, and videos, attempting to deceive and distort facts and raise doubts about the Palestinian credibility.

Alongside the Israeli military's actions, an information and media war is being waged to deceive public awareness, counter global and regional reactions to the Israeli army's brutality against Gaza, and justify plans for total or partial

displacement within or outside Gaza. However, this has not succeeded. Amid the declining international support for the current war, the number of Americans wanting the U.S. to support Israel dropped from 43% in October to 37% in November, according to a University of Maryland and Ipsos poll. As tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets in European capitals, some of the continent's prominent leaders have detached themselves from fully embracing the Israeli campaign. French President Emmanuel Macron called on Israel to cease hostilities, and the United States remains the only UN Security Council member voting against an immediate ceasefire. Even the Biden administration, Israel's strongest ally and largest military aid provider, is urging Israel to scale back its offensive, at least superficially.

*The Israeli failure on October 7 can be summarized across three levels:*

1. **Intelligence Failure:** Despite Israel's extensive network of electronic sensors, surveillance systems, and agents embedded among Palestinians, there was a failure. Even with concrete warnings and indications of an imminent attack, the security, intelligence, and political levels also failed to interpret or take these signs seriously, despite being aware of them just hours before the attack.
2. **Military Failure:** There was a failure of the army to respond promptly, both militarily and logistically, after the outbreak of the attack. Hamas fighters were able to complete their primary missions within 3-5 hours and return to their bases before the Israeli army could respond in a comprehensive and centralized manner.
3. **Intelligence Analysis Failure:** It is clear that Israeli military intelligence had gathered specific information about how Hamas would conduct the invasion. Additionally, they had evidence of the capabilities and techniques Hamas was likely to use and which Israeli facilities and properties would be targeted. By monitoring drills, they could also have obtained information about the level of violence Hamas militants were prepared to commit.

Evidence also suggests that about a year before the attack, Israeli analysts had a copy of Hamas's playbook, the "Jericho Wall Document," which detailed how Hamas fighters would penetrate the borders using gliders, drones, and rockets and what they would seek to attack. The October 7 invasion closely imitated this plan.

This raises the question: Why was the correct assessment overlooked?

It appears that the evaluation of the information obtained by the Israeli intelligence agencies was dismissed for three main reasons:

- The belief that Hamas lacked both the capability and the intent to carry out such an attack, as it was outside the scope of their historical behavior patterns.
- These assumptions about Hamas were not fully established within Israeli intelligence, nor through sharing the assessment with international partners who may have had useful intelligence on the matter.
- Israeli defenses, whether deep-buried sensors, walls, or parts of the border that are automatically defended, were considered stronger than Hamas's capabilities.

Given the significant lack of information on security matters due to the secrecy surrounding such studies, it is difficult to confirm, based on available information, whether the intelligence assessment on Hamas was sent to the Israeli Prime Minister's office or shared with international allies, such as the United States.

## **Fifth: Assessing Israeli Intelligence Agencies' Performance in the "Al-Aqsa Flood" Operation:**

### *Collapse of the Israeli Intelligence System:*

The two main intelligence agencies in Israel responsible for providing strategic warning and preventing specific terrorist activities from Gaza are the General Security Service (Shin Bet), which is responsible for human intelligence (HUMINT) but also uses technological means, primarily signal intelligence (SIGINT), and the Military Intelligence Directorate (Aman), which primarily uses specialized technical means for information gathering.

Israel's warning system against attacks, whether small or large-scale from Gaza, relies on three main defense layers. The first layer, primarily consisting of Shin Bet's human intelligence sources, aims to provide warning that Hamas leadership has decided to plan, prepare, and execute a major attack. The second layer, relying on Aman's SIGINT (Units 8200 and 81) and imagery intelligence (Unit 9900) capabilities, included gathering evidence of Hamas's actual

preparations for the attack. The third layer was the large ground barrier along the Gaza border, consisting of physical obstacles, electronic sensors, and other visual means meant to provide a final line of defense against any infiltration attempt into Israel.

All three layers collapsed on the morning of October 7, providing no strategic warning about the nature and scale of the imminent attack. The root of this failure lies in two fundamental shortcomings. The first is conceptual, similar to 1973: a shared, misleading/misled, but fixed and robust assessment by Shin Bet and Aman, consisting of two elements: first, Israeli military and intelligence superiority would deter Hamas from initiating any significant military action; second, if Hamas launched such an attack, Shin Bet and Aman would provide timely warning.

Hamas's relative restraint in recent years and its apparent interest in continuing the flow of cash from Qatar and increasing the number of Gaza workers allowed to work in Israel strengthened this concept in the collective mindset of Israeli political, military, and intelligence leaders.

Commitment to the concept of calmness led senior Israeli officers to ignore warning signs before the attack. In recent years, civilian enthusiasts near the border monitored Hamas's radio communications, observing nonstop drills to capture Israeli settlements. In recent weeks, these officers received reports of illegal activities such as disguised farmers taking photos of the border fence and Hamas members with maps monitoring Israeli military outposts and settlements, but they ignored these reports.

There was even an opportunity on 11 P.M. to deter or mitigate the attack. On the night of October 6, Israeli intelligence detected some warning signs leading to high-level consultations late at night. However, the flawed concept prevailed with little consequence. The alert level along the border was raised, with Shin Bet sending a few additional agents to the south, but Aman's director, Major General Aharon Haliva, continued his vacation in Eilat without any significant deployments.

The second failure was in collection. Shin Bet failed in its primary mission, providing no significant warning about Hamas's intention to launch a major attack. On October 16, its director, Ronen Bar, took responsibility for this

failure, followed shortly by his counterpart at Aman. According to some reports, Hamas deceived and misled Israeli SIGINT collection methods by discussing on monitored calls the avoidance of a new war, representing a higher level of sophistication than previously perceived.

The final defense line, the 40-mile barrier along the border, gave Israelis a false sense of confidence. When the Israeli military unveiled the \$1.1 billion project upon its completion in December 2021, it conveyed the impression that no terrorist could cross it. The main element was a massive anti-tunnel barrier with enough cement to “build a road from Gaza to Bulgaria,” as the military described.

The Israeli military also used three large surveillance balloons to monitor Gaza in its southern, central, and northern sectors. In the weeks leading up to the attack, the three balloons were decommissioned due to their deployment in unsuitable weather conditions, but the military neglected to return them to service.

### *Changing Roles of Israeli Intelligence Agencies:*

Netanyahu deleted a previous tweet attacking Shin Bet and Aman for their responsibility in failing to detect Hamas’s movements before the war and assessing that the movement was in a military hibernation state, focusing only on political activities. The political attack suggests Netanyahu sought to change the roles of Israeli intelligence agencies and their hierarchy in decision-making or execution. Netanyahu directed the Israeli army and Shin Bet to manage the ground operation in Gaza, assigning Shin Bet the role of uncovering tunnels and freeing Hamas-held hostages while intentionally reducing Aman’s role in this regard.

This means Mossad handles the political aspect of hostage release negotiations with relevant countries, including Egypt, while Shin Bet focuses on hostage release through military force. This created competition between Mossad and Shin Bet to achieve success in the hostage file, a significant political pressure point for Netanyahu, remarkably after Hamas announced the deaths of some hostages due to indiscriminate aerial bombing in northern Gaza. Netanyahu expressed his anger with the deleted tweet attacking Shin Bet.

Since 2004, Israel has faced an administrative crisis in intelligence affairs, aspiring to form a unified intelligence complex to unify what is known in intelligence sciences as EEI (Essential Elements of Information) to precisely arrange these elements, reaching what is known as a “concept.” The primary role of intelligence agencies is to provide strategic warnings about the likelihood of a crisis, emergency, or war. The events of October 7 in Israel signify a genuine failure of Israeli intelligence agencies due to varying assessments and imprecise concepts or security assessments.

This stems from Netanyahu’s use of Israeli intelligence agencies for political interests, sidelining or destabilizing ministries involved in their respective files, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has seen its role diminished compared to Mossad. Similarly, the hostage file, now handled by Mossad instead of the Foreign Ministry, reflects this shift. Another reason for the shortcomings in Israeli intelligence work is the duplication of agency roles on the same file, such as the hostage file shared by Mossad and Shin Bet. Additionally, the logical responsibility of Aman for Gaza’s situation appears to have been shifted to Shin Bet, reducing Shin Bet’s effectiveness.

Finally, the failure of the Israeli Ministry of Intelligence, established in 2009 under the Likud government, with Dan Meridor as its first minister, contributes to this administrative crisis. Meridor stated, “I agreed with Prime Minister Netanyahu to participate in all his weekly meetings with security chiefs, and he is committed to this agreement.” However, Netanyahu gradually withdrew this role from the intelligence minister, assuming it personally. Over time, statements from former Israeli chiefs indicate that Netanyahu no longer cares about organizing agency work, simply signing off on decisions.

The crucial question within Israeli intelligence agencies should have been: Under what conditions could Hamas launch such an attack?

This form of critical thinking is essential within intelligence agencies, which the state relies on for protection and as a primary source for leaders and officials in decision-making. Generally, intelligence evaluation involves two elements to evaluate its intelligence agencies: assessing the adversary’s capabilities (people, skills, funding, equipment), and what the adversary plans to do with these capabilities (intentions).

If analysts in intelligence agencies believe the adversary cannot act this way, they tend to seek intelligence supporting this view and exclude information

that contradicts it. This mindset led Israeli intelligence agencies to believe Hamas would not carry out any hostile action against Israel, at least in the short term, influencing their choice of intelligence that supported this view and disregarding contradictory information, forming analytical reports and assessments accordingly. Relying on “groupthink” and exchanging Israeli intelligence with allies with larger analyst groups and diverse intelligence sources could have resulted in a different outcome.

Excessive comfort with biases and assumptions is a dangerous pitfall for intelligence agencies. Effective methods within these agencies create systems ensuring continuous challenge, though it is unclear if these elements were used before October 7, 2023. This intelligence failure is well-documented in security and intelligence agencies worldwide, leading to the formation of the Five Eyes intelligence network (shared security information between Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada) to avoid this mistake and address the challenge faced by global intelligence agencies.

Intelligence failures often stem from human and technological weaknesses. Israeli border defenses gave analysts unwarranted confidence in their ability to fend off any hostilities against Israel, regardless of early threat detection. Similarly, the failure to recognize the adversary’s evolving capabilities—human, informational, or material—poses a major threat to Israeli security.

Intelligence failures can occur in areas with extensive resource investment but insufficient investment in human intelligence or analytical techniques. Strategic intelligence failures often drive reform and improvement to avoid repeating such mistakes, yet Israel’s repeated errors led to the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation.

## **Conclusion:**

### *The Future of the Israeli Intelligence Community:*

Israel invests heavily in Shin Bet and Aman, with the 2023–2024 defense budget allocating approximately 14 billion shekels annually for “miscellaneous defense expenditures,” mostly for both agencies. Three Israeli inspection committees formed over the years, the latest nearly 20 years ago, addressed the overlap between organizations and the need for coordination, but no changes have been made, posing a significant challenge for Israel.

The Ministry of Intelligence is comprised of five sections: research, policy, intelligence relations, foreign relations, and projects. The 2023 work plan includes several projects, such as institutionalizing academic programs for intelligence professions, enhancing Israel's technological superiority, strengthening cybersecurity legislation, and devising decisions within a working group on education and tolerance in the Negev Forum.

The ministry's main project in recent years is "Sikrot Ofek." Established in 2017 under Katz, the office's role is to identify global trends with potential impact on the political and economic systems and determine methods Israel can develop a competitive advantage. The office is managed by Dr. Victor Israel, head of the research department, supported by a limited team of analysts.

Over the years, the Ministry of Intelligence and the Ministry of Strategic Affairs have alternately operated under the same ministry and minister. In the Bennett-Lapid government, it was decided to close the office, but it was re-established in the current government under Ron Dermer. The proposed 2023 budget for the ministry amounts to 24 million shekels. The office's role is to "promote strategic issues on Israel's agenda, including the Iranian threat, enhancing the Abraham Accords, expanding the circle of peace, and strengthening the alliance with the United States, in coordination with government ministries and security agencies." However, for political reasons related to Netanyahu alone, Iran is considered the responsibility of the Ministry of Israeli Intelligence Affairs. This is inferred from the contacts and relations established between the ministry and the Misgav Institute with senior leaders of the Iranian opposition abroad and the Mujahedeen Khalq Organization in Albania.

The expenditures of the Ministry of Intelligence since the beginning of the year have been minimal, such as a few parking spaces, rent payments, property taxes, and a siren for the minister's car. A review of the contracts concluded by the ministry last year reveals an intention for a single major contract signed in September of this year: the ministry sought an exemption from tender in a joint project valued at one million shekels for "diplomatic and geopolitical consulting for the Negev Forum working group, education, and tolerance." The Negev Forum, established concurrently with the Abraham Accords, includes several neighboring countries to Israel, such as Egypt, Bahrain, the UAE, and Morocco. Its purpose is to enhance civil cooperation among member states, including promoting economic opportunities to eradicate poverty, protecting the regional environment, improving resilience in the areas of food and water resources, and

fostering tolerance among the peoples of the region. A government decision in September 2022 determined that the Ministry of Intelligence would lead the team on education and tolerance, with the team leader being the ministry's director-general.

The entity with which the ministry sought to enter into an exemption from a tender in a joint project valued at one million shekels is the Misgav Institute for National Security and Zionist Strategy, headed since last April by Meir Ben Shabbat, the former head of the National Security Council. In the tender exemption documents, "the Ministry of Intelligence identifies the Misgav Institute as a focal point for understanding the regional landscape and formulating policies suited to its challenges." Thus, the institute is expected to play a significant role in shaping Israel's security policies in the foreseeable future, domestically and regionally, and with the countries normalizing relations with Israel under the Negev Forum framework.

The Policy Department conducted an in-depth review of all current service providers and ultimately found no provider with capabilities similar to those of the Misgav Institute. They also point out that the advantage of the institute is that it is led by "Meir Ben Shabbat, an expert in national-level policy and strategy due to his former role as head of the National Security Council and a senior member of Shin Bet, with unique expertise and knowledge in the context of the Abraham Accords, in cooperation with the executive director of the Abraham Peace Accords Institute and the policy and strategy expert at the Misgav Institute."

Notably, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Intelligence, and Strategic Affairs have begun to establish cooperation protocols with research centers (such as the Institute for National Security Studies - INSS, the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies - JISS, the Regional Forum, and the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya). This indicates that Israel is preparing to activate a "Track Two" policy through research centers to shape security, political, and military decisions and forge partnerships with regional and global countries.

Israel will look to further develop its intelligence community through a plan based on the following key lines:

- Increasing Coordination and Integration Among Agencies: Enhancing human resources in secret organizations and improving technological solutions for these organizations. Strategic assessments from Israeli research

and development centers affiliated with the Ministry of Intelligence (since 2017) indicate that the ministry has “additional missions that cannot be published due to their security sensitivity.”

- **Increasing Financial Allocations to Intelligence Agencies, particularly the Ministry of Intelligence:** In the 2023 budget proposal, 25.6 million shekels were allocated to the ministry, 30% more than its budget in 2022, which was 19 million shekels.
- **Guiding Security Agencies (Mossad, Shin Bet, Aman) to Develop Their Own Specific Intelligence Communities:** Before Israel moves to create a unified intelligence community encompassing all security agencies, each organization will first work on developing its own unique intelligence community, as a prelude to establishing an Israeli intelligence compound under the supervision of the Ministry of Intelligence and the management of the Prime Minister’s Office. For example, during operations in the Gaza Strip following the ground offensive, the Aman intelligence unit developed its own intelligence compound named “Eden,” which includes four departments: (a) Human Intelligence (HUMINT), (b) Cyber Intelligence (CYBINT), (c) Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT), and (d) Signals Intelligence (SIGINT). Notably, it has been effective in uncovering Hamas tunnels and targeting elements of the movement’s military wing.
- **Integrating More External Political and Diplomatic Efforts in Military Decision-Making and Security and Political Assessments in Israel:** Netanyahu’s efforts to break the link between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and intelligence work, and military and security assessments, created a significant imbalance that contributed to the current failures in the war in Gaza and strategic assessments. It is likely that the Ministry of Strategic Affairs will start by organizing external, security, and military relations and then gradually include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which requires substantial reforms.

It can be said that the Israeli intelligence agencies that failed in their assessment of the events of October 7 were not aided by technological advances, as Hamas was able to surprise and deceive one of the world’s largest and most advanced intelligence and security agencies, which possesses the latest technology in this field, by reverting to primitive methods in communication, planning, and training, in addition to maintaining complete secrecy.

Overall, information has become the basis for decision-making, technological, and strategic developments, and for building modern organizations. Whoever has accurate information at the right time can make sound political and military decisions and control natural resources to achieve their interests. With

the increase in the ability to collect information and the significant assistance of modern technology, security agencies worldwide, not just in Israel, have a surplus of information. The main challenge remains to sift through and analyze this information. What distinguishes one intelligence agency from another is not merely obtaining information but the ability to prove its accuracy amidst a surplus of data, then analyzing it, arriving at the facts, and making recommendations that help decision-makers predict events.

# Palestinians Outside Gaza: A Parallel Battle

THE EGYPTIAN OBSERVATORY TEAM - NERMINE SAIED

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While the world's attention is focused on the Israeli war on Gaza, the West Bank is witnessing a parallel war where Israeli settlers use all means of violence and abuse against Palestinians. This situation drives the scene to the brink of explosion and threatens further complications. Since the events of October 7th, Israeli forces have not stopped their infiltrations, arrests, and assaults on Palestinians, including severe beatings and live ammunition. Moreover, the Israeli government has given settlers the green light to resort to extreme violence, even arming them under the alleged reason of self-defense, which indicates disaster.

Various parts of the West Bank and Jerusalem have seen daily raids and incursions into villages and towns by the Israeli army, with settlers escalating violations against Palestinians and seizing more lands without restriction. While the occupation commits all forms of genocide and ethnic cleansing against Palestinian civilians in Gaza, it intensifies its punitive measures against Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, imposing a long series of collective punishments and racist measures that paralyze their lives completely, arrest them in their residential areas collectively, and prevent them from living freely in their land. The Israeli forces also commit daily crimes during their invasions and incursions into Palestinian cities, towns, and camps, leaving behind deaths, injuries, and infrastructure damage.

In the same context, following a security assessment session led by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with the participation of security and intelligence leaders, after the Israeli army launched its most violent military operation in the Jenin camp since 2005, the Israeli army decided to deploy additional battalions to the West Bank and intensify its focused operations in the northern West Bank. Resisting significant pressure for a large-scale operation in the north, it was decided to deploy three military battalions and special units to streets, intersections, gathering centers, and hot spots throughout the West Bank. The Israeli decisions also included: enhancing intelligence efforts, increasing the arrests of activists, launching limited focused attacks in the northern West Bank, and addressing the “Paying the Price” terrorist attacks carried out by settlers on Palestinian towns.

In fact, the parallel war that Israel is waging in the West Bank takes advantage of the world’s preoccupation with the war in Gaza and creates an opportunity for the Israeli occupation to establish a new reality on the ground, facilitating the passing of schemes to eliminate the Palestinian cause by deepening the silent displacement crime in the West Bank and seizing more lands.

In light of the ongoing violations by the occupation forces in the West Bank, many questions arise about Israel’s real objectives in igniting the situation in the West Bank, and the expected implications on the future of Benjamin Netanyahu’s government. Especially since the long-standing assumptions about how Israel should deal with the challenges posed by Hamas in Gaza entirely avoid the corresponding aspect that there are no comparable assumptions in the West Bank, indicating a lack of awareness of the security burden imposed by settlement movement and its reckless actions there.

**Hence, the topic can be approached by studying the following elements:**

### **First: The Settlement Scene in the West Bank:**

To clarify the situation in the West Bank, it is initially necessary to highlight the settlement reality in the West Bank, which has shown its impact clearly during the ongoing war in Gaza. The concept of “settlement” refers to a type of colonialism through a massive housing process in the occupied land under the pretext of development and establishing the dominant state’s control over the annexed land, which it now considers part of itself. However, it differs from

colonialism as it justifies itself with religious and ideological grounds. The idea of “the return of the people to the Promised Land and the building of the temple” has been one of the foundations of settlement in Palestine. From the perspective of international law, the settlements in the West Bank are illegal and violate the Fourth Geneva Convention, which forbids the occupying power from relocating its population to the occupied areas.

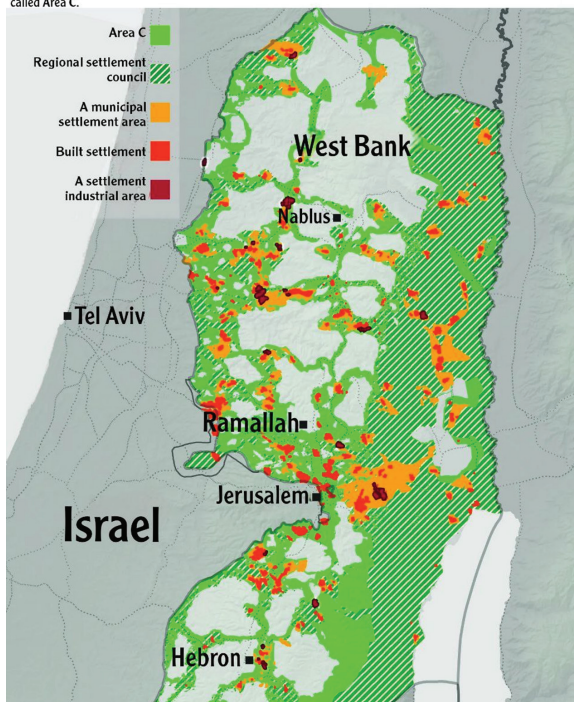
### *Stages of Settlement in the West Bank:*

It is important to note that Israeli settlement in the West Bank did not become a regulated, lawful matter before the June 1967 War when legal systems were amended through a combination of illegal military orders that legalized the confiscation of public and private Palestinian lands and their seizure for building settlements and their associated services. By 2023, the number of settlements in the West Bank had reached 176, with 186 settlements housing approximately 730,000 Israeli settlers.

Looking at the map of the occupied West Bank, Israeli settlements now form 42% of the land, with 68% of Area C controlled for the benefit of settlements. This area includes 87% of the West Bank’s natural resources, 90% of its forests, and 49% of its roads, as shown in the following map:

By controlling Area C, settlement policies have solidified the project of fragmenting the West Bank, isolating Palestinian citizens in limited, fragmented areas, dividing markets

There are now more than 500,000 Israeli settlers living in 237 settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, which includes East Jerusalem. Israel prohibits Palestinians from developing the areas it allocates to regional settlement councils, which constitute 70 percent of the area under Israeli administrative control in the West Bank, called Area C.



and local communities, preventing economic and social development, and violating Palestinian human rights. This also invalidates any possibility of establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank.

By returning to the period of Ottoman rule, despite some laws enacted by the High Porte to prevent Jewish ownership in Palestine, such as the pilgrimage tax for Jews and the restriction of staying no longer than 31 days, several lands were sold to Jews with the High Porte's approval. Nevertheless, the number of Jews remained limited during Ottoman rule, and the British Mandate became the real incubator for the growth of settlements and the increase in Jewish numbers by enacting legislation that opened the doors for Jewish immigration to Palestinian lands and facilitated their land ownership.

During the British Mandate, settlements were clustered on the Palestinian coast, which formed the borders of the Zionist entity until 1948 when the United Nations issued a decision granting Jews 55% of the land of the Arab State of Palestine. The Zionists had prepared for this decision by establishing settlements within the "Tower and Stockade" strategy, where the new settlements were mere wooden walls and towers guarded by a few guards. Subsequently, the UN commissions ensured that settlement locations were within the lands of the State of Israel in the partition plan, which the extremist Israeli finance minister today seeks to recreate by demanding a change in the security concept in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) with an emphasis on creating buffer zones around settlements and roads and preventing Arabs from entering them, even for harvesting. The Palestinian Prime Minister addressed this in his recent speech, saying, "The purpose of this toxic call is to steal more Palestinian lands and annex them to the existing colonies and random settlements to deepen and expand colonialism in the land of the State of Palestine as part of the gradual and unannounced annexation of the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem."

## **Second: The Current Scene in the West Bank Since the Start of the War:**

Since October 7, 2023, Israel has acted with a mix of violence and terrorism by Israeli settlers against unarmed Palestinian civilians, with a lack of awareness that the violence in the West Bank would understandably ignite if these practices continue. This requires a reevaluation of these racist policies, especially with no guarantees of the start of violence or predictions of its timing. Lessons from recent history support this conviction, as in May 2021, during the "Guardians of

the Walls” operation, Hamas managed to unify the fronts and sparked a violent wave across the West Bank, with mass protests and clashes extending to East Jerusalem. Nothing prevents Hamas from repeating this experience.

This is evident from the operations carried out against the occupation since the start of the Al-Aqsa Flood and in the two weeks following the operation, where Palestinian actions against the Israeli army tripled compared to the situation before October 7. Multiple Media sources in Israel indicated this escalation.

The effective resistance actions in the West Bank can be attributed to a long list of groups that have become more technically proficient and rooted in the ground, especially in areas with camps in the northern West Bank where the Palestinian Authority’s control is more limited.

However, this does not mean that peaceful resistance has been absent from the West Bank since the start of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation. The occupied territories have seen an increase in protests supporting Gaza, resulting in the Israeli forces arresting over a thousand Palestinians, nearly half of them associated with Hamas. They also confiscated dozens of weapons, and these confrontations resulted in the deaths of approximately 105 Palestinians. The Palestinian Authority allowed these protests as the only outlet for the Palestinian people, with some members of the Fatah movement issuing positive statements supporting civilians in Gaza and even Hamas, possibly out of recognition that the violence perpetrated by Hamas in 2007 must be set aside. Before concluding about the situation’s outcomes in the West Bank, it is crucial to monitor the occupation’s movements since October 7 and interpret their implications.

Since the start of the Al-Aqsa Flood, the occupation has adopted a policy of collective punishment against all Palestinians, not just those in Gaza, reflecting a principle of revenge against everyone and a plain moral suicide. Since then, armed settlers, under the protection of the army and police, have evacuated 15 agricultural compounds inside the West Bank, vandalized water tanks, and cut off electricity to push Palestinian residents, especially in Hebron, to leave. They intended to forcibly displace Palestinians not only in Gaza but in the West Bank as well.

Movements began by considering isolating Israeli settlements within the West Bank through statements by the extreme right-wing finance minister Bezalel Smotrich, reflecting a major fraud operation that the occupation intends to

implement in the West Bank by creating buffer zones around settlements and preventing Palestinians from entering even to harvest olives. This call reflects the occupation's intentions and draws attention to racism, incitement, imbalance, and preparation to annex these lands legally. This plan is not new to the Zionist entity but follows a method established long ago, traceable to the early stages of settlement in the occupied West Bank.

**The main characteristics of the scene in the West Bank since the October 7 attack can be described as follows:**

### *1. Widespread Arrest Campaigns and Continuous Assaults:*

Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem house over 700,000 settlers who have used all forms of violence against Palestinians for years. Before the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, violence by extremist Israeli settlers against the Palestinian civilians in the West Bank had significantly increased, with about a hundred attacks recorded monthly in 2023, according to the United Nations.

Since the Israeli war on Gaza, assaults on Palestinians have intensified, including property damage, roadblocks, blocking access to lands and water sources, setting fire to cars or homes, theft of livestock, burning or cutting down olive trees, stone-throwing, vandalizing churches and mosques, and various forms of physical and verbal harassment. And in several cases, settlers used live ammunition to kill and injure Palestinians.

Additionally, Israeli authorities have significantly increased their use of administrative detention, a form of indiscriminate detention of Palestinians across the occupied West Bank, alongside expanded emergency measures allowing inhumane and degrading treatment of prisoners.

According to the Israeli human rights organization "HaMoked," from October 1 to November 1, the total number of Palestinians held under administrative detention, without charge or trial, rose from 1,319 to 2,070. According to a report by the Palestinian Prisoners Club, detainees were threatened, severely beaten, and abused, with some even suffering fractures. Additionally, Israeli soldiers photographed groups of detainees with the Israeli flag during filming and numbered some detainees by writing specific numbers on their foreheads. Relatives were also arrested and tortured, including daughters and wives, often held as hostages. The occupation forces launched an arrest campaign targeting

journalists and social media activists in the West Bank who covered daily events and summoned other journalists and activists, warning them against incitement or praising Gaza.

## *2. Continuous Raids:*

The Israeli army has raided large areas in the West Bank, clashing with armed men and protesters before confrontations erupted, with the fiercest recorded in the Jenin camp in the northern West Bank, which became into a war zone where Israel used significant firepower and drones, while armed men tried to repel the invading forces with gunfire, ambushes, and explosive charges.

The occupation forces also carried out several infiltrations into areas in the northern West Bank, such as Nablus, Tulkarm, and Qalqilya, arresting citizens and injuring others. In Jerusalem, Israeli forces raided the Shuafat refugee camp, arresting several Palestinians and raiding their homes.

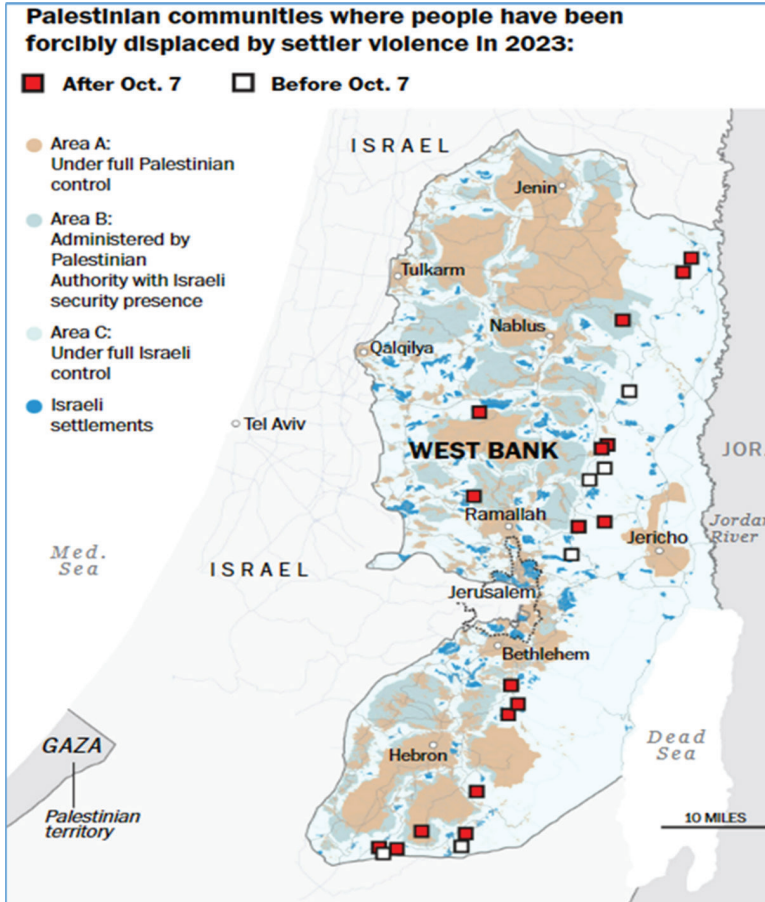
In the southern West Bank, Bethlehem's Al-Khader area was a target for Israeli incursions, along with Hebron, where Dura, Idna, Beit Fajjar, and Tubas saw confrontations between Palestinians and the Israeli forces entering the towns with bulldozers and military vehicles. The occupation forces raided Aqabat Jaber and Ein Sultan camps in Jericho governorate, arresting several individuals. Soldiers raided homes of Palestinians in the areas they raided, taking detainees to temporary detention centers before relocating them to main interrogation centers or prisons.

## *3. Silent Displacement:*

The Israeli newspaper "Haaretz" revealed a leaflet believed to have been distributed by settlers in the West Bank, threatening residents with forced displacement to Jordan. The leaflet stated that " Hamas committed the greatest historical mistake by declaring war on us," referring to the October 7 attack. The leaflet, unsigned by any entity, addressed Palestinians as "enemy residents in the Jewish West Bank," continuing, "You wanted a Nakba like 1948; we swear we will bring down the greatest disaster on your heads soon," adding that they had the opportunity to flee before being compulsorily expelled.

This is part of Israel's crime of silent displacement in the West Bank, insisting on igniting the situation in the West Bank alongside the ongoing war in

Gaza. However, this wrongdoing did not start recently but has been gradually implemented over the past decades, intensified after October 7 as Israel seeks to control more West Bank lands and expel their residents.



Source: B'Tselem Organization

A report from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) confirmed that at least 98 Palestinian families, comprising over 800 individuals, were expelled from 15 pastoral or Bedouin communities in Area C since October 7. According to United Nations estimates, nearly 2,000 Palestinians have been displaced since the beginning of 2023 due to the ongoing settler violence in the West Bank, particularly in Area C, which constitutes 61% of its area and is considered by the international community as the foundation for the future Palestinian state.

According to the report, 14 Palestinians, half of them children, were displaced after being threatened with death by armed Israeli settlers if they did not leave, from the “Khirbet Zatouna” area in the southern West Bank. In late October 2023, the Palestinians had to dismantle about 50 buildings and evacuate the area with all their livestock, numbering 5,000 heads. OCHA previously documented settler assaults on this community, the latest occurring on October 12, 21, and 26, leaving about two-thirds of the Palestinian pastoral community displaced.

Additionally, 40 Palestinians were displaced from the southern pastoral community during the same month, with armed Israeli settlers raiding the area and threatening residents with death if they did not vacate within an hour. On the same day, eight Palestinian families comprised of 51 people were displaced from the “Shahada and Hamlan” pastoral community in Nablus, northern West Bank, after settlers threatened to kill them and setting fire to their tents at night.

A report published by the American magazine “Foreign Policy” stated that Dror Etkes, director and founder of the “Kerem Navot” organization monitoring settlement activities, noted that since Hamas’s attack on October 7, settlers have taken advantage of the war cover to redraw the demographic map of the West Bank. The idea is to expel Palestinians from Area C, confining them to pockets within Area A, which includes urban centers in the Palestinian territories.

Although attempts to pressure Palestinians to leave Area C are not new, Etkes said some settlers and Israeli officials see the Hamas-Israel war as an opportunity to expand the initiative by escalating violence and intimidating Palestinians. The report pointed to the spread of calls for the mass expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in the West Bank and Gaza since the war with Hamas began, described by rights groups as “normalizing expulsion in the Israeli rhetoric.”

The report highlighted that in southern Hebron hills, the main area for displacement so far, Palestinian and Israeli activists say settlers raid homes, beat civilians, shoot, cut off electricity, block roads, and issue final warnings to leave or face death.

#### *4. Arms Distribution Among Settlers:*

Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, one of the prominent far-right ministers in the Israeli government, granted tens of thousands of permits to carry weapons to Israelis, announcing that “Israel is arming itself.” Ben-Gvir

distributed assault rifles to settlers and said on the “X” platform on October 12, “So far, about 4,000 weapons have been purchased out of about 20,000 pieces to be purchased,” adding that approximately 2,000 weapons had already been distributed to dozens of settlements in the northern and coastal areas, with more weapons to be distributed to further settlements.

On November 4, the American newspaper “The New York Times” reported that the Israeli government requested 24,000 assault rifles from the Biden administration. The request raised concerns among American legislators and some State Department officials, fearing that the weapons might end up in the hands of settlers and civilian militias trying to force the Palestinians to leave their lands, which could fuel violence in the occupied West Bank.

The deal is worth \$34 million and was requested directly from American arms manufacturers but requires State Department approval and congressional notification. This supposed deal overlaps with Ben-Gvir distributing rifles to settlers in the West Bank and forming special militias called “security teams.” According to sources familiar with the weapons orders, Israel confirmed that the rifles would be used by the police, but it also implied the possibility of giving them to civilians.

Overall, the security situation in Israel after the October 7 attacks pushed Israelis to arm themselves, with the number of gun owners expected to triple. Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir made it a priority to ease gun licensing standards for Israelis, especially settlers.

### *5. Siege and Curfew:*

Immediately after the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, the occupation imposed a strict siege on West Bank cities and villages, closed the crossings connecting them to Israel, and closed the only exit connecting them to Jordan. Additionally, the Israeli army closes the main entrances to West Bank cities late at night, setting up military checkpoints at city entrances, conducting extensive searches enforcing maximum inspection measures on Palestinians, including searching mobile phones and arresting anyone found publishing anti-Israel posts on social media or having defiant images on their phones.

The closure included all Palestinian governorates, leaving only one narrow exit for each governorate connecting it to the rest through settlement roads,

complicating the Palestinian movement. Roads were closed with dirt mounds, concrete blocks, metal gates, or manned checkpoints.

## *6. Financial Blockade:*

In recent days, the occupation government decided to deduct a new portion of tax revenues on the pretext that the Palestinian Authority funds Gaza with approximately \$140 million monthly, with the majority of this money allegedly going to Hamas, which the Palestinian Authority interprets as a political decision to further isolate Gaza from the West Bank.

The Israeli cabinet had voted to transfer the frozen tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority but stopped the funds allocated to Gaza. A statement from the Israeli Prime Minister's office said the security cabinet voted to deduct the funds previously allocated to Gaza, in addition to continuous deductions to compensate the money the Palestinian Authority pays to prisoners convicted by Israel of terrorism and their families.

Ongoing monthly transfers make up about 65% of the Palestinian Authority's annual budget. Lacking state status legally, the occupation is responsible for collecting customs duties and other tax revenues on its behalf. Israel had made deductions in the past based on a 2018 law allowing it to compensate for the Palestinian Authority's payments to the resistance fighters and their families. However, it only partially supports this policy, fully aware that the Palestinian Authority is dangerously close to financial collapse, preventing it from performing its security duties, further increasing the security burden on Israel.

According to the vision of the extremist Israeli National Security Minister, the Palestinian Authority should not receive a single shekel, especially since it evaded condemning Hamas's October 7 attack. Instead, Ramallah issued vague statements about protecting civilians on both sides while strongly condemning the Israeli military attack, indicating that the Authority is not an alternative to Hamas but rather an ally.

Nevertheless, extremists on the Israeli side, blaming the Palestinian Authority, forget that since 2007, Hamas in Gaza has managed to develop five funding channels, four of which operate under arrangements involving Israel or under its supervision.

### **Third: Israeli Objectives in the West Bank:**

Israel's policy towards the West Bank primarily focuses on solidifying the status quo on the ground and eliminating any hopes for an independent Palestinian state by expanding settlements. After the extreme right-wing coalition led by Netanyahu took power in Israel, Israeli settlers in the West Bank used the highest levels of violence, with 2022 and 2023 being described as the most violent in decades, intensifying the violence between settlers and Palestinians.

However, the events of October 7th poured gasoline on the fire, and the situation in the West Bank is on the verge of explosion due to Netanyahu's government giving settlers the green light to use violence, taking advantage of the world's focus on the war in Gaza.

**In summary, Israel's objectives in the occupied West Bank after October 7th are:**

#### *Declared Objectives:*

Israel claims there are terrorist cells in the West Bank, some linked to Hamas, necessitating the urgent protection of Israel's interior. To illustrate this, an Israeli reconnaissance plane dropped leaflets in the sky over the Jenin camp, stating, "The IDF's activity in the Jenin camp was due to Hamas's terrorist activities and other organizations. Do not cooperate with them."

#### *Undeclared Objectives:*

1. Stopping Conflict Spread: The Israeli war on Gaza has intensified the anger of West Bank Palestinians, who already suffer from settler violence without any deterrence, increasing fears of the conflict spreading to a second front, the much larger West Bank. Hamas's warnings of spreading the conflict to include the West Bank and Lebanon prompted Israel to use extreme violence in the West Bank, claiming to target resistance elements. The real objectives behind Israeli measures in the occupied territories are to separate the West Bank from Gaza, as clearly stated by Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, calling for buffer zones in the West Bank, excluding Arabs, reflecting Israel's true goals of stealing more Palestinian lands and annexing them to the existing colonies and random outposts to deepen and expand settlement in the land of a Palestinian state.

2. Reality on the Ground: For decades, occupation forces have confronted everything Palestinian on occupied lands, seizing more Palestinian lands. The current war presents an opportunity for Israel to employ its retaliatory policies more violently amidst the absence of accountability or significant attention to what is happening in the West Bank. Since October 7th, Israel has been imposing gradual displacement of West Bank Palestinians from their lands, using tactics to disrupt Palestinian lives by targeting them economically, such as destroying olive groves. According to Palestinian sources cited by the Chinese news agency “Xinhua,” settlers cut down 170 ancient olive trees, aged 50 to 80 years, in the villages of Yasuf and Al-Sawiya east of Salfit city, targeting Palestinian heritage as well. Palestinians are also prohibited from harvesting olives in season. Additionally, Israel is displacing Palestinian shepherds from their villages, killing their livestock, depriving them of water and pastures, and seizing vast areas of these lands.

3. Prolonging the War: Personally, Benjamin Netanyahu seeks to extend the current war. Despite not making decisions unilaterally, he aims to prolong the conflict duration due to the significant decline in his popularity and increased accusations of failing in the war on Gaza, even facing calls for immediate resignation. Netanyahu knows that the end of the war will coincide with the end of his government, so achieving a significant victory in this ongoing battle can give coalition members, including Netanyahu, hope. This likelihood is very slim, especially since the issue of the Israeli prisoners held by Hamas remains unresolved, complicating the government’s position, knowing that submitting to Hamas’s use of the prisoner card and agreeing to an exchange will be portrayed as a victory for Hamas, not Netanyahu’s government. Thus, the Israeli Prime Minister is obliged to prolong the war, even if it places immense pressure on the army facing a fierce war in Gaza, leaving no alternative for Israel but to attempt to assert control over the volatile West Bank front that can explode at any moment.

4. Eradicating Resistance in the West Bank: Israel fears the West Bank exploding while facing a catastrophic war in Gaza. Israel’s concerns in the West Bank root from attacks carried out by Palestinians with varied loyalties but united by general disdain for the occupation, especially after recent polls showed massive popular support for armed factions among Palestinians. Even before the current aggression on Gaza, the West Bank saw increasing resistance operations against the occupation. Israel’s fears have been intensified by the emergence of new armed groups in the West Bank and the escalation of settler violence. The recent escalation in armed conflict and the current stalemate in Palestinian-Israeli political dialogue provide Palestinian factions an opportunity to reorganize in the

West Bank, especially with the presence of a right-wing Israeli government that supports settlements, rejects any political partnership, and commits genocide and displacement of Gaza's Palestinians.

In recent years before the aggression on Gaza, Hamas adopted a dual-track approach, conducting security operations to hold Israelis accountable for their crimes in the occupied West Bank and providing financial support to resistance groups to acquire weapons. This strategy has led to successful operations by resistance fighters in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem. The Qassam Brigades described these operations as the beginning of a new phase of resistance against the occupation in the West Bank. Thus, Israel applies a proactive approach in its West Bank policy, fearing an uncontrollable explosion, especially with the Palestinian "Lions' Den" group calling on West Bank citizens to head to contact points, enter settlements, and engage settlers in confrontations in a statement stating the "human flood" date in the West Bank.

It is worth noting here Israel's targeting of the Jenin refugee camp and previous resistance operations: Among the airstrikes carried out by Tel Aviv on the West Bank, especially in the northern region, was the targeting of militants in the Jenin camp in the northern West Bank. According to observers, the Israeli occupation army continues to destroy the infrastructure in the West Bank, particularly in the Jenin and Nur Shams camps, where it carried out a series of incursions during which it bulldozed streets and destroyed water, phone, sewage, and electricity networks. Israeli machinery also demolished public squares and memorials.

The Israeli army launched nighttime raids on the camp and an airstrike on a mosque in central Jenin, which Israel claims is used "as a command center" by Hamas and Islamic Jihad for "planning terrorist attacks." While airstrikes have been common in Gaza for a long time before the recent escalation, they are relatively rare in the West Bank.

An analysis published by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) highlighted various indicators pointing to the emergence of new military infrastructure in the Jenin and Nablus areas, similar to what already exists in Gaza. The report interpreted this as a result of the weakening control of the Palestinian Authority, which is based in Ramallah, over the area. According to Iran's Arabic-language Al-Wafaq newspaper, the leader of Islamic Jihad in Palestine, Ziad al-Nakhalah, said that the arming of the West Bank is being carried out according to instructions issued in 2014 by Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

The MEMRI report also highlighted the increasing missile launches from the Jenin area towards Israeli settlements. These projectiles were launched by a Hamas-affiliated group called the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades (Ayyash Battalion). The report mentioned the Joint Operations Room in Gaza, a comprehensive organization activated primarily during rounds of fighting with Israel.

Furthermore, there are other active groups in the West Bank, which increases the military cooperation among Palestinian armed factions. In this context, the “Lions’ Den” group is noteworthy. This resistance group emerged in the old city of Nablus in August 2022 and initially included around 100 young men from the post-Second Intifada generation, affiliated with Hamas and Islamic Jihad. A more organized and larger imitation of the Joint Operations Room in Gaza is the “Jenin Brigade,” also known as the “Jenin Battalion,” which was established in the camp in 2021 and is divided into independent cells.

This carefully coordinated strategy has produced a number of successful operations carried out by resistance fighters in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem. The latest of these operations in 2023 was the July 6 attack in the Kedumim area east of Qalqilya, when Ahmad Yasin Hilal Ghaydan got out of his car and directly shot an Israeli soldier, killing him instantly. This attack came immediately after the Israeli occupation forces withdrew from the Jenin camp, following the July 3 massacre that resulted in the martyrdom of 12 Palestinians. Two days earlier, on July 4, a car-ramming and stabbing attack occurred on Pinhas Rosen Street, north of Tel Aviv, injuring 10 Israelis, four of them critically.

The double operation near the Eli settlement south of Nablus on June 20, which killed four Israelis, sparked widespread Israeli outrage. This operation came one day after Israeli occupation forces raided the Jenin camp to arrest a Hamas member. During that raid, six Palestinians were martyred, and about 100 others were injured.

On January 28, 2023, Khairi Alqam carried out a shooting operation inside the Neve Yaakov settlement in Jerusalem, killing at least seven Israelis and injuring 10 others, just one day after the Israeli forces committed a massacre in Jenin camp, which resulted in the death of nine Palestinians.

Thus, the “Paying the Price” strategy adopted by the two main Palestinian resistance factions has proven their ability to inflict pain on the occupation forces and launch effective operations against Israeli soldiers and settlers. The

history of this strategy dates back to April 28, 2022, when the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades claimed responsibility for an attack on the Ariel settlement in the northern occupied West Bank, in which an Israeli security guard was killed. This retaliatory attack was part of a series of responses to Israel's desecration and assaults on the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. At the time, the Qassam Brigades described the attack as "the beginning of a new phase of resistance against the occupation."

It is also essential to note that resistance in the West Bank has become increasingly clear and impactful, largely due to the alliance of the Qassam Brigades, the adoption of unique tactics, and the secret activation of military cells. In some cases, the movement refrains from claiming responsibility for security reasons, ensuring its continued ability to carry out such operations, which indicates a wave of arming in the West Bank for executing these operations, as is evident from the following.

## **Fourth: Dangerous Repercussions:**

**Analyzing the situation in the West Bank, several observations are noteworthy:**

1. Before October 7th, all indicators pointed to the outbreak of a Palestinian uprising being only a matter of time. Given the current atmosphere, such an uprising is likely to erupt soon, possibly extending the war in Gaza and becoming the most violent in decades. The more atrocious the settlers' actions become, the more likely a full-scale uprising will break out across the West Bank.
2. The danger of expanding arms to settlers without standards must be recognized, as it could turn them into unrestrained killers, especially since they live among Palestinians and cannot be separated from them. Additionally, during recent events, they were given the green light by the Israeli government to use all forms of violence without accountability. They also hold more hatred and anger following the October 7th attacks, with the motive and opportunity to vent their built-up anger on Palestinians.
3. Despite Netanyahu's expressed fears of the West Bank exploding, he currently stands on shaky political ground, with growing public anger over his failure to address the October 7th attacks and his failure to

manage the war. However, he remains in office thanks to the far-right settler parties mostly concerned with seizing West Bank lands. He cannot order a campaign against the settler violence or stop them, as this would conflict with the far-right coalition members, risking his fate if this coalition disintegrates.

4. Concerns remain about the attrition of Israeli deterrence in the West Bank after Gaza, a significant factor for Israel, fearing the opening of other fronts. Therefore, Israel seeks to show its control over the situation in the West Bank to prevent this.
5. Arming settlers in the West Bank in response to the October 7th operation, Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir pledged to arm civilian security teams, especially around towns near Israel's borders, illegal settlements in the West Bank, and cities inhabited by both Palestinians and Jews. So far, around 150,000 firearms have been distributed to settlers, according to a parliamentary security committee. The Israeli government's request for 24,000 assault rifles from the United States raised scrutiny from the American legislators and some State Department officials, fearing the weapons might end up with settlers and civilian militias attempting to force the Palestinians to leave their lands in the West Bank. The proposed three batches of semi-automatic and automatic rifles worth \$34 million are requested directly from American arms manufacturers but require State Department approval and congressional notification. Israel says the rifles will be used by the national police force but also implied they could be given to civilians, according to sources familiar with the orders, in the New York Times.

These measures will lead to the creation of civilian militias specifically targeting Palestinians in the West Bank. A report published by Haaretz noted that 86 of the 100 towns with high gun ownership rates are West Bank settlements. The report added that in some settlements, licensed firearms account for a third of the population, most of which are West Bank settlements, meaning a quarter of West Bank settlers, about 100,000 people, hold licensed firearms, a very high number.

## Conclusion:

There is no exaggeration in the Shin Bet reports about Washington and the European Union's warnings that the situation in the West Bank has reached a boiling point. Several contexts might lead to an escalation, including the rising number of victims in the West Bank since last month and attempts to compulsorily displace and terrorize Palestinians by an unhinged occupation regime. Many Palestinians have lost hope for a political solution after 75 years of their just cause. For them, life under relentless military occupation only fuels more despair and extremism.

On the Israeli side, Washington appears the most rational, expressing awareness of the looming problems. The Biden administration urged Israel to restrain its extremist settlers, with President Biden saying their actions and incitement "pour gasoline" on an already unstable situation. Even in the best-case scenario for Israel, even if it succeeds in taming Gaza by silencing Hamas's guns and rockets, a conceptually unlikely feat, there is no reason to believe Tel Aviv will be able to control the West Bank situation before it explodes.

## Section Seven

# The Economic Dimension in the Gaza War: Motives and Economic Impacts

ABDEL FATTAH EL-GEHALI - DR. AHMED SULTAN - AHMED BAYOUMI - AYA HAMDY  
MOHAMED SABRY - ASMAA FAHMY

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Despite the world and the global economy not needing more shocks, disasters, and various challenges—political, environmental, health, and economic—the geopolitical transformations in the Middle East have produced a bundle of disasters and crises from which the world and its economy have not been spared. This is evident from the launch of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation on October 7, followed by Israel’s response with the Iron Swords operation in its three stages. The war’s consequences have resonated unexpectedly in the international community, threatening the global economy, as seen in the initial days of the war and its escalation.

The severity of the war in Gaza and its security and economic repercussions are worsened by the already turbulent regional security environment in the Middle East. The outbreak of war has inflamed the region, extending the escalation beyond Gaza to include southern Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and the Red Sea passage. The economic repercussions have intensified both regionally and globally, placing major economies at risk of recession and instability, especially since the global economy has not yet fully recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.

Given this backdrop, this section aims to provide a detailed look at the economic repercussions of the Al-Aqsa Flood on the Israeli economy. This includes an overview of the Israeli economy before the war on Gaza, an analysis on the potential economic losses affecting the decision to stop the war, and an examination of the war's impact on Gaza's economy. Additionally, the effects of the Al-Aqsa Flood on European Union countries in light of their relations with Israel will be discussed, followed by an analysis of the war's impact on the energy sector and global and regional gas supplies, and finally, a reassessment of the overall economic repercussions, including Israel's potential benefits from the outbreak of war.

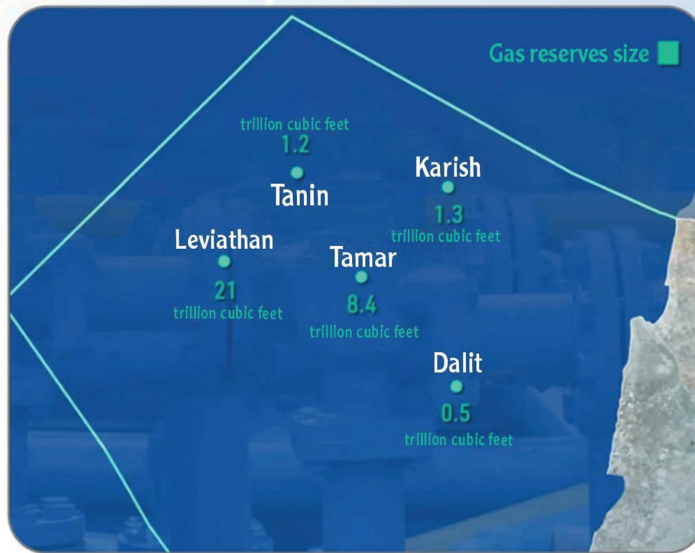
## **First: The Israeli Economy Before the Al-Aqsa Flood:**

Israel's economy is considered strong and advanced globally in many aspects, particularly as a global center for innovation and technology. Israel encourages the formation of startups and invests heavily in advanced technology sectors. The high-tech sector is a foundation of the Israeli economy, with many startups and large companies in biotechnology, software, telecommunications, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence. These companies play a crucial role in cultivating innovation, expanding the industrial base, and increasing exports, contributing up to 6% of Israel's GDP, which is the main driver behind its rapid growth. According to 2022 data, the high-tech sector accounts for 18.1% of GDP and around 50% of total exports.

The diamond industry is also significant; as Israel has become a global center for diamond trade and manufacturing, with one of the four major diamond exchanges worldwide. The chemicals and pharmaceuticals sectors are other noteworthy components of Israel's economy, benefiting from government grants, tax incentives, and low-cost financing.

Additionally, Israel holds a regional position in the gas sector, particularly since 2010, despite its production and exports not being massive by global standards. The current developments in Gaza could potentially influence both Israel and its neighboring countries, like Egypt and Jordan, as well as Europe, which benefits from gas imports from Egypt. In 2022, Israel produced approximately 22 billion cubic meters of gas from its Leviathan and Tamar fields, making it a significant regional gas producer and exporter. As evident in the following figure:

## Gas fields in Israel



Source:

Researcher / Announced data

Based on that, Israel's recent natural gas discoveries have transformed the regional energy landscape and attracted billions of dollars in foreign investments. However, the ongoing conflict with Gaza could hinder investment in gas fields and hinder efforts to attract more global energy companies. One significant investment was Chevron's acquisition of stakes in two major Israeli offshore gas fields for nearly \$4 billion in 2020. Israel is considered the second-largest natural gas producer in the Eastern Mediterranean after Egypt, with an average production of 276 billion cubic feet annually, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Israel's ambition to increase natural gas production by 15 billion cubic meters by 2025 involves improving existing fields and accelerating new explorations, as evidenced by recent exploration licenses granted to companies like Italy's Eni, and BP.

This ambition attracts significant foreign direct investment, thanks to a favorable business environment and available investment opportunities, strengthening the economy, improving infrastructure, and creating new jobs. According to Bloomberg, total foreign direct investment in 2022 was \$29.32 billion, with 72% coming from the United States.

Israel's economy has shown sturdy growth over recent years, with an economic growth rate of 8.6% in 2021 and 6.5% in 2022, high compared to other economies. Before the Gaza conflict, the 2023 budget was about 484 billion shekels (\$119 billion), with the 2024 budget expected to reach 514 billion shekels (\$126 billion), the largest in Israel's history. However, due to the war, the Ministry of Finance reporting on 12 October a budget deficit of 1.5% in September, up from the previous forecast of 1% of GDP.

Regarding Israeli foreign trade within the framework of its extensive economic relations, trade between Israel and the United States represents 33%. Israel was the first country with which the United States signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The volume of trade in 2022 amounted to approximately \$50.6 billion. Trade with the European Union also represents about 33%, amounting to approximately €46.8 billion. This trade is regulated by a number of agreements signed with the European Union in various sectors, including agriculture (in 2010), pharmaceuticals (agreement in 2012), and aviation (agreement in 2018).

Tel Aviv enjoys an extensive trade network and economic cooperation with many countries. Israeli exports are characterized by their diversity and the quality of products, including agricultural and technological exports, industrial equipment, diamonds—which have become a global center for trade and manufacturing—jewelry, and medical instruments. The volume of exports reached \$166 billion, a record figure as Israeli exports increased by 15% in 2022. This was the second consecutive year that goods exports exceeded 52%.

### *A. The Beginning of the Decline of the Israeli Economy:*

Israel's economy entered 2023 with a current account surplus of about \$5 billion, a debt-to-GDP ratio of about 61%, and foreign exchange reserves of around \$200.9 billion. Despite the ongoing economic activity, global economic slowdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, and internal protests against judicial reforms impacted investments and growth.

According to a report from the Start-Up Nation Policy Institute, investments in Israeli startups fell by 68% in 2022 compared to the historic highpoints of \$27 billion in 2021. While the global trend contributed to this decline, the Gaza war significantly aggravates these drops.

The October 7, 2023, marked a turning point for Israel's economy as it launched the Iron Swords operation in Gaza, mobilizing about 360,000 reserve soldiers. This mobilization severely impacted the labor force, apparent from shortages in agricultural workers and the tourism sector, as many travel and airline companies canceled flights to Israel. Stores were vacated of customers, and partial gas field supply stoppages were implemented.

The central bank of Israel lowered its GDP growth forecast to 2.3% from a previous 3.0%, with some more pessimistic economists predicting a more significant drop of 15%, compared to a 0.4% decrease during the 2014 Gaza war and 0.5% during the 2006 Lebanon war.

## **Second: Implications of the Al-Aqsa Flood on the Israeli Economy:**

In the early weeks of the war, Israel's economy faced significant challenges due to political and security tensions, revealing both direct and indirect economic impacts:

### ***A. Direct Economic Impacts on Israel:***

1. Daily War Expenses: Economic forecasts for Israel were pessimistic due to the general mobilization disrupting food supply chains and a 12% annual decline in credit card transactions across most sectors. The Israeli Ministry of Finance revealed that the initial war expenses against Gaza could reach 200 billion shekels (\$51 billion), with daily combat expenses exceeding 1 billion shekels (about \$250 million), equating to approximately \$1.75 billion weekly and \$7.5 billion monthly. The Ministry estimated monthly losses of about \$2.4 billion due to the war, with thoughts to discharge thousands of reserve soldiers to mitigate the financial losses. The Minister of Finance, Bezalel Smotrich, confirmed that the 2023-2024 budget is no longer suitable and needs revision.

2. Reduced Economic Growth: The technology sector bore the brunt of the damage, with around 500 multinational companies contributing about 18% of Israel's GDP and roughly half of its exports. Among these companies is the American company "Intel," which established its presence in Israel in 1974 in the cities of Haifa, Petah Tikva, and occupied Jerusalem, with investments amounting to \$25 billion. This company has become a target for Palestinian factions, affecting approximately 12,800 workers and exports worth around \$3.6 billion. Moreover, Intel's products play a significant role in the manufacturing of autonomous vehicles, artificial intelligence, and the Israeli Iron Dome system. Other global companies affected by the conflict include "Nvidia" and "Tower," which manufacture electronic chips.

Additionally, rockets launched by Palestinian factions from the Gaza Strip have halted construction and building sectors, prompting more stringent safety measures that cost up to \$37 million daily.

Meanwhile, the credit rating agency "Moody's" indicated that Israel's debts are under review in light of the economic losses. "Fitch" has downgraded Israel's economic outlook to negative. Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich estimated that the direct cost of the war to Israel is about \$250 million daily, with total costs (both direct and indirect) exceeding at least \$300 million daily. As a result, the fiscal budget for 2023/2024 has become inadequate to cover both the direct costs (military operations) and indirect costs (compensation-related expenses). This economic situation has led the Israeli government to allocate a package of around \$25 million (about 100 million shekels) to assist affected startup tech companies.

Consequently, "Oxford Economics" announced a downward revision of Israel's economic growth forecast to 1.9% for 2023, down from the previous estimate of 2.9%. Growth expectations for the next year have also been reduced to 2.2% from 3.1%. Israel's GDP loss for this year is expected to reach 1.4%, according to the economic newspaper "The Marker," meaning that each month of war could result in a GDP loss of about 9 billion shekels (\$2.4 billion), potentially leading to stagnation in per capita GDP. JPMorgan Bank predicted that Israel's economy will shrink by 11% on an annualized basis in the last quarter of this year, impacted by the ongoing war in Gaza.

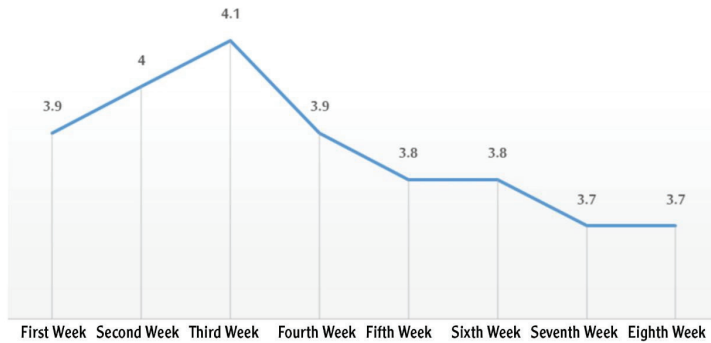
Moreover, the Israeli central bank announced that economic growth would decrease from 3% to 2.3%, and it had to sell \$30 billion to defend the Israeli

shekel. Additionally, many factories and facilities have ceased operations due to the call-up of around 360,000 reserve soldiers, leading to rising unemployment and inflation, alongside disrupted supply chains from seaports, resulting in severe food import shortages. This is compounded by the closure of the Tamar offshore natural gas field and the potential closure of northern gas fields.

3. Labor Shortage: Israel is losing \$600 million weekly due to a labor shortage; this includes the displacement of 144,000 Israelis, the absence of 310,000 workers, and decreased productivity from 210,000 workers. Additionally, more than 300,000 reserve soldiers have been called up, leading to a reallocation of human resources from civilian to military use. This negatively impacts civilian sectors, which have lost part of their economic capabilities to the military-industrial sector. The call-ups have affected approximately 10-15% of the workforce in the technology sector, which has been the fastest-growing sector for years. With 500 multinational companies, the tech industry contributes about 18% of the total GDP and nearly half of exports, meaning its performance has suffered significantly. The authorities have announced a \$25 million package (about 100 million shekels) to support affected tech startups. Moreover, around 2,000 farmers have joined the Israeli army, which means 70% of the agricultural sector's capacity has been damaged by the war.

4. Shekel Depreciation: The Israeli currency fell by about 5% since the war began, prompting the central bank to inject \$30 billion from reserves into the market, along with an additional \$15 billion through swaps. Despite this, the shekel dropped to its lowest level since 2012, trading at 3.72 shekels per dollar on November 27, 2023. Tel Aviv's stock exchange lost about 6.5% of its market capitalization on October 8, with losses reaching approximately \$40 billion.

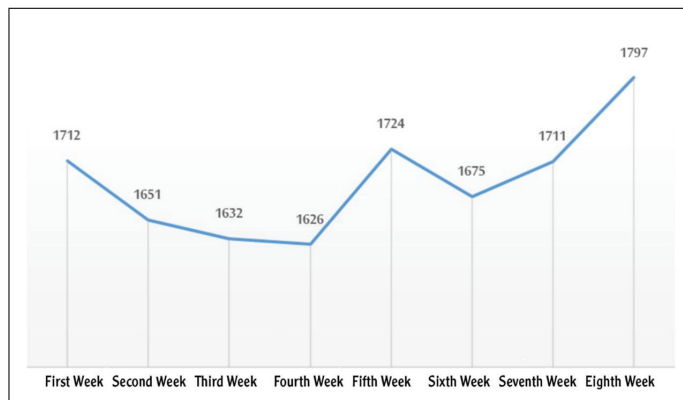
As a result, the Israeli central bank announced the sale of 15% of its dollar reserves to prevent the collapse of the shekel. This has led to investors fleeing Israel. Despite the "Bank of Israel" beginning to inject up to \$45 billion into the local market to stabilize the shekel's exchange rate amid the war-induced fluctuations, the currency's decline persists. Bloomberg warned that the shekel's depreciation could continue for an extended period, as the Israeli currency has become one of the worst-performing currencies this year due to fears of prolonged conflict and the exodus of investors from Israel. This situation is also impacting foreign currency reserves.



Source: Bank of Israel, Exchange rates- US Dollar.

5. Credit Rating Downgrade: While Israel's credit rating has never been downgraded by major agencies (Standard & Poor's Global, Moody's, and Fitch), Moody's and Fitch announced placing Israel's long-term sovereign debt ratings under review (currently rated A1) for potential downgrade due to the war. Standard & Poor's changed Israel's outlook from stable to negative. These reviews reflect the initial economic shock's impact, possibly followed by more severe evaluations.

6. Stock Market Losses: Tel Aviv's main stock index lost over \$25 billion in value since October 7, with a 9% loss in the first week of the war, the largest weekly loss in a decade. As the stock prices of the five largest banks have dropped by 20%. The TA-35 index dropped from 1830 points on October 5 to 1651 points on October 15, slightly improving to 1797 points on November 23.

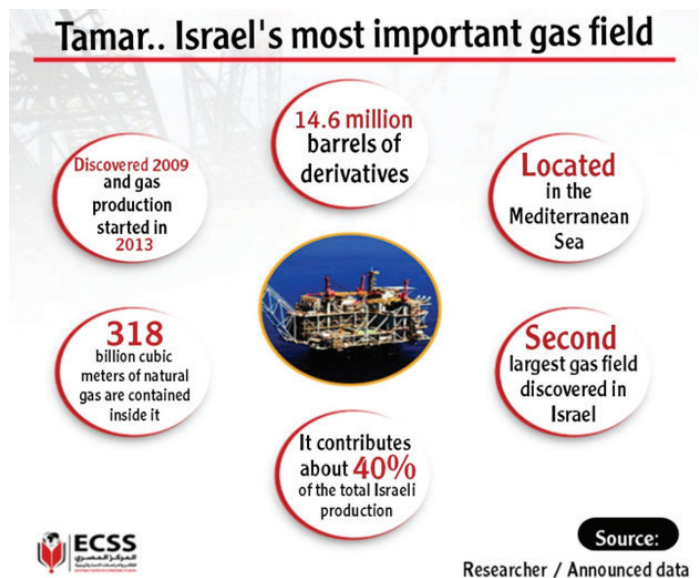


Source: Market Watch, Tel Aviv 35 Index

7. Tourism Sector Paralysis: Several foreign airlines have canceled their flights to and from the occupied territories, resulting in a significant decline in the number of tourists arriving in Israel. Israeli hotels are almost empty of tourists, as half of them are now occupied by refugees coming from the other side of the city. This has negatively impacted Israel's tourism sector, whose tourism revenues contributed around \$5.5 billion to the GDP, or approximately \$15.3 million daily, during the past year. However, tourism activity dropped by 76% year-on-year in October, according to the monthly report issued by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics. Additionally, flights at Ben Gurion Airport decreased by 80%, according to a report by the website "Secret Flights," which tracks international air traffic. On October 12, the government presented a plan to provide a government guarantee covering war risk insurance for Israeli airlines, amounting to \$6 billion.

8. Reduced Gas Export Revenues: Israel, the second-largest natural gas producer in the Eastern Mediterranean after Egypt, produces an average of 276 billion cubic feet annually. However, the war prompted Chevron to stop production at the Tamar gas field, contributing 40% of domestic production, costing Israel about \$200 million monthly or \$6.7 million daily in lost revenues. Israel exported 9.21 billion cubic meters of gas to Egypt and Jordan in 2022.

Gas production from six wells ranges from 7.1 to 8.5 million cubic meters daily. Israel halted production at a gas field on October 9, seeking alternative fuel sources like coal and fuel oil to meet electricity needs, as 70% of Israel's electricity comes from natural gas. A prolonged Tamar stoppage would necessitate using Leviathan field gas for domestic needs instead of exports.



However, this is not the first time that gas facilities have been shut down due to the war in Gaza. During the clashes in 2021, in the wake of the Sheikh Jarrah events, the Israeli government issued instructions to Chevron to temporarily shut down the Tamar platform. Although the facility is located about 24 km off the coast of Ashkelon, it remains vulnerable to attacks from Gaza.

The 2021 Gaza conflict previously triggered a temporary Tamar shutdown. Despite its location 24 km off Ashkelon, the facility remains vulnerable to Gaza-based attacks. Current tensions may delay expansion plans like increasing Tamar's capacity by 65% by 2025.

In addition, the clashes and the increased intensity of the conflict could significantly affect Israel's ability to export gas to neighboring countries, either by disrupting energy supplies or reducing investor confidence. This is because if the gas infrastructure is attacked, or if there are security concerns affecting the safety of workers in the gas sector, it will lead to a general disruption of natural gas supplies. The expansion of the conflict could also make it difficult for Israel to attract other international energy companies to invest in its natural gas sector. As a result, a slowdown in investment in Israel's natural gas sector would be a blow to its ambitions to become a hub for exporting natural gas to Europe and other regions.

Israeli liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports will not make a significant impact on the Northwest European gas market or the Mediterranean gas market. Apart

## Some Israeli energy sites damaged

**East Mediterranean Gas Pipeline**




Gas exports via the pipeline to be halted on October 10 ●

It is 90 kilometers long ●

It extends from the city of Ashkelon in southern Israel to El Arish in Egypt. ●

**Tamar gas field**



It was suspended on October 9 ●

It is located 25 kilometers off Ashdod ●

10.25 billion cubic meters – total Production in 2022 ●



**Ashkelon Port**



Closed on October 9th ●

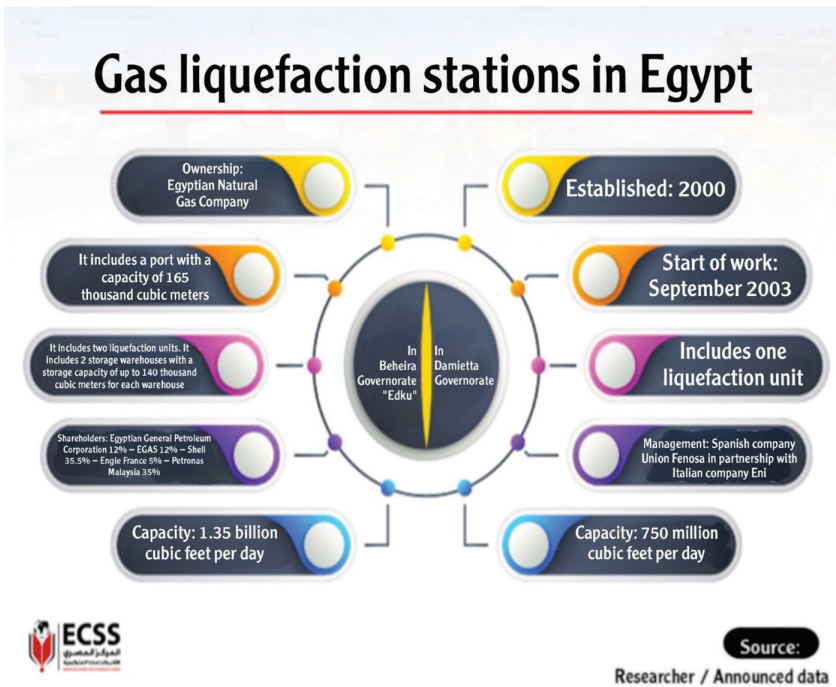
The port is located 10 kilometers from the Gaza Strip ●



**ECSS**  
المركز المصري  
للدراسات والبحوث

**Source:**  
Researcher / Announced data

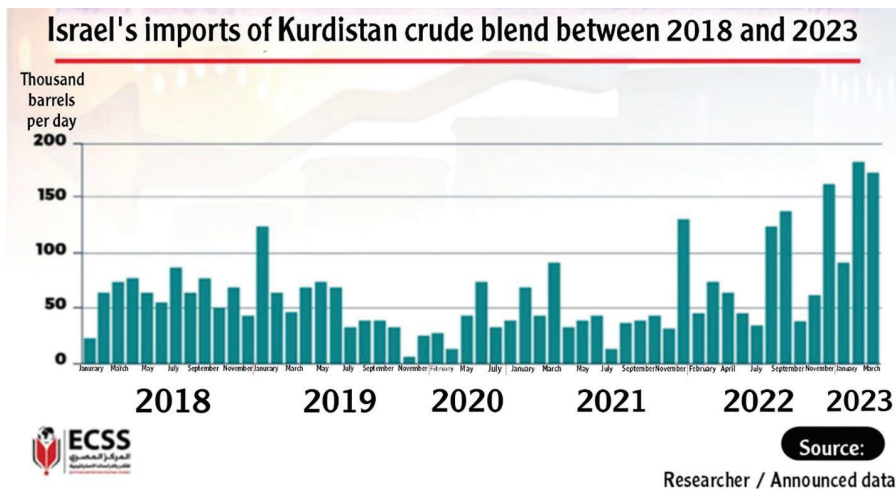
from the relatively small quantities transported via pipelines to neighboring Jordan or Egypt, Israel's only current export market for offshore gas fields is Egypt (as a transit point for Israeli gas). Israel does not currently have facilities for liquefying and exporting LNG, whereas Egypt has two liquefaction plants, which have played a significant role in exporting several shipments of LNG to European markets. These plants, located in Damietta and El-Buheira, have been a major turning point in transforming Egypt's natural gas sector into a regional and global power in the region. They serve as key pillars in Egypt's project to become a regional hub for energy trade and distribution, opening new horizons for enhancing Egypt's role in natural gas trade, storage, and distribution, generating revenue for the Egyptian economy, and securing energy supplies for the local market and development projects. The following chart illustrates the importance of Egypt's liquefaction plants in the natural gas industry:



Furthermore, in June 2022, the European Commission, Egypt, and Israel signed a trilateral memorandum of understanding regarding the supply of Israeli gas through Egypt's LNG export infrastructure to the European Union. Israel, Egypt, and Cyprus will build the East Mediterranean Gas Pipeline to transport natural gas to Europe via Greece. The estimated cost of the project is \$6.5

billion. However, regional unrest could disrupt the project, which is expected to be profitable given the abundance of natural gas supplies and the potential to increase its capacity from 10 to 20 billion cubic meters annually.

9. Oil Sector Impact: Israel’s energy infrastructure, particularly the Ashkelon port, closed to ships since October 9, 2023, has suffered. Shippers diverted to Ashdod and Haifa, while Ashkelon, only 10 kilometers away from Gaza, received 179,000 barrels daily in September 2023, from 205,000 total imports. Since Ashkelon’s closure, at least one crude shipment arrived via the Red Sea port of Eilat, as seen in the following figure:



10. Threatened Israeli Companies: An Israeli survey revealed a sharp decline in the revenues of about half of Israeli companies during the Israeli aggression on Gaza. Several global companies halted their operations in Israel or requested their employees to work from home. Among these well-known chains is the Swiss company “Nestlé,” which closed one of its production plants in Israel as a precautionary measure. The Spanish group “Inditex” temporarily shut down 84 of its centers in Israel, and the Swedish company “H&M,” which owns 20 stores in Israel, closed its stores due to the security situation, noting potential delivery delays for its customers due to the war. Additionally, “Nvidia,” one of the largest producers of graphics processors and visual display cards, canceled an artificial intelligence conference scheduled for October 15 in Tel Aviv. A spokesperson for Intel, the chip manufacturer and Israel’s largest private company and exporter, stated that the company is closely monitoring the situation in Israel

and is taking steps to protect and support its workers. The significance of Intel's investments in the Israeli economy lies in the fact that it employs about 12,800 workers in its Israeli centers, with exports amounting to over \$3.6 billion.

### *B. Indirect Economic Impacts (The broader meaning of the Gaza war implications on the Israeli economy):*

Despite the economic consequences of the war on Israel, as previously mentioned, there is agreement with the views of the late economic thinker Dr. Mahmoud Abdel Fadil, who argued that the issue is not simply about calculating gains and burdens in a narrow, purely economic sense. Israel is not just a foreign country exporting its goods to other nations and making investments like other countries. Rather, it is a state with a project based on Zionist ideology, which involves the continued absorption of new immigrants and their settlement in occupied Palestine, under the laws of citizenship and return.

These two laws grant any Jew in the world the right to obtain citizenship and residency, which means continued pressure toward expansion to secure the natural and geographical resources necessary to accommodate the ongoing Zionist settlement movement. This drives continuous efforts to expand the economic margin vital for Israel's economy. However, this does not negate the possibility of studying the outcomes of this process, whose importance emerges in light of the structural nature of the Israeli economy, which is fundamentally based on war as one of its key features. The interaction between war and the economy ultimately impacts its core existence, as war helps Israel overcome its chronic problems and enables it to achieve various advantages, such as territorial expansion and securing natural resources, among others.

Understanding the unique nature of the Israeli economy requires studying the interaction of three factors that have deeply influenced it. The first factor is reliance on a superpower to adopt the project within the international strategy (Britain in the first stage, and the United States since the Cold War). The second factor is the pivotal role of the state in the economy, where it undertakes centralized planning and oversight, covering all areas of economic and social development. The third factor is the flow of capital from abroad, which has enabled Israel to accumulate the necessary capital to build its productive sectors.

The Israeli economy has gone through several phases, each aligned with a set of desired objectives, allowing it to build a solid economic foundation

in all sectors. Agriculture was modernized and mechanized, with capital investment exceeding its capacity to absorb it, and the same occurred with industry. This allowed Israel to achieve high growth rates. Its economic growth relied on the phenomenon of militarizing the economy, in accordance with military Keynesianism, which involves the state's intervention to raise the total demand in the national economy through increased military spending. Military expenditure has remained an important mechanism for economic growth, and a significant part of the technological advancements Israel boasts today is due to defense spending and efforts in this industry. This has led to massive progress in some highly skilled scientific industries, such as electronics, computers, and aircraft.

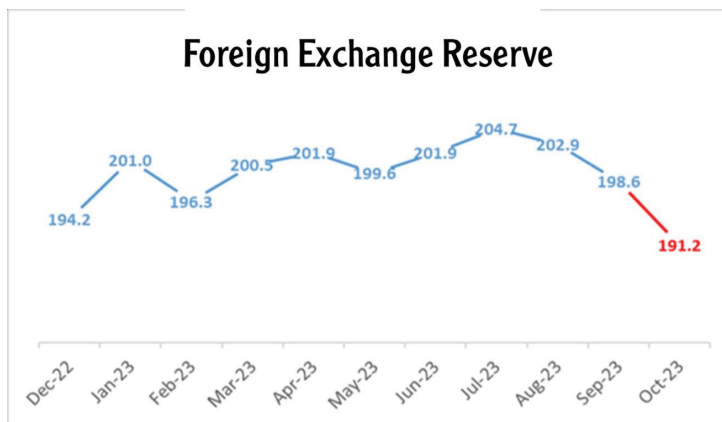
It is noteworthy that most of Israel's industrial exports are concentrated in military equipment, and Israel is among the largest arms exporters in the world. The focus on technological exports stems from its lack of natural resources, as Israel can only produce or export the fruit of its sole available resource, which is not tied to the land: human intelligence, specifically technological products. Israel has managed to leverage its foreign relations to serve this goal, successfully acquiring advanced technology through two main channels. The first channel is obtaining it for free or at symbolic cost, benefiting from a wide range of technical information that saves enormous costs in research, development, and manufacturing. The second channel is the mobility of scientists and technicians between European institutions and laboratories and those in Israel. Additionally, Israel has established many joint ventures and opened several branches of European companies, allowing Israeli companies to benefit from their capabilities and expertise.

### **Third: Differing Views on Economic Losses Influencing War Continuation:**

Opinions vary on the Israeli economy's capacity to sustain the war, especially with the economic challenges faced by both warring parties. Social sciences, including economics, and statements from Israeli officials suggest the war could last from two months up to a year. As previously mentioned, Israel loses \$600 million weekly due to currency shortages, making the expected costs range from \$2.4 billion to \$30 billion, plus \$18.6 billion in stock market losses and reconstruction costs yet to be determined. The crucial question is whether economic losses will stop Israel's war on Gaza.

First Opinion: Some believe that the Israeli economy is one of the strongest global economies, enabling it to withstand the repercussions of the war. Despite the successive economic losses, the Israeli economy still maintains its strength through two key factors.

The first factor is the foreign currency reserves. Despite losing 7 billion dollars from its foreign currency reserves, Israel still maintains its strength with a reserve amounting to 191.2 billion dollars as of October 2023, even amidst its war on Gaza. The following figure illustrates the size of the Israeli foreign currency reserves:

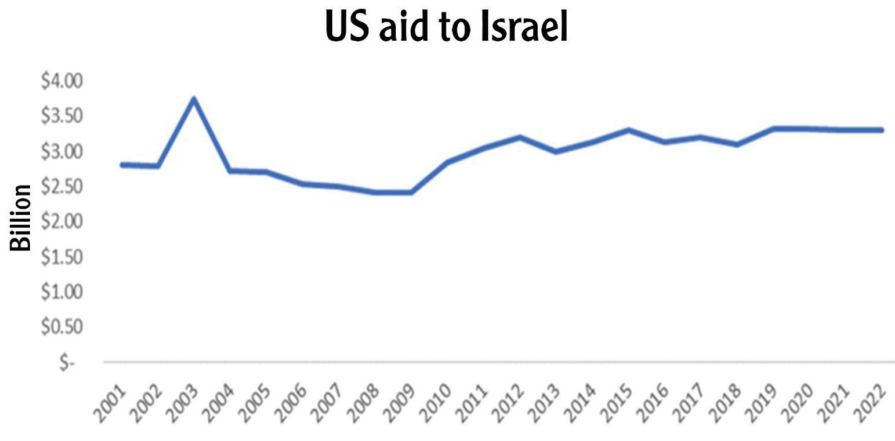


Source: The Central Bank of Israel

The second factor is U.S. aid. The U.S. economy, being the strongest globally, is considered the most significant supporter and ally of Israel, both in times of war and peace. The United States sees Israel as its long-term strategic ally in the Middle East. Additionally, the economic and trade relations between the U.S. and Israel amount to approximately 50 billion dollars annually in goods and services. Many treaties and agreements solidify the bilateral economic relations between the two countries, making the U.S. Israel's largest trade, diplomatic, and military partner.

During the current aggression, the U.S. has sent aid amounting to approximately 14.3 billion dollars to Israel, divided as follows: 10.6 billion dollars in assistance through the Department of Defense, including support for air and missile defense, industrial base investments, and replenishment of U.S. stockpiles being drawn upon to support Israel, and 3.7 billion dollars to the

Department of State to bolster the Israeli military and enhance the security of the U.S. embassy. Israel is one of the largest recipients of U.S. aid over the past 72 years, having received about 253.8 billion dollars. The following figure illustrates U.S. aid to Israel:



Source: [foreignassistance.gov](https://foreignassistance.gov)

Based on the above, some opinions argue that the disruption of the Israeli economy is unlikely to be an obstacle to continuing its aggression on Gaza. Both the foreign currency reserves and U.S. aid contribute to the resilience of the Israeli economy against the war’s repercussions.

On the other hand, some believe that these economic losses will impact Israel’s ability to continue its aggression on Gaza. What is currently happening to the Israeli economy is seen as a severe setback that might cause Israel to reconsider continuing the war. These repercussions suggest that the Israeli economy will suffer in both the short and long term. In addition to the previously mentioned economic losses, there are potential challenges that could further complicate the economic situation:

1. Trade Disruption: The seizure of an Israeli-owned ship by Houthis in the Red Sea raises concerns that the Gaza war could disrupt regional shipping, ultimately impacting Israel’s trade and economy.

2. Reduced U.S. Aid: Increasing U.S. economic pressure, with interest rates at historic highpoints to curb inflation, raises debates about continuing aid to Israel. Congress is divided, especially after President Biden’s \$105 billion

national security package, allocating \$61.4 billion to Ukraine, \$14.3 billion to Israel, \$10 billion for humanitarian aid, \$7.4 billion for Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific, and \$13.6 billion for U.S.-Mexico border security.

This will lead to increased pressure on the U.S. economy, where interest rates have reached their highest levels in an effort to reduce inflation rates. This has intensified opinions suggesting that the United States may withdraw or reduce such aid. Consequently, if the U.S. reduces the amount of aid it provides to support Israel, it will weaken Israel's strength, particularly its economic strength, which directly relies on the U.S. economy.

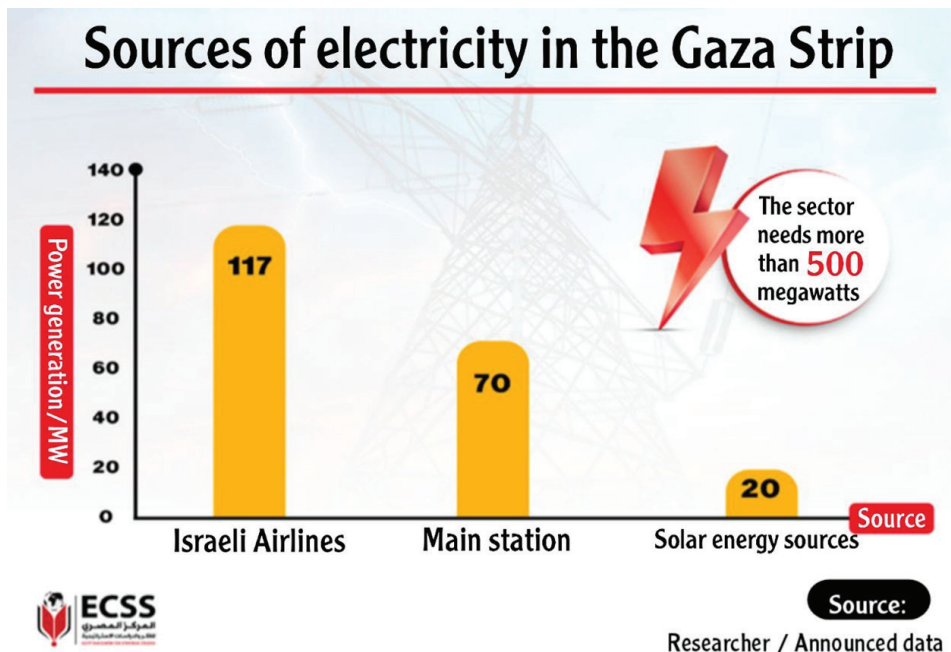
In conclusion, economic losses are not the sole factor influencing decisions to end the Gaza war or any conflict. War cessation decisions involve multiple, complex factors, including political, humanitarian, security, diplomatic, and legal considerations. In Israel's current Gaza war, non-economic factors dominate, making economic losses secondary, as the U.S. covers the financial burden. The current truce may alleviate Israel's daily economic losses, encouraging continued war efforts in Gaza.

#### **Fourth: Economic Impacts of the Al-Aqsa Flood on Gaza:**

Gaza, with an area of about 365 square kilometers, has faced a severe electricity crisis since Israel targeted its sole power plant in June 2006. At best, electricity is available for only eight hours a day. The crisis extends back to the plant's foundation in 1999, as it is capable of a production capacity of just 120 MW.

Accordingly, it can be said that the Gaza Strip has suffered from a severe shortage of energy sources, with the impact being evident in power outages lasting more than 13 hours a day due to only about 45% of the population's electricity needs being met (this was before the current war). Additionally, most areas in the West Bank receive electricity by purchasing it from the Israeli Electric Corporation, making Palestinian citizens vulnerable to blackmail by the Israeli company. The average annual electricity consumption in Palestine is about 1.8 thousand megawatts, with around 600 megawatts for the Gaza Strip. As a result, Gaza faces a severe electricity deficit, with the total available power currently not exceeding 220 megawatts, according to data from the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company, sourced from two main providers: the only power plant and the Israeli lines.

Palestine relies on Israel for 95% of its electricity, with the remaining 5% from Jordan and solar energy, as illustrated below.

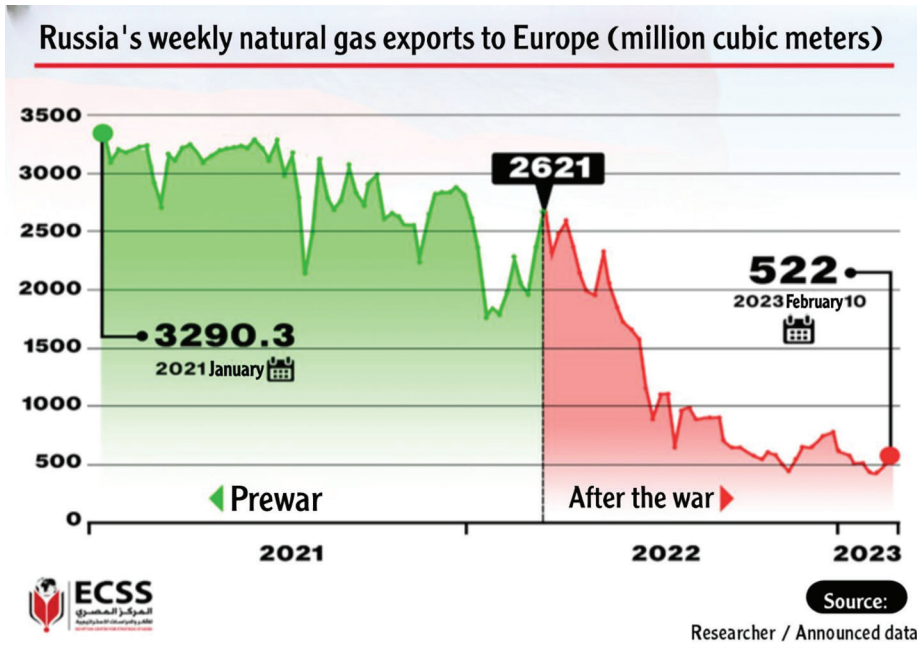


The current crisis will halt ongoing efforts to resolve Gaza's electricity issue, previously centered around Gaza's gas fields.

## Fifth: Expected Impacts of the Al-Aqsa Flood on the EU:

Under the shadow of the Russia-Ukraine war and the stopped Russian gas supplies, combined with sanctions on Moscow and their effects on Europe, which experienced a severe energy crisis last year, the current regional tensions escalate similar fears. The potential expansion of the conflict, involving new parties, threatens substantial market disruptions, including energy markets, causing renewed suffering for Europe, which is still stumbling from the Ukraine war's aftershocks.

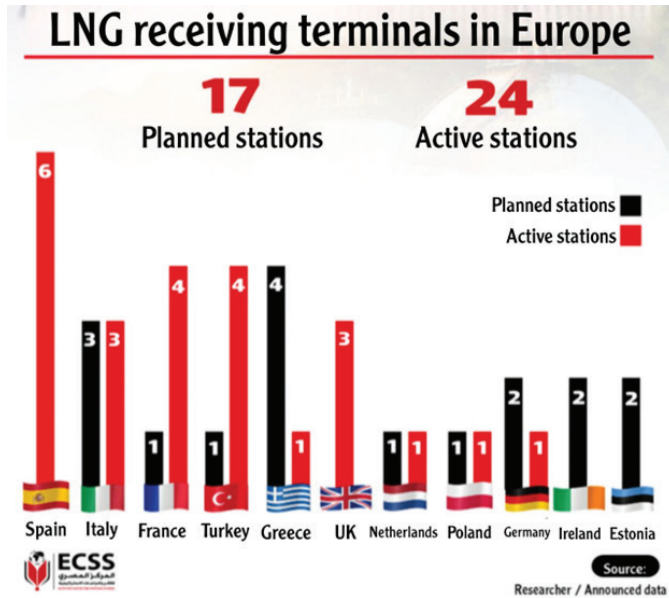
Moscow reduced Nord Stream pipeline flows to Germany to about 40% in June last year and 20% in July, cutting supplies to several European countries. These reductions have strained Europe’s gas supply, as illustrated below.



Based on that we can say that for Europe, multiple potential risks remain, but they may have limited impact on gas supplies this winter. However, affordability and supply security remain concerns, with fears about affordability continuing. The European gas industry remains fragile (with weak infrastructure) with multiple potential risks to supplies, including the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. The continent suffers from a significant weakness and a lack of sufficient liquefaction terminals, as illustrated in the following figure.

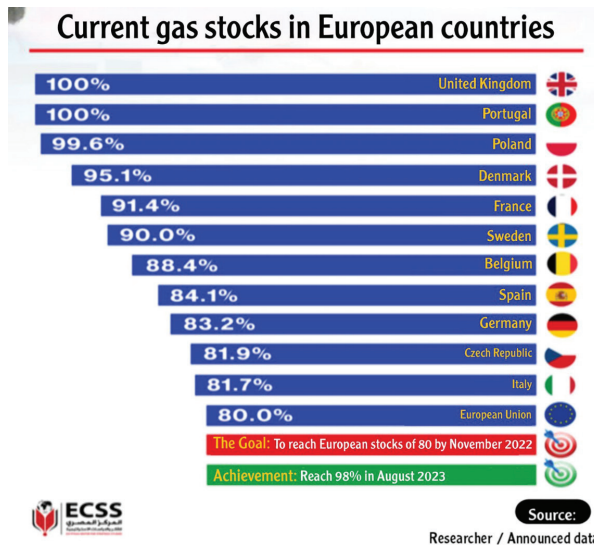
Therefore, the impact remains limited for several reasons, which can be summarized as follows:

The strategic gas reserves of European countries have been filled to high levels and earlier this year (reaching around 98%, which is approximately 8% above the initial target). This was aided by an overall decrease in gas demand by over 10%, as shown in the following figure.



Therefore, the impact remains limited for several reasons, which can be summarized as follows:

1. The strategic gas reserves of European countries have been filled to high levels and earlier this year (reaching around 98%, which is approximately 8% above the initial target). This was aided by an overall decrease in gas demand by over 10%, as shown in the following figure.



2. The last winter was not particularly cold. Despite the difficulties the continent faced last year, the situation was relatively limited, leaving a significant portion of the previous reserves that can be utilized this winter. Additionally, even today, temperatures remain noticeably high.

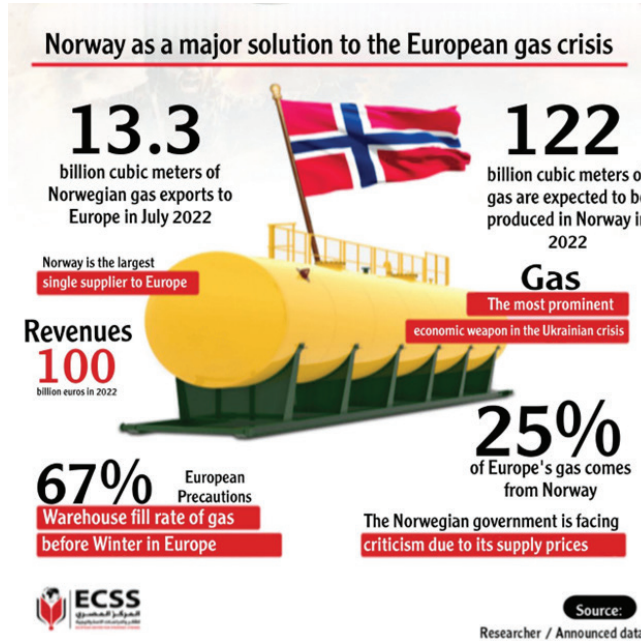
3. Israeli gas is exported to Europe, but at relatively low levels, which can be quickly replaced by the available global liquefied natural gas (LNG) market (from the United States, Norway, or Algeria). Thus, the impact might remain limited (according to the current scenario).

4. Although prices have risen from 30 euros to about 55 euros (an increase that might seem limited), such an increase could somewhat put pressure on price levels and production costs in a given market. However, the situation remains relatively contained, and most European companies are currently able to bear the temporary costs, considering that most contracts are long-term, while these short-term fluctuations will not significantly affect the market.

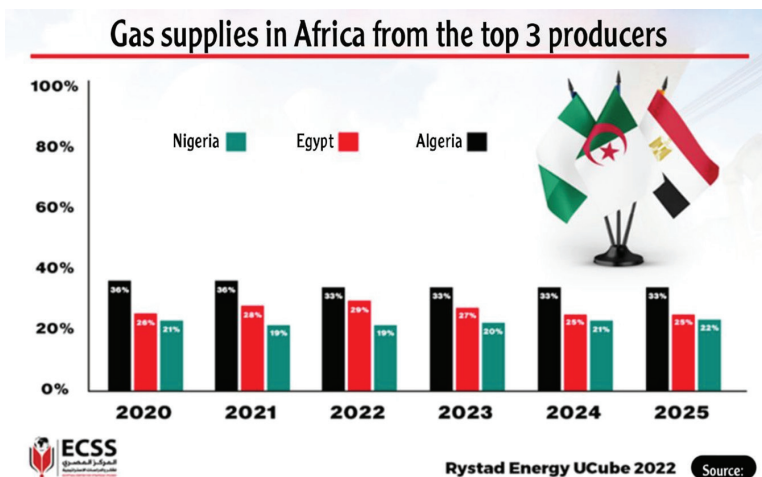
5. Natural gas consumption in the European Union countries has not been high, leading to an overall decrease in demand for the product. In contrast, there has been a reasonable supply in the local market, and the strategic reserves may be sufficient to meet the needs.

Continuing from the above, there are undoubtedly numerous known geopolitical risks, especially with the current tensions between Israel and Palestine coming to the forefront. Thus, the potential impact on gas supplies from Israel to Europe or incoming gas from Egypt is still present, but the effects remain limited according to the current scenario of events in Gaza.

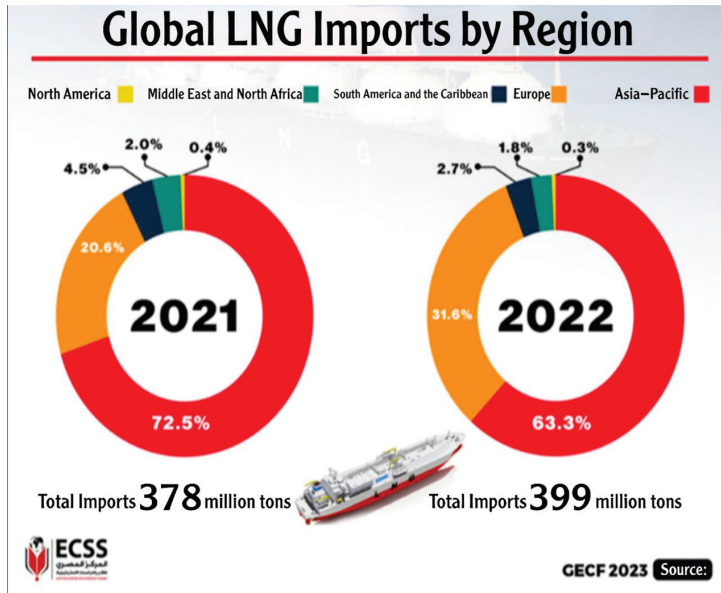
In the context of the markets on which Europe relies for gas supplies, mainly from Norway and Algeria in the upcoming period, Norway is considered the second-largest gas supplier to Europe after Russia. It is increasing production to help the European Union achieve its goal of ending dependence on Russian fossil fuels by 2027. Norway managed to overtake Russia and became the largest gas supplier to the European Union. Norwegian gas is exported via pipelines to the UK, Germany, Belgium, and France. Norway surpassed Russia as the main gas supplier to Europe even before Russian supplies were cut, as shown in the following figure.



Algeria is the world's tenth-largest gas producer. Economic data indicate that the liquefied natural gas shipments exported from Algeria in 2021 were largely directed to European markets. This places Algeria fourth among the exporters of liquefied natural gas to Europe, with Germany being one of its largest markets. Algeria, along with Egypt and Nigeria, represents a formidable African force in the global natural gas industry, as illustrated in the following figure.



The geographical map of gas supplies is illustrated in the following figure.



Hence, the impact of the war on Gaza will depend on the balance of regional and global gas markets, how the conflict intensifies in the short and medium term, and the broader effects that pressure on Israeli gas production could have. Additionally, it will affect the future of natural gas project investments in the Eastern Mediterranean over the long term, as well as risks associated with the movement of shipments and gas vessels in the Middle East. The expansion of the conflict could further increase pressure on the security of energy infrastructure and facilities that connect gas suppliers in North Africa and Europe, increasing uncertainty and volatility in global gas markets.

## Sixth: The War’s Impact on Energy and Gas Supplies Globally and Regionally:

Continued war in Gaza will mainly affect global oil and natural gas markets, with moderate price increases since the war’s start in November 2023. This will ultimately raise production and transportation costs and global inflation rates. Regional escalation could disrupt global trade, forcing port and border closures.

Gas has become a strategic geopolitical weapon comparable to nuclear weapons or other arms. Washington opposed Europe's gas deal with Moscow in recent years. The ongoing wars (Russian-Ukrainian and Gaza conflicts) ensure natural gas remains a vital energy source for over 30 years, politically utilized like oil. Gas market dynamics will follow historical energy and resource management principles.

### *A. Global Energy Markets:*

Undoubtedly, the war in Gaza and the clashes with Hezbollah in the north have had an inevitable impact on regional and global energy markets, creating uncertainty regarding the markets in the coming period. Concerning oil markets, despite the slight increase in the first week of the war, with global oil futures rising by 4%, if the fighting were to expand to include other countries, it could have a shocking effect on global energy markets, disrupt key supply lines, and drive-up global energy prices.

According to the forecasts in a report published in November 2023 by the U.S. Energy Information Administration, global production of liquid fuels is expected to increase by 1 million barrels per day in 2024, reaching 4.3 million barrels per day. The ongoing production cuts by OPEC+ will offset production growth from non-OPEC countries, helping to maintain a relatively balanced global oil market next year. Although the war in Gaza has not affected actual oil supplies at this stage, the uncertainties surrounding the conflict and other global oil supply conditions could exert upward pressure on crude oil prices in the coming months. Forecasts indicate that the price of Brent crude could rise from an average of \$90 per barrel in the fourth quarter of 2023 to an average of \$93 per barrel in 2024.

As for global natural gas markets, many risks threaten global energy markets, particularly the gas market, deepening the uncertainty of the global economy following the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation on October 7. This event marked another significant moment in the context of the geopolitical tensions the world has witnessed since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Many countries, particularly in Europe, are doing everything possible to save the energy market from falling into the grip of a major supply crisis that could threaten their populations with a deadly winter, having already been beset by

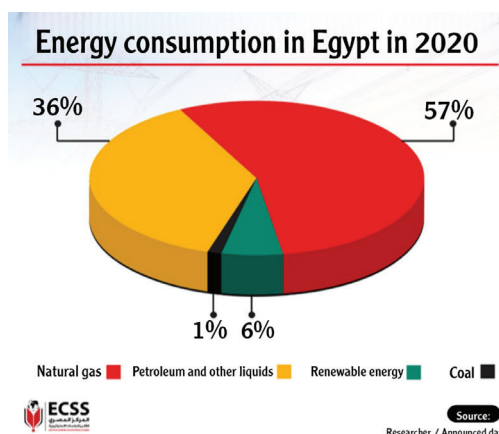
additional challenges in the recent period, leaving them exhausted. Last month saw several events that could change the global energy equation and the global gas map, coinciding with an increased demand for electricity and heating. However, the question remains: what alternatives are available to the world if gas supplies from the Eastern Mediterranean are cut off completely?

During the first week of the war, European natural gas futures rose by 14%. While natural gas prices have only risen marginally, no major new deals have been struck, as the global energy market remains in a state of anticipation and waiting. This is mainly due to the continued availability of large quantities of gas in the global market. European countries have managed to find alternatives to their Russian gas imports, sourcing liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the United States, Egypt, Qatar, and other locations, and they have also been able to fully fill their gas storage facilities.

### ***B. Middle Eastern Energy Markets:***

1. Egypt's Gas Market: Egypt is the region's largest gas market, with a domestic demand of about 61 billion cubic meters. Fluctuating local production and reserves lead to periods of surplus and deficit. Egypt's gas exports have varied over time, in accordance with the world.

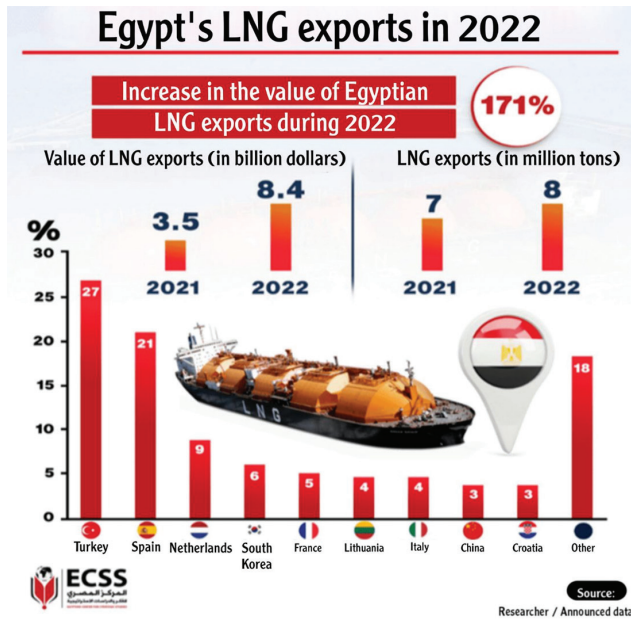
According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration's April 2022 report, natural gas is Egypt's most consumed fuel, followed by petroleum and other liquids in 2020. Renewable energy and coal account for about 6% and 1% of total consumption, respectively, as shown below.



Egypt's LNG exports overtook Qatar, Algeria, and Oman last year in terms of growth compared to 2021, with a 13% year-on-year increase in Q4 2022 (OAPEC 2023 report). As Egypt's exports of LNG in 2022 were the highest among Arab countries, as it overtook the Sultanate of Oman which had an upsurge in its exports with 6.6%, and Qatar with 2%.

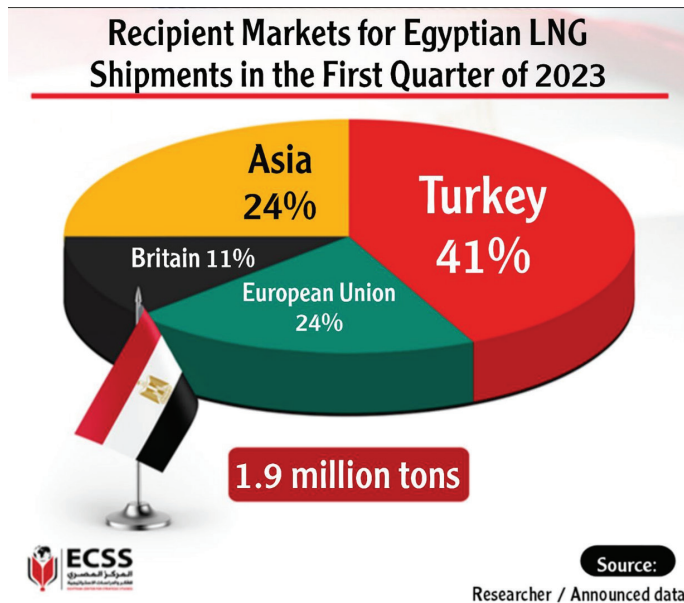
Egypt's LNG export revenues reached \$8.4 billion in 2022, up 170% from \$3.5 billion in 2021, due to higher global LNG prices. Egypt has two LNG plants, one in Idku with a 7.2-million-ton annual capacity (operated by Shell) and another one in Damietta with a 5-million-ton capacity (operated by Eni).

Egypt exported 7.4 million tons of LNG in 2022, with 70% directed to Europe and Turkey. Gas supplies to the EU rose from 1.1 billion cubic meters in 2021 to 4.2 billion cubic meters in 2022 (European Commission October report). Egypt's LNG exports in 2021 were 6.6 million tons. Egypt's total gas exports, including pipeline exports, reached a record 8 million tons in 2022, compared to 7 million tons in 2021, ranking second among Arab countries and fifth globally in European exports. As illustrated in the following figure:



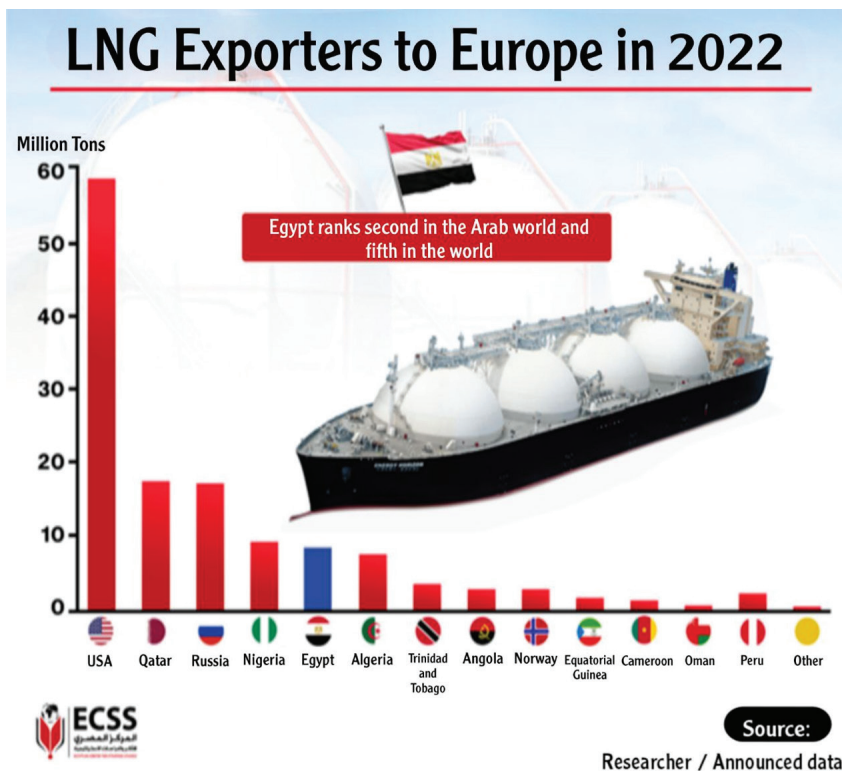
Forecasts had indicated that Egypt's natural gas exports would remain at the same levels throughout 2023. However, high temperatures contributed to an increase in domestic natural gas consumption. During the first half of 2023, natural gas export volumes declined to meet local demand. Consequently, projections suggest that Egypt's natural gas exports in 2023 will fall below the levels seen in 2022. With the start of the war in Gaza, the Israeli Ministry of Energy announced a temporary halt in gas production at the Tamar field, Israel's second-largest gas field, although exports to Egypt later resumed. Chevron, the field's operator, subsequently announced that the gas shortfall directed to Egypt from the Tamar field would be compensated by other fields. However, the continuation of the war could lead to difficulties if additional conflict zones expand.

According to the published data, Turkey topped the list of destinations receiving Egyptian LNG exports from the Damietta plant with a share of approximately 27%, followed by Spain with about 21%, the Netherlands with around 9%, South Korea with about 6%, and France with about 8%. The remaining share was distributed across several other markets. European markets, including the United Kingdom and Turkey, collectively accounted for over 82% of the total exports from the Damietta liquefaction plant last year, as illustrated in the following figure.



Egypt serves as a transit point for Israeli gas (due to Israel's weak infrastructure), with Egypt exporting 7 million tons of LNG in 2022, 5 million tons to the EU, out of a total EU import of 96 million tons. While the global LNG market exceeds 400 million tons annually, the potential loss of these supplies early in winter could pressure the European and Asian gas prices.

According to the above, Egypt imports gas from Israel, liquefies it at local liquefaction plants, and then re-exports it to Europe, which is beneficial for both sides (Egyptian and Israeli). However, the ongoing war will affect this arrangement. During the summer, there is a high season for local demand, so the priority is given to the domestic market. During the winter, local demand decreases, allowing Egypt to export to Europe. It is in Israel's interest to resume gas supply since it is undoubtedly beneficial to its economy. The following figure illustrates Egypt's position among the gas-exporting countries to Europe.



## **2. Other Middle Eastern Markets:**

Israel has closed its oil terminal in Ashkelon, and if the conflict expands to include Hezbollah, it will exacerbate Lebanon's already severe energy crisis. The Lebanese government faces difficulties in purchasing shipments of petroleum products to supply four coastal power stations with fuel. Amid this acute energy shortage, private oil importers in Lebanon have increased their diesel imports, mainly to operate private power generators. If tensions between Israel and Hezbollah escalate, Lebanon's caretaker government will not be able to handle new emergencies. During the last conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, Israel bombed oil storage tanks at the Jiyeh coastal power station in southern Lebanon, causing a major disaster due to a large heavy fuel oil spill into the Mediterranean Sea. Consequently, the expansion of the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel also affects shipping to Lebanon, increasing pressure on its struggling economy.

The future of Lebanon's oil and gas discoveries is now in jeopardy, especially after the disappointing results from drilling in the Qana gas field near the Israeli border, which threatens the chances of providing strong alternatives for the local energy sector.

As for Jordan, which receives 37% of its natural gas imports from Israel, the country will be significantly affected if the conflict in Gaza expands, despite the smaller volume of these imports compared to Israel's natural gas exports to Egypt. The Jordanian government will resist this impact given its weak domestic natural gas production and its reliance on costly liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports to meet demand. This situation will cause economic hardship for citizens and erode foreign currency reserves at a time when Amman is already facing significant economic problems.

Therefore, as the war continues, uncertainty will remain about the future of energy markets in the Middle East and globally. Any escalation will only lead to further volatility in the region's energy markets, potentially causing severe damage to the energy sector's infrastructure and economic repercussions on the oil and gas sector's status in the region. Regional governments will likely delay any expansion plans in the energy sector they had previously set for years to come.

### *C. Future Global Energy Prices Amid Gaza War Developments:*

The matrix of estimates for the developments in the Gaza war and its impact on the global market points to two main possibilities. The first is a limited ground operation in Gaza, with a likelihood of about 60-70%. This scenario would limit the negative effects of the war on the region and set a price range for crude oil between 80-95 USD per barrel.

The second possibility is an expansion of Israeli ground operations in Gaza, with a probability of 30-40%, which could open the conflict to additional fronts. There are two scenarios for this development:

1. The first scenario involves managing to keep confrontations limited between Hezbollah, Israel, and Hamas (with a probability of about 25%), which could drive oil prices to levels of 100-115 USD per barrel.

2. The second, more pessimistic scenario is a multi-front war involving the United States (with a 10% probability), which would push oil prices to between 135-150 USD per barrel. Additionally, there is a 5% probability that this conflict could escalate into direct confrontations with Iran, potentially raising oil prices to 150-200 USD per barrel.

Based on the previous analysis, the involvement of any parties representing Iran directly or indirectly in the conflict would threaten the global energy market and push the global economy into contraction. According to the International Monetary Fund, every 10 USD increase in energy prices reduces global economic growth by 0.15% on average. The contraction impact is more significant for energy-importing countries and less for countries with self-sufficiency in energy.

Interest rates would also be affected by the likelihood of direct confrontation with Iran (5% probability). If Iran becomes directly involved in the conflict, the U.S. Federal Reserve is expected to raise interest rates again, causing a drop in U.S. stock markets by 30-50%, an increase in gold prices to levels between 2,100-2,300 USD per ounce, and a contraction in global economic growth by 0.5% in 2024.

While other scenarios have higher probabilities and pose less damage to the global economy, the direct involvement of U.S. forces in the conflict would inflict severe losses on the global and Israeli economies, significantly raising interest rates, energy prices, and gold, ultimately harming the global economy, particularly Europe.

## **Seventh: Israel's Gains from the Gaza War:**

Israel's expansionist goals and the establishment of the Israeli state rely on two main principles: having abundant and diverse resources to support a growing population and high living standards, and controlling vital resources like water and oil within its territory. This aims to improve Israel's economy and enable the next phase of its grand strategy, transforming it from a small state to a regional and global power, fulfilling the concept of Greater Israel according to the Torah.

While acknowledging the benefits that the Israeli economy may gain from the invasion of Gaza, it is essential to highlight that these gains could be minimized if the Arab world recognizes the nature of the associated risks. This realization can only come from moving beyond mere intentions and statements to serious, concrete actions.

In conclusion, the detailed discussions regarding the economic repercussions of the Gaza war, which extend beyond the Middle East to impact the global economy, particularly in the energy sector, underscore a key truth: The current phase of widespread economic consequences must compel the world's major economies, particularly those involved in the conflict such as the United States, to reconsider their support for Tel Aviv. This reconsideration should be based not only on political considerations, given Washington's strategic alliance with Tel Aviv as evident in the initial days of the war, but also on economic reasons that have cast a shadow over the global economy, affecting the U.S. economy and those of its international and regional allies.



## Section Eight

# Diverse Roles of Regional Powers: Partner, Mediator, and Target

GEN. MOHAMED IBRAHIM ELDEWERY - HADIR ABU ZAID - MARY MAHER - REHAB AL-ZAYADY  
MOHAMMED MANSOUR

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## Diverse Roles of Regional Powers: Partner, Mediator, and Target:

It is certain that the stances of regional parties are very important in the equation of the Al-Aqsa Flood events and their repercussions, whether concerning the future of the war between Hamas and Israel or the stability of the Middle East as a whole. There is a similar stance among different regional powers regarding the war in Gaza and the rejection of Israel's continued use of military force against Palestinians. However, the involvement of regional powers in the ongoing developments in Gaza varies. Some countries are directly involved in the crisis, such as Egypt, which is directly affected by this war and its consequences due to its shared border with Gaza and the forced displacement of Palestinians towards the Egyptian border. Recently, the traffic in the Suez Canal has been affected by the Houthi group's threats to ships passing through Bab al-Mandab, declaring war on Israel. As a result of Egypt's strong involvement, its role varies between diplomatic and economic, and Egypt does not hesitate to confirm its constants towards the Palestinian cause. To a lesser extent, Jordan is also heavily involved due to the situation in the West Bank and the escalating events there parallel to the escalation in Gaza. The Gulf states adopt diplomatic positions condemning the continued bombarding on Palestinians and improving aid directed to them. However, Qatar is the most involved Gulf state in the crisis through diplomatic efforts to mediate a humanitarian truce or prisoner exchange.

Among the non-Arab regional powers, Iran and Turkey have clear roles towards the war. Iran is actively involved by supporting Hamas and having some of its proxies enter the war (the Houthi group in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon). Its role intensifies with the United States' involvement in the regional scene, especially with its airstrikes on the Houthis, and the likelihood of this scene continuing for an indefinite period. On another level, Turkey has adopted a clear position on the war and capitalizes on it domestically and regionally to a large extent. The Turkish role may become clearer in the post-war phase.

Accordingly, this section focuses on the most important regional roles in the Gaza war, specifically the Egyptian, Iranian, and Turkish roles, while other efforts will be reviewed in the section on diplomatic efforts.

## **Dimensions of the Egyptian Role:**

It is certain that any Egyptian move towards the current situation in the Gaza Strip relies not only on an honorable historical legacy but also on a distinguished present and a reality that examines events objectively and deals with them to achieve the interests of the Palestinian people. This is the framework that has governed the stance of the Egyptian political leadership towards the Palestinian cause over the past decades and in its upcoming stages.

In this context, the Egyptian efforts since the start of Israeli military operations towards Gaza, which began on October 7, 2023, following the Al-Aqsa Flood and Iron Swords operations, have been characterized by the stability of Egyptian principles and constants that have not and will not change. These include the absolute rejection of liquidating the Palestinian cause or displacing the population from their lands, especially to Sinai, opposing the policy of collective punishment and systematic killing and destruction carried out by Israel against unarmed civilians for three months without any deterrent. Egypt moved from the first day of the Israeli operations, knowing that it was moving in a minefield and that the current war is entirely different from the six previous wars that Gaza has witnessed since 2008. Despite unparalleled obstacles, the Egyptian attention focused on how to reach a ceasefire or a relatively long humanitarian truce, considering this path as a tactical goal to create a climate suitable for achieving some positive steps, the most important of which is the introduction of more humanitarian aid and completing a prisoner exchange deal. Subsequently, it is possible to move in the next stage to the strategic goal of reviving the peace process.

### *An Integrated Vision: The Cairo Peace Conference:*

Egypt was responsible when it proposed several successive stages to change the current situation in Gaza from a state of war with all its tragedies to a state of peace, even if temporary. It is important to point out a very significant point, credited to the Egyptian state with pride: Egypt is the only country in the world that strived to present an integrated vision to get out of the current dilemma in the sector. We must not forget that the Egyptian president proposed a set of main principles to solve the Gaza crisis on October 21, 2023, during the Cairo Peace Conference.

From a fair perspective, the value of the recent Egyptian proposals is not only tied to the stages and requirements they included but also in Egypt's refusal to be merely a number among observing countries, deciding instead to move amidst the fire and engage strongly in the political battle to protect its national security, which it will not allow to be compromised, seeking solutions given the losses the sector has suffered so far, surpassing the losses the Palestinian cause has faced since 1948.

On the other hand, the Egyptian proposals cannot be viewed as sacred or unmodifiable, but it is certain that they are valid as a basis for negotiation among all the concerned parties. Therefore, it is neither logical nor expected to receive a complete rejection or acceptance response. All parties must see them as a ray of light in a very dark tunnel, and they must receive, invest in, and start a new phase that can change the course of the current war, which no one knows when and how it will end. Alongside these proposals, Egypt ensured communication with all parties, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to reach understandings that could serve as a foundation for building upon in the future, hoping to achieve the desired calm and hoping that the current situation in Gaza will gradually change, especially to relieve the humanitarian disaster affecting the Palestinian population in Gaza.

Despite Egypt's positive effort seeking to mature a vision for calm agreed upon by all, there are some difficulties surrounding this movement from two main sides. Firstly, American stances do not help in calming the situation in Gaza. Secondly, the extreme stances adopted by Israel, including the rejection of the return of the displaced to northern Gaza and the intention to occupy the buffer zone separating the sector from Egypt, called the Philadelphia Corridor,

complicate the situation and indicate that such Israeli plans could spoil any efforts for a solution.

Certainly, such Israeli positions must be taken seriously, as Israel is about to transition to the third phase of the ground operation, which will focus on the southern sector. Israel will change its military tactics adopted during operations in the north and central regions, with less ground incursion and more specific targeting, avoiding civilian casualties as much as possible to avoid further regional and international criticism and to comply with some American demands.

Despite all the obstacles related to the current situation in Gaza, which are increasingly complicated, Egypt will not stop its efforts and will remain keen on communicating with all parties until achieving the desired calm, whether through the proposal it presented or any other suggestions. Egypt will remain open to coordination with all concerned powers to reach a better situation that moves the Palestinian population in the sector from the catastrophic state seen by the world without action to a humanitarian situation where Palestinians receive at least their basic human rights in a world that only acknowledges human rights for their own communities.

## **Dimensions of the Iranian Role:**

Iran's approach to the Al-Aqsa Flood events remained unchanged, focusing on expanding its influence through militias and other tools, as demonstrated by the roles of Hezbollah, Iranian support for Hamas, and the role of the Houthis, as follows:

### **A. Iranian Support Paths for Hamas Against Israel:**

Political and strategic readings after the outbreak of the conflict between Israel and Hamas following Hamas's attack on October 7, 2023, ranged between confirming and denying Iran's involvement in the Al-Aqsa Flood operation. However, Tehran did not hide its absolute support for Hamas's operation against Israel. Despite this, Tehran simultaneously calls for a ceasefire in Gaza, hinting at the possibility of a complex and uncontrolled regional crisis. This raises questions about the reasons for Iran's support for the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, its levels, and its paths.

## Multiple Motives

Several reasons drove Iran to support Hamas in its recent attack on Israel, including:

1. **Halting Saudi-Israeli Normalization:** Iran realizes that achieving the Abrahamic normalization path between Saudi Arabia and Israel could create two levels of strategic threat to it. The first level is the imbalance in the Middle East strategic balance. Indeed, the Israeli war on Gaza has frozen normalization talks between Saudi Arabia and Israel, which is a success for the Iranian goal. The second level is the further strategic integration of Israel into the region at the expense of Iran and its proxies in the region, which could lead to the loss of Iranian deterrence or at least a significant portion of Tehran's regional influence, in exchange for the distribution of Israeli weapons along the Gulf Arab coasts opposite Iran. This explains the focus of Iranian statements on the insignificance of Israeli weapons in the face of Hamas's operation.
2. **Reducing the Security Feasibility of New Middle East Projects:** Recently, Iran has faced a series of geostrategic moves led by the United States with Israel and the Gulf states aimed at forming economic and security blocs that could encircle Iran in the region, similar to the economic corridor project between India, the Middle East, and Europe announced on the sidelines of the recent G20 summit in New Delhi. The Al-Aqsa Flood operation conveys the message that the persistence of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict destabilizes the security feasibility of any geostrategic project in the region. This prompted Iran to support an operation that might cause reconsideration of these projects before ensuring security feasibility or even including Iran in those projects rather than excluding it.
3. **Achieving Regional Deterrence:** One of the factors in establishing an armed militia network in the Middle East under Iranian, specifically Revolutionary Guards, control is to implement the policy of "encircling Israel" in the region by creating several fronts that constrain the Israeli military behavior, achieving the theory of regional deterrence serving the Iranian interests. Tehran believes that supporting Hamas's operation against Israel may grant it a real maneuvering margin against regional

countries and American interests in the region. Iran succeeded in this goal after Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman conducted their first direct phone call since the normalization agreement between the two countries, clearly attempting to halt the escalation and elucidate its risks. Iran also warned Israel that other regional parties might intervene if the conflict continued.

4. **Institutional Cohesion Within Iran:** The Iranian Revolutionary Guards tried to preserve their pivotal role in arranging strategic relations in the Middle East, especially after the Iranian president succeeded in reaching a normalization agreement between Riyadh and Tehran with Chinese mediation last March. Still, it soon created tension with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait over Iran's right to the Dorra field in the Arabian Gulf. Iranian decision-makers understand that not supporting Hamas's operation may force them to create a crisis within Iran between security institutions like the Revolutionary Guards and others, creating a negative impression about the institutional cohesion within Iran.
5. **Promoting the Idea of "Supporting the Proxy":** Hamas is an important "partner" for Iran in the region, responsible for a strong military infrastructure that Iran has benefited from in achieving its encirclement of Israel through the so-called "unity of the fronts." Hamas has succeeded in varying its geography in the region by spreading across the West Bank, southern Lebanon, and southern Syria through some resistance factions affiliated with the Al-Qassam Brigades. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi stated on October 29, 2023, "It is Iran's duty to support Hamas and Hezbollah in facing Israel, which has crossed the red lines."

## **Response Tactics**

A series of Iranian warnings indicate an increasing risk of expanding the war between Israel and Hamas beyond its current geographical reach, with Tehran's ability to use multiple mechanisms to attack Israel and the West if it chooses to. Therefore, Iran's support for Hamas in confronting Israel takes two levels:

1. **Threatening With Response:** Officially, Iran has not declared its intention to target Israel or engage militarily in supporting Hamas in its "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation. Instead, it has sufficed with threatening to respond if

the war, specifically the ground invasion of Gaza, continues, by targeting American and Israeli objectives in the region. This tactic can be excused to two reasons: First, Israel and the United States have not officially accused Iran of being involved in or planning the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation, considering it merely political support for one of its proxies in the region. Second, there has been no direct threat to Iranian territories or its military nuclear program. Iran benefits from this tactic by sending a deterrence message to regional countries about the centrality of the Iranian position in regional security considerations, without recklessly dragging the region into a regional war that might force Saudi Arabia to halt normalization with Tehran and recommence talks with Israel about normalization.

2. Limited Attacks: Iran did not stop at merely threatening a potential military response to American and Israeli targets in the region, but there were indications that Iraqi militias, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Houthis in Yemen were launching “limited” attacks on Israel and the United States in Syria and Iraq, aiming to remind of the potential regional conflict that could break out at any moment if Israel continues its comprehensive ground invasion of the Gaza Strip. Iran benefits from this tactic by conveying a message that it can control regional security rhythms without involving itself in a real regional crisis, targeting threats in the Arab region, namely Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and the Red Sea, without including Iranian territories or its nuclear program within these threats. Moreover, maintaining the policy of “unity of the fronts” in the region.

### **Potential Paths**

In light of the above, to what extent can Iran officially declare its involvement in the war with Hamas and activate the policy of “unity of the fronts”? Here, several paths can be estimated as follows:

1. Back Channel Message to the UN: Iran conveyed a message through a back channel to the United Nations stating it does not seek escalation in the current war between Israel and Hamas (according to the Axios newspaper), but it will be obliged to intervene if Israel proceeds with its expected ground invasion of the Gaza Strip. Tehran does not want to publicly state that its red line is the overthrow of Hamas in Gaza,

recognizing that Israel seeks to drag Iran into a regional war to justify American military action against it.

2. **Iranian Escalatory Rhetoric:** The escalating Iranian rhetoric implies the increasing threat of Tehran becoming more involved in the conflict, risking its spread to other countries in the region and possibly beyond. So far, the war has largely been confined to the conflict theater between Israel and Gaza, where the regional powers and the United States have sought to limit the risk of escalation. This explains American pressure on Israel to avoid expanding the ground operation and to limit it to a specific mission with logical goals (hinting at the illogical Israeli goal of overthrowing Hamas).
3. **Iranian Direct Involvement:** If Iran becomes involved, it will have multiple means to launch direct and proxy attacks in neighboring countries and cyberspace, threatening to open new fronts in the war and/or disrupt global energy markets. The most urgent possibilities for greater Iranian involvement will be using regional proxy groups in neighboring Lebanon or Syria, or further afield in Iraq and Yemen. In addition to Iranian forces on the ground in at least the first two countries, Tehran has a network of allied militias in all four countries that it can use to strike Israeli, American, or other Western targets through missile attacks or more aggressive drones. This participation may expand to ground incursions from Lebanon or Syria directly into Israeli-controlled territories in the most pessimistic estimates, forcing the Israeli soldiers to fight on multiple fronts. Iran could use its militias in Iraq (which have already vowed to target local American interests if Washington provides more support to Israel) to attack American forces, or Western oil and gas companies, or other foreign operations. Simultaneously, the already-supported Houthis might resume attacks weaken the fragile ceasefire with Saudi Arabia. Given a certain degree of Iranian-Saudi rapprochement, these attacks are more likely if the United States becomes more militarily involved in the conflict, with Iran and the Houthis potentially launching attacks targeting Saudi Arabia, such as its oil and gas infrastructure, regional shipping, or perhaps more distant targets in the Gulf countries as an alternative to their pro-Western orientations and hosting of American forces in places like Bahrain.

In conclusion, it can be noted that while the Israeli ground invasion remains “limited,” accompanied by Western pressure on Israel to avoid expanding the operation, it is likely that this pressure includes not escalating the idea of overthrowing Hamas unless there is a comprehensive Arab and regional will for the effectiveness of the idea to prepare for its consequences and negative implications. Despite many indicators of regional tensions in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen, they have not yet reached a level of regional conflict that could threaten to trigger a direct regional war. Finally, the US military position can be identified as a controlling indicator to measure the paths of Iranian military intervention, with Iranian involvement limited by the extent of American military engagement in the region.

### *B. Hezbollah’s Calculations:*

Since the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Flood events on October 7, 2023, questions have been raised about Hezbollah’s position and role amidst Israel’s escalation against the Gaza Strip. Hezbollah did not engage as expected, given its essential role in the resistance axis or opposition axis, raising doubts about Iran and its involvement behind the operation carried out by Hamas, especially as it financially supports both Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Movement with about one hundred million dollars annually, and Hezbollah provides training for Hamas. Despite this, Iran and Hezbollah denied any connection to urging the movement to carry out this operation. However, with the advancement of Israeli attacks, the party began to engage in a calculated manner but did not reach the level of the 2006 Lebanon war. The attacks were limited to the Shebaa Farms and Kfar Shuba hills in the border area controlled by Israel. The party launched rockets at an Israeli military base in Shebaa Farms on October 8, and on October 9, there were some infiltration attempts by Palestinian groups firing at adjacent areas on the Lebanese side of the border. As a result of these raids, two Hezbollah members were killed. The fighting was limited to both sides of the border to a depth of about 5 kilometers, the designated range for the anti-tank guided munitions used by the party. In response, Israel bombed a Hezbollah watchtower, reflecting mutual deterrence between the two sides.

Additionally, Iranian proxies in Iraq targeted American bases at Ayn al-Assad Air Base and Harir Base in Erbil with drone attacks, alongside targeting American forces at Al-Tanf Base in Syria, resulting in injuries to some American soldiers. (Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, and Kata’ib Hezbollah, along with the Badr Organization) vowed to strike American bases in the region if the

United States directly intervened in the war. The Houthis also launched missiles and drones towards Israel, intercepted by the American warship USS Carney. In response, the United States sent naval forces to the Eastern Mediterranean, with the arrival of the aircraft carriers Gerald Ford and USS Eisenhower to deter Iran's allies from opening new fronts with Israel or threatening its interests in the region.

In light of this, some key considerations governing Hezbollah's calculations can be clarified as follows:

1. **Iranian Vision:** Iran desires to maintain the party's role as one of the most important deterrent tools against any Israeli strikes, keeping it as a pressure card to be employed at the appropriate time. According to Nasrallah's speech on November 3, it was obvious that escalation to the level of regional war depends on Israel forcibly displacing Gaza residents and expanding operations to destroy Hamas, which would test the party's and Iran's stance in the coming period. On the other hand, Iranian calculations monitor regional and international efforts to de-escalate the Israeli escalation, with a commitment to not expand the war's scope unless the Israeli provocations escalate. The party linked escalation to stopping American support for Israel, which represents its tool in the region, stating that all options are on the table, but the party might currently prefer training Hamas and launching solidarity strikes against small targets to preserve Hezbollah fighters and its voters and avoid further destruction in Lebanon amid the already deteriorating conditions.
2. **Lebanese Crises:** The economic and political crisis in Lebanon is part of the party's considerations regarding escalation, as Lebanon suffers from internal crises and a vacancy in the presidency, with a temporary government. Thus, the conditions are unsuitable for escalation from the Lebanese front. Additionally, the party is keen on not diminishing its popular power in Lebanon, considering the collapse of state institutions and the weak economy amid the Lebanese currency's decline and rising inflation. Furthermore, there is no financial support available for rebuilding infrastructure if the war escalates on the Lebanese front. Secondly, the party is involved as a political force in the government and parliament, ensuring it maintains its political power that might be threatened by any far-reaching war escalation steps, especially with Israeli threats from the head of Israel's National Security Council to return Lebanon to the Stone Age if the war expands.

3. **Political Conflicts:** The party suffers from internal conflicts and disintegration in its alliances, lacking political support as in the 2006 war when its ally was the then-leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, Michel Aoun, who today is headed by Gebran Bassil, with political tensions between them over the presidential candidacy in Lebanon. Secondly, there are political tensions between Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces Party, with its leader, Samir Geagea, opposing Lebanon's involvement in the war to avoid further destruction. Unlike the 2006 war when the Lebanese homes were opened to receive displaced individuals from the south due to the Israeli bombardment, today the situation is different. In a war on the Lebanese front amid an economic crisis, there would be no welcome for more displaced people.
  
4. **Loss of Influence:** The losses suffered by the party in previous wars, whether its participation in Syria and losing about 2000 fighters, the loss of 1000 Lebanese, and the displacement of about a million individuals in the 2006 war, are influential factors that might fuel public sentiment against the party. The party's headquarters are located between civilians in the Dahiyeh neighborhood in Beirut, with Shia concentration in southern Beirut suburbs and parts of the Bekaa Valley, areas targeted by Israel in the 2006 war. Any attacks on the party's sites would affect Lebanese civilians. During current events in Gaza, Israeli air and artillery strikes have breached the Lebanese territories, resulting in the deaths of journalists and civilians and halting work in Block 9 of the offshore gas field. These losses could escalate if the war expands on this front.

In conclusion, caution remains towards opening a front in southern Lebanon and engaging in a comprehensive confrontation, dictated by the considerations above, human and material cost calculations, and avoiding additional pressure on Iran amid unresolved issues such as its nuclear program, its support for Russia with weapons in Ukraine, its internal crises, and international sanctions imposed on it.

### *C. Houthis and the Tanker War:*

The current interactions in the Gaza Strip are associated with increasing involvement of the Ansar Allah Houthi movement in Yemen in these interactions, either through multiple attempts to target the southern city of

Eilat in Israel or through applying “gradual” pressure on civilian and military maritime operations in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. So far, numerous incidents related to navigation in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean have been reported since October 19, 2023, reflecting earlier scenes where civilian navigation in this area was subject to serious threats, whose impacts are currently more dangerous given the international economic situation.

This important maritime area, witnessing the world’s largest commercial movement, previously experienced the first rounds of the “Tanker War,” which lasted from 1984 to 1987. It witnessed intensive use of marine mines by Iran, causing significant losses to the American naval vessels that had to patrol the Arabian Gulf to escort and protect oil tankers. In April 1988, the American frigate USS Samuel B. Roberts was hit by a marine mine while moving in the Gulf region, causing moderate damage to its hull. This attack prompted the United States, a few days later, to launch an offensive operation that destroyed two Iranian oil platforms and several Iranian naval vessels.

Later, other American naval vessels were damaged by marine mines, but this time they were Iraqi mines. During the naval operations supporting the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, the guided-missile frigate USS Princeton and the amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli were struck by marine mines.

### **Gaza Battles and a New Phase of the “Tanker War”**

After a long pause to the “fiery” exchange targeting tankers and cargo ships in this maritime area, the Ansar Allah Houthi movement entered the field equation related to the Gaza Strip, targeting the southern area of occupied Palestine with several cruise missiles and drones. The United States entered this equation on the Israeli side on October 19, when the American Navy announced that the guided-missile destroyer USS Carney had shot down several missiles and drones launched from Yemen towards Eilat.

The American Navy began to seriously perceive the threats posed by missiles launched from Yemen, whether towards occupied Palestinian territories or towards the American and Israeli navigation in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Thus, on November 4, 2023, it moved the carrier strike group of the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, including the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Philippine Sea and the Arleigh Burke-class

guided-missile destroyers USS Mason and USS Gravelly, to the northern Red Sea from the Mediterranean, joined by the Ohio-class guided-missile submarine USS Florida on November 6.

This group moved to the Gulf of Aden on November 10, about 400 kilometers from the Iranian coast, stationed there, conducting surveillance operations in the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Aden, and Red Sea, in cooperation with another American naval group that had been stationed for a period in the northern Red Sea, consisting of the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Bataan, the Harpers Ferry-class amphibious dock landing ship USS Carter Hall, and the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers USS Carney and Thomas G. Kelley.

Despite this naval build-up, the Houthi group's maritime attacks and movements in this maritime area began to severely escalate on November 19, with the kidnapping of a car-carrying ship flying the Bahamas flag named "Galaxy Leader" while moving in the Red Sea. This came after the group issued a warning to all ships flying the Israeli flag, rented by Israeli companies, or owned by Israeli companies.

The ship, owned by a British company headed by businessman Rami Ungar, with a crew of 52 people, was hijacked by an airlift operation involving a helicopter deploying the assault team onboard. The ship is currently anchored off the coast of the Yemeni port of Hodeidah.

On November 23, 2023, the US Central Command announced that the American destroyer USS Thomas Hudner had shot down several drones over the Red Sea heading from Yemen towards Eilat, the second such incident since the start of military operations in Gaza. On November 25, unconfirmed reports indicated an Israeli cargo ship, "CMA CGM SYMI," was attacked by a drone in the Indian Ocean. On the same day, the British Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported that a group identified as the "Yemeni authorities" instructed a British ship to change its course while approaching the Bab al-Mandab Strait.

The most significant development in these interactions occurred on November 26 and 27, 2023. The UKMTO issued a warning to sailors on November 26 about "two black and white boats with eight people in military uniforms" seen in the area about 60 kilometers south of the Yemeni coast, about

80 kilometers east of Djibouti, and about 110 kilometers northeast of Somalia in the Gulf of Aden, a major shipping route.

Later on the same day, the UKMTO indicated that unidentified individuals boarded the Liberian-flagged tanker “Central Park” while moving off the Gulf of Aden, carrying a shipment of phosphoric acid. This tanker is owned by the British company “Clumvez Shipping Inc.,” affiliated with the British company “Zodiac Maritime,” part of the “Zodiac” group owned by the Israeli businessman Eyal Ofer, with a crew of 22 people from Bulgaria, Georgia, India, the Philippines, Russia, Turkey, and Vietnam, coming from Morocco, crossing the Suez Canal on November 22.

That evening, the American destroyer USS Mason, part of the Eisenhower carrier strike group, responded to the distress call from the “Central Park” tanker, moving with the international anti-piracy task force “TF 151” towards the tanker’s location. According to a US Central Command statement, the five-armed group that hijacked the tanker attempted to escape on a small boat after the American destroyer arrived but was eventually arrested.

On the morning of the next day, November 27, the American destroyer detected the launch of two ballistic missiles from Yemen towards the location of the American destroyer and the rescued tanker, tracking the missiles until they plunged about 19 kilometers from the destroyer’s location.

It is remarkable that a ship belonging to “Zodiac Maritime” had previously been attacked by drones from Yemen in July 2021 when the tanker “Mercer Street,” also owned by the same company, was targeted off the coast of Oman, resulting in the death of two crew members. Another incident occurred in November 2022 when the “Pacific Zircon” tanker was targeted by a drone in the Gulf of Aden, connected to a shipping company associated with the owner of “Zodiac.”

The US Central Command did not specify in its statement whether the two ballistic missiles specifically targeted the American destroyer or the hijacked tanker, but the USS Mason, which carried out the rescue operation, has experience dealing with Yemeni missiles. In 2016, it was targeted three times by Houthis: the first was on October 9, 2016, when it intercepted two missiles, the second on October 12 with two similar missiles, leading the US Navy to strike three Yemeni radar sites the next day. The third attempt occurred on October

15, 2016, when five cruise missiles were launched at the destroyer, intercepting four of them while the fifth fell far away.

Although it is not clear, given the difference in the method of attempting to seize the “Central Park” tanker from the Houthi’s seizure of the “Galaxy Leader” ship, who tried to hijack the “Central Park” tanker, with the likelihood of Somali pirates being involved, the overall escalation in maritime threats to commercial navigation in this vital maritime area is evident.

Recent Houthi activities in Yemen seem to align with the increasing attacks by Iran-affiliated armed groups against the American bases in Iraq and Syria, aiming to expand the military maneuver margin regarding the Gaza crisis. Given the scale and type of attacks attempted on southern occupied Palestine compared to the group’s ballistic and drone capabilities, it does not appear that the group has decided to launch “qualitative” strikes on Israeli cities, focusing instead on the maritime area mentioned to provide “support” for Gaza and convey indirect messages to Israel.

Additionally, these recent developments emphasize the magnitude of the threat to international navigation in this vital maritime area, exacerbated by the lack of a final political solution to the Yemeni crisis, with ongoing talks despite the current events in Gaza. On October 18, 2023, Saudi Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman met with the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council to discuss developments in talks on resolving the Yemeni crisis. Although it is unlikely that the maritime operations in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden will drastically affect these talks, they can be considered a “means to strengthen the position of the Ansar Allah movement in these talks.”

Finally, it can be said that a “balance” characterizes the current maritime scene in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and related missile operations. The Houthis, at least for now, do not seem eager to expand attacks on Israeli cities, despite their capabilities. Meanwhile, the American side has not initiated strikes on Yemeni territory as happened in 2016, focusing on countering any attempts to target southern Israel from Yemen, prioritizing the protection of civilian navigation for its naval units in the Gulf and Red Sea regions.

Considering the above, the conclusion is that the current threats to commercial navigation, while not new in a literal sense, draw from historical experiences. Given the growing global importance of oil, they present new challenges for

any regional or international naval force. These threats are accompanied by unprecedented tactics and methods to threaten ships and naval vessels. This situation may induce future naval strategy planners to consider this asymmetric threat when preparing for any limited or extensive military operation, potentially reviving the convoy method, where naval vessels secure civilian ships and key maritime straits. We might also see future fundamental changes in the design of oil tankers, equipping them with mechanisms to defend against external attacks or modern technologies to overcome these new threats, which also threaten military naval vessels, as demonstrated by the Yemeni battles.

## Dimensions of the Turkish Role:

Turkey's stance towards the Al-Aqsa Flood operation differed from previous times, as it was not constant but went through several phases since the war on the Gaza Strip broke out, starting from neutrality and caution, moving to escalation and calculated involvement, due to the sensitivity of the Palestinian issue for Turkish public opinion and political spectrum components, reflecting on governmental policies. Simultaneously, Turkey sought to complete normalization with Israel and maintain economic relations with it.

### *A. Cautious Diplomacy:*

Turkey's initial reactions from Ankara after the start of the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation were characterized by neutrality and cautious balance due to its desire not to endanger its progress in relations with Tel Aviv while maintaining support for the Palestinian cause. This was apparent in several indicators as follows:

1. **Balanced Speech:** Ankara maintained its support for the Palestinian cause while cooling relations with Hamas and avoiding new repercussions with Israel. While the Turkish Foreign Ministry condemned civilian casualties in Gaza envelope settlements, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan opposed indiscriminate actions against Israeli civilians. His statements fixated on condemning what Turkey describes as targeting civilians from both sides and calling for moderation, restraint, and a ceasefire.
2. **Political Solution Vision:** Ankara called for adopting a peace-supportive stance based on a two-state solution, considering the attack resulted from the political standoff in the peace process between the two sides, holding

Israel politically responsible for reaching this state due to its policies towards Palestinians, and opposing the ground invasion of Gaza fearing escalation. Concurrently, Turkey aimed to propose an initiative to mediate between the two sides, with President Erdogan stating on October 7 that his country was ready to make mediation efforts and steps to prevent increased tension from the ongoing conflict and reiterating his offer for mediation on October 10.

3. **Allowing Pro-Palestinian Demonstrations:** Ankara allowed pro-Palestinian demonstrations in many Turkish areas, with Turkish associations organizing events in Istanbul in front of the Israeli consulate, and the “Huda Par” party, an Islamic Kurdish party close to the authorities, organizing massive events in southeast Turkey, alongside demonstrations in Turkish provinces on the Syrian border.
4. **Cool Relations with Hamas:** Ankara sought to cool its relations with Hamas despite the ongoing contacts. A Palestinian source in Ankara told Al-Monitor that Palestinian groups, including Hamas, were dissatisfied with the Turkish position and considered Ankara’s statements insufficient, even without summoning the Israeli ambassador to the Foreign Ministry. Additionally, two different sources told Al-Monitor that Ankara politely asked Ismail Haniyeh and his accompanying delegation to leave Turkey, as it did not want to appear to be sheltering Hamas after footage showing him and other Hamas members prostrating in thanks while watching the news of the incursion on television spread on social media. Adding that Ankara was also aggravated by statements made by Saleh Al-Arouri about Hamas capturing several Israeli soldiers to force Tel Aviv to release all Palestinian prisoners and continuing the fight. Consequently, Hamas was not welcomed by Turkey at that stage, making Hamas more open to Cairo, Doha, and Tehran in addressing the crisis.

Given this, neutral diplomacy raises several questions, the most important of which are Turkey’s motives behind it, which can be outlined as follows:

1. **Strengthening Rapprochement with Israel:** The Al-Aqsa Flood operation came at a time when President Erdogan was seeking to normalize relations with regional powers, including Israel. After years of bilateral disputes, Erdogan met the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in September on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly

in New York, inviting him to visit Ankara. This meeting followed the full restoration of diplomatic relations between the two sides and the exchange of ambassadors after years of rupture, especially after Israeli President Isaac Herzog's visit to Turkey in March 2022, leading to the Israeli Ministry of Transport announcing at the end of 2022 the expansion of aviation lines and movements with Turkey under a new aviation agreement, the first since 1951. Therefore, Turkey aimed to assume a cautious neutral stance to ensure continued relations with Israel and solidify rapprochement.

2. Turkey's Economic Situation: The war also coincided with Turkey dealing with an unprecedented economic crisis under the Justice and Development Party, ruling the country since 2002, needing to develop economic relations with its surroundings, including Israel, forcing it to ease escalation and maintain stable relations, especially as it looks forward to developing projects to transport Israeli gas through Turkey to Europe. President Erdogan saw that any solidarity stance with Palestine could disrupt these energy plans and deprive Turkey of playing a significant role in global energy policies, especially after being excluded from the "India-Middle East Corridor" plan. Additionally, Erdogan wanted to maintain economic relations with Israel, with the trade volume between Turkey and Israel nearing nine billion dollars, of which five and a half billion are Turkish exports to Israel, enhancing the economic situation inside Turkey.
3. Strengthening Ankara's Position with Washington: Turkey's position can also be understood in the context of Ankara's attempts to use Israel as a trump card in resolving its outstanding issues with Washington, pressuring Washington to agree to Turkey's continued possession of the Russian S-400 system and stopping US support for the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which Turkey sees as a national security threat. Additionally, sustaining new distinguished relations with Israel fits into enhancing the Turkish intervention in Syria, occupying its lands, and continuing Ankara's hostile plans against Damascus in full coordination with Tel Aviv, contributing to weakening Syria's ability to confront Turkey's plans in Syria. Simultaneously, Russia's lack of response to Erdogan for renewing the grain agreement and considering Erdogan unreliable has weakened Erdogan's hopes of keeping Russia as a card to resist American pressures when necessary. Thus, he does not want to lose the Israeli card either.

## *B. Calculated Escalation:*

The escalation of Israeli bombardment prompted Ankara to change its rhetoric and adopt a more stern stance towards Israel, evident in several indicators, shown as follows:

1. **Explicit Accusations:** The ceiling of the Turkish official rhetoric against Israel was raised, accusing the latter of committing war crimes and genocide against Palestinians, describing it as a terrorist state, criticizing its Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, holding him directly responsible, and declaring him politically finished, ending any dealings with him, as Erdogan stated literally. In October, he announced the cancellation of his planned visit to Israel, affirming that his country rejects the “atrocities committed by Israel” against civilians in Gaza.

Additionally, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, during his speech at the “Cairo Peace Conference,” stated that what “Israel” is doing in Gaza is a crime against humanity without any excuses, calling it to stop.

Finally, Turkey directed sharp criticisms towards the West, the United States, and the European Union, for its hypocrisy, military mobilization, and directly holding it responsible for the Israeli practices and crimes, capable of stopping them, emphasizing its double standards towards Ukraine and Gaza compared to Turkey’s consistent ethical and political stance in both cases.

2. **Suspending Energy Cooperation:** Turkish media reported Ankara suspending all energy agreements and cooperation plans with Israel, including the largest offshore gas field project in Israel. This was apparent when the Turkish Energy Minister Alparslan Bayraktar canceled a planned visit to Tel Aviv in the coming days, during which the two sides were supposed to negotiate purchasing gas and transporting it to Europe, especially amid increasing global demand for energy supplies from the region.

Some estimates suggest this will harm Israel, as the Turkish option is the most suitable and least costly after Tel Aviv sought Turkey’s assistance as a second partner after Cairo to transport gas to Europe through pipelines passing through Turkey and use this gas to satisfy Turkey’s local needs.

3. **Suspending Diplomatic Relations:** In November, Turkey announced recalling its ambassador in Israel for consultations after Israel refused

to agree to a ceasefire in Gaza. This followed Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen's announcement that his government ordered the return of diplomatic representatives from Turkey, responding to Erdogan's harsh criticisms against Tel Aviv over the Gaza events, declaring he would cut off communications with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

While this recall does not represent a stop in diplomatic relations between the two countries, it is seen as reducing cooperation and expressing the cooling of relations restored in 2022 after a decade-long rupture.

4. Refusing to Classify Hamas as a Terrorist Group: President Erdogan refused to describe Hamas as a "terrorist organization," insisting on calling it a "liberation movement fighting to protect its land," adding that the scenario of eliminating Hamas is unrealistic, appealing for global pressure on Netanyahu's government. This stance drew international condemnation, most notably from Italy, describing his statements as disgusting, and Israel rejected them, calling them harsh and inciting.

In this context, the ruling Justice and Development Party in Turkey announced that Turkish lawyers would file about 3,000 complaints to the International Criminal Court, accusing Israel of committing crimes in Gaza. It should be noted that the Turkish government cannot directly file a complaint with the International Criminal Court as it did not sign the Rome Statute of the Court.

5. Ongoing Relief Efforts: Alongside diplomatic and media efforts, Turkey rapidly intensified its relief activities towards Gaza, with the Turkish Ministry of Defense establishing an air bridge to transport humanitarian aid to Egypt for delivery to the Gaza residents. It sent a large ship carrying 50 containers filled with field hospitals, medical supplies, and other aid to Egypt in preparation for transport to Gaza.

In a conference with his Bosnian counterpart in Ankara, the Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan mentioned ongoing efforts to transfer all patients from Gaza hospitals, noting the transfer of 27 patients from Gaza with 13 companions to Ankara, adding that Turkey prolongs its efforts to establish a field hospital in Gaza.

Lastly, Turkish Health Minister Fahrettin Koca visited Palestinian patients who crossed into Egypt, during an inspection tour in Egyptian hospitals. Koca

personally welcomed Palestinian cancer patients, whom the Turkish state covered their treatment in its hospitals, transferring them via two planes, one presidential and the other from the Turkish army.

In this context, several factors contributed to shaping the Turkish position towards Gaza's events, outlined as follows:

1. Internal Popular and Official Pressures: The transformation in Turkey's approach rooted from the escalating internal pressures driven by the brutality of Israeli attacks on Gaza. With rising civilian casualties and widespread destruction, a broad Turkish segment crossing political camps opposed these attacks, demanding a stronger Turkish stance.

Among the prominent internal pressures was the stance of Erdogan's main ally, Nationalist Movement Party leader Devlet Bahçeli, who adopted street discontent over Gaza vocally, delivering a confrontational speech, even suggesting a Turkish ultimatum to Israel for a 24-hour ceasefire in Gaza, otherwise Turkey must intervene due to its humanitarian, historical, and religious responsibilities. Some understood this as a call for direct military intervention. Additionally, the former Prime Minister and Future Party leader Ahmet Davutoglu criticized his government's lack of sufficient support for Palestinians.

On the other hand, all political parties in the Turkish parliament showed a rare united front, issuing a joint statement condemning "Israel's crime against humanity," while the parties in the ruling People's Alliance took severe stances against Israeli escalation in Gaza, with the Islamic "Huda Par" party organizing a solidarity march outside the Israeli consulate in Istanbul.

Moreover, public anger in Turkish cities manifested in protests, targeting the Israeli embassy with fireworks while not allowing Turkish citizens to approach it, escalating the security threat to Israeli diplomats to the extent that Israel decided to evacuate them.

All these indicated a broad public sector, particularly within the ruling People's Alliance, perceived Turkey's relatively non-confrontational stance as insufficient, prompting various conservative and nationalist parties to mobilize and influence the ruling party's base through confrontational positions and sometimes outbidding the government, intensifying pressure on the ruling party.

2. **Upcoming Municipal Elections:** The local elections in March are closely tied to Turkey's shift in position, as solidarity with Gaza's plight and pressures from Erdogan's bases and allies made confrontational approaches a crucial political mobilization tool. This serves to maintain the People's Alliance's cohesion around a central issue, possibly attracting other sectors, especially the undecided voters.

In summary, this new Turkish approach may strengthen Erdogan's legitimacy internally, especially since the recent presidential election results show his and his party's popularity in decline. Erdogan only won 52% of votes in the May 2023 presidential elections, and his party attained its lowest results in parliamentary elections.

Concurrently, the Turkish opposition aimed to leverage the Gaza crisis to enhance its image and reduce the ruling authority's credit. This was evident as some opposition factions attempted to undercut Erdogan's efforts on Gaza, with the Nationalist Movement Party leader calling for Turkish intervention to impose a ceasefire in Gaza, facing opposition from various opposition forces like the Future Party and the Yeniden Refah Party, which demanded closing American bases in Turkey. Meanwhile, DEVA Party leader Ali Babacan claimed that Turkey's role could have been more effective amidst the humanitarian tragedy, suggesting that Turkey's word is not as strong as before. Good Party leader Meral Akener used the Gaza crisis to call for Syrian refugees to go to Gaza to defend it, urging the government to facilitate their arrival in Palestine.

Therefore, Erdogan's approach aims to prevent opposition parties from outspending the government's efforts on Gaza, leveraging it for the upcoming local elections.

3. **Affirming Political Leadership:** Linked to the previous point, Turkish internal alignment across ideologies on supporting Palestinian rights, including secularists, Islamists, Kurdish parties, Turkish nationalists, centrists, radicals, left-wing extremists, and right-wing extremists, alongside the centrality of the Palestinian cause in Arab and Islamic public consciousness, makes it an ideal element for Erdogan's political dialogue and media messages to reinforce his image as a regional political leader defending the Arab and Islamic causes. This suits his preference for the populist rhetoric to enhance his influence in the Arab and Islamic worlds

and strengthen his image locally as a charismatic leader and regionally as a regional leader.

4. **Countering American Pressure:** Ankara aimed to utilize the crisis to send a message that it could disrupt and obstruct Western policies in the region. This likely prompted Washington and Western powers to emphasize coordination with Turkey to release Israelis and foreigners captured by Hamas during the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation.

This relates to Washington’s support for the Kurdish self-administration, which Turkey considers a terrorist entity, as well as recent joint maneuvers with PKK fighters. Moreover, American pressures on Turkey to reduce military cooperation with Russia, alongside Congress’s opposition to Turkey obtaining advanced F-16 fighters, and American desires to increase pressure on Ankara to approve Sweden’s NATO membership.

5. **Preventing Iranian Regional Infiltration:** The escalation can also be interpreted as Turkey’s desire to prevent Iran from utilizing the Palestinian cause to enhance its regional interests amid discussions on Iran’s support for Palestinian resistance, improving Iran’s image in the collective Islamic and Arab consciousness. In short, Turkey fears Iran might take advantage of developments in Gaza to boost its regional interests, especially in competition areas between the two countries. The Turkish-Iranian divergence on the Gaza war was evident as Iran postponed a scheduled visit by President Ebrahim Raisi to Ankara on November 28.

### *C. Established Motives:*

There are several fixed interest considerations behind Turkey’s interest in Gaza’s situation, in both the cautious balance and calculated escalation phases, which will also guide Ankara’s future moves, they can be outlined as follows:

1. **Improving Turkey’s Regional Influence:** Ankara aimed to achieve several key objectives, including recognizing Turkey as a major regional power capable of playing a vital role in resolving crises, alongside solidifying its role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which holds regional and international priority, especially for the United States and Europe. Simultaneously, Ankara seeks to expand coordination and understanding with regional powers, particularly those involved in the Palestinian issue.

Additionally, Ankara seems concerned about being sidelined in favor of Cairo and Doha, as this indicates a decline in Turkey's central role in Western powers' strategy in the Middle East. Therefore, Turkey likely aimed through its involvement in the Gaza war and discussions on security arrangements there to send a message to Washington and European capitals about the indispensability of its role in the upcoming phase.

2. Establishing Turkey as a Peace Broker: Turkey's intervention in Gaza's situation is linked to its desire to enhance its new role as a peace broker or neutral guarantor in regional conflicts capable of leading initiatives to de-escalate and settle for regional peace. This aims to reinforce the regional standing and elevate strategic importance for Western allies, a role it has recently assumed and achieved notable successes, such as in Cyprus, acting as a guarantor, in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict mediating between Baku and Yerevan, and in the grain initiative in Ukraine.

Thus, Ankara proposed itself as a potential mediator for hostage negotiations, with Erdogan proposing a "guaranteeing formula" where Turkey would act as a guarantor state for an independent Palestinian state established through a comprehensive and just settlement of the Palestinian issue. This relies on Turkey's positive or at least interest-driven relations with both conflict sides, eventually renewing Turkish influence in regional equations.

3. Serving Turkey's Vision for Security Council Reform and International System Amendment: Erdogan found in the UN system's failure to issue an international resolution for a ceasefire and humanitarian aid to Gaza an opportunity to redirect criticisms towards the global system and the international community, particularly the UN Security Council structure. He argued that the failure to address the civilians' predicament in Gaza weakens the global system's credibility and moral authority, stating that the UN's inability to agree on a decision about Israeli bombardment was "saddening." He emphasized that the Security Council needs reform to be more inclusive, aligning with repeated discussions within Turkish elite circles about the necessity of Security Council reform under the slogan "the world is bigger than five." Concurrently, Turkish officials blamed the United States for continuing illegal Israeli practices against Palestinians, emphasizing that the current unbalanced global system dominated by US unipolarity is far from achieving peace, stability, and justice for a significant part of the world.

#### *D. Potential Repercussions:*

Turkey's stance towards the Gaza war may result in several consequences, shown as follows:

1. The Turkish-Israeli Normalization: Turkey's stance towards Israel might impact the future of normalizing relations between the two countries, potentially taking the path of one of the following scenarios:
  - a. Temporary Phase Freeze: Most analyses suggest that the normalization path between the two countries will be "temporarily" affected by escalating Israeli attacks on Gaza, but it will not end altogether. It will take a longer timeframe than before the conflict. Therefore, relations in the coming phase might witness a level of regression and deterioration demonstrated in verbal tensions and reduced diplomatic relations, leading to a "temporary freeze" or "momentary cooling" in efforts to expand and develop relations, with its extent controlled by future war developments.

While Turkey's escalating rhetoric towards Israel will impact their relations, delaying some energy projects and political and security coordination, both countries are keen on not returning to pre-2010 relations, avoiding complete severance of relations.

This view relies on Turkey's desire to maintain interests with Israel, particularly economic ones. It is noted that Turkey has not taken any tangible official steps against Israel, with no signals suggesting the Turkish government might impose any sanctions like severing diplomatic and economic relations or leveraging its NATO presence to pressure Washington and Western players with all its means, indicating a desire not to ruin relations with Israel. The Justice and Development Party has always separated politics from economics, evident in sustained economic relations even during the worst periods with its surroundings, including Israel.

On the other hand, the Israeli government has not taken any confrontational diplomatic steps, such as expelling the Turkish ambassador or reducing diplomatic relations, reflecting mutual interest in maintaining their interests.

Finally, promoters of this scenario argue that Turkish-Israeli relations, nurtured under American sponsorship, are unlikely to be allowed to deteriorate or collapse by Washington. Despite current media conflicts between Ankara and Tel Aviv, intelligence, military, and economic relations continue frequently, highlighting

the unique nature of Turkish-Israeli relations, separating media statements from actual relations.

b. Complete Severance: Prolonged tension, even at the rhetorical level, might lead to deepening the crisis, returning both countries to pre-recent normalization positions, especially with the continued aggression on Gaza. This was evident with some Israeli political elites calling for revising relations with Ankara, coupled with the departure of the Israeli diplomatic mission from Ankara and Israel's previous rejection of Turkey's mediation request in the Gaza crisis.

Additionally, Israeli threats to assassinate Hamas leaders abroad produced strong reactions in Turkey, promising a firm response to any Israeli violation of its sovereignty, representing the fragility of peace between Turkey and Israel, according to observers.

Based on this, this scenario suggests the end of Turkish-Israeli rapprochement, particularly with Turkey's escalating criticisms of Israel's stance on the Gaza war, seen with the Turkish Ministry of Justice directing the beginning of a criminal case against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for "genocide" in Gaza. Finally, increased popular pressures might enhance severance and freeze relations between the two countries.

2. Expanding Distance Between Washington and Ankara: The war added another factor to the already tense Turkish-American relations, overlapping with escalating disputes, especially over US support for Syrian Democratic Forces in northern Syria. The climax of this tension was the US F-16 fighter shooting down a Turkish drone a few hundred yards from American forces in northern Syria. The escalatory rhetoric against Tel Aviv and Washington might complicate Turkey's quest for F-16 jets and could prompt the Turkish parliament to delay the approving of Sweden's NATO membership protocols at Erdogan's request. Initial signs of Gaza-related tensions were seen in US sanctions on Turkish entities linked to Hamas, with the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control imposing sanctions on three major stakeholders in the Turkish real estate investment trust "Trend GYO," the Turkish charity "Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH)." Notably, Turkish-American tensions extended to the Turkish street, targeting American installations, including the Kürecik radar base in Malatya.

3. **Economic Challenges:** Analysts predict that Turkey's extreme rhetoric towards Israel will impose significant challenges on the already struggling Turkish economy, evident in several manifestations. The Istanbul Stock Exchange temporarily ceased operations following Erdogan's speech against Israel due to activating automatic trading suspension systems, with the main stock index dropping by 5%, the most noticeable decline since February. Additionally, The Wall Street Journal reported that President Biden's administration is ready to impose broader sanctions on Turkey for its support of Hamas.

In this context, many adversaries have expressed anger that Erdogan is reverting to his previous style, which could lead the country into new crises. This may disrupt the mission of the economic team, cause renewed concern among markets and investors, and deepen the current economic crisis, especially given the heavy reliance on foreign investments. Despite the fact that Turkey's approach remains one of calculated confrontation, without affecting economic relations or igniting political tensions as in previous experiences, this does not necessarily prevent the negative impact on the image of Turkish normalization, which could hinder the government's economic steps.

Based on the current situation, all indications suggest that Turkey will seek in the coming period to maintain a delicate balance between supporting the Palestinian cause, responding to grassroots pressure, and preventing Turkish-Israeli relations from deteriorating to a dangerous level that threatens Turkish economic interests and severely damages its relations with regional and international parties involved in the conflict.

Moreover, Turkey does not want this war to expand regionally, as it suspects that the West has a larger agenda than merely the Gaza issue, namely redrawing the Middle East map after the war in a way that allows for the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Syria.

Finally, Ankara aims to be a key player in the security arrangements and the reconstruction process in Gaza after the war ends, which would ultimately enhance Erdoğan's and the Justice and Development Party's image in the collective Arab and Islamic consciousness, thereby bolstering their chances in the upcoming elections.



## Section Nine

# Gaza War in the International Competition Theater

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The ongoing developments in the Palestinian-Israeli theater, following the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation, reveal the deep geopolitical and geostrategic transformations in the regional and international contexts. This situation is linked to the intensifying international competition between major powers (the United States against the revisionist powers represented by China and Russia). The intensive American efforts to limit the Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific region, and to contain the Russian influence in the Balkans and Central Asia, make the Middle East one of the theaters of power balance that these adversaries use to confront Washington, and possibly negotiate or trade for other areas related to the Chinese and Russian interests.

In other words, in light of the extensive Israeli aggression in Gaza since the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation on October 7th, it is clear that there is a complete alignment of the Western world with Israel, accompanied by providing “unlimited” support for its bloody war against the Gaza Strip. This is contrasted by the stances of other powers, such as Russia, China, and India, which have ranged between balance, watchfulness, and caution, based on their understanding that the repercussions of this war will affect their interests in the Middle East, not to mention its potential impact on building a multipolar international system. This situation raises multiple questions about the impact of the ongoing war in Gaza on the state of competition on the international stage.

## Western Bias and Support for Israel:

The United States' handling of the current escalation in the Palestinian-Israeli theater has reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to maintaining Israel's qualitative military superiority and enhancing its ability to defend itself against any threats. This was reflected in President Joe Biden's statement in response to the October 7th clashes, as he assured that Washington is fully prepared "to provide all appropriate means of support to the Government and people of Israel." This was further stressed by National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby's comment on Israel's bloody attack on Gaza on October 27th, stating that Washington "does not draw red lines" for Israel.

In other words, Washington's quick response included reaffirming its support for Israel by planning to provide military aid that reinforces its power against Hamas. This response bypassed all indications of disagreement that had emerged between the two countries in the months leading up to the escalation, such as Biden urging the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in March 2023 to back down from legislative efforts related to the judicial system, expressing deep concern about the "health of Israeli democracy." Additionally, when asked about inviting Netanyahu to the White House, Biden's definitive response was no. Moreover, there have been calls to stop the American aid to Israel, not only from some Democrats but also from Republicans who see military aid as a leverage to deter Israel from its rapprochement with China.

The official European stance was also supportive of Israel and its right to self-defense, condemning the attacks carried out by Hamas under the name "Al-Aqsa Flood," calling for the release of detainees, protecting civilians, respecting international law, and delivering humanitarian aid to Gaza residents, while working to avoid condemning Israel in the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council. The European Union tasked Josep Borrell, the EU's foreign policy chief, with formulating common positions among member states, but the union found it challenging to take a unified stance, except for condemning the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation.

Based on this, the Western bias and support for Israel can be interpreted according to several considerations:

**Commitment to Israel's Security:** It is clear that there is a Western commitment to protecting Israel's security, as the American approach to protecting Israel and supporting its security in the region is a central goal for Washington across

successive administrations, considering it an essential strategic commitment to American national security. The European stance towards Israel is also based on historical friendship, shared democratic values, respect for the rule of law, and growing interdependence and economic cooperation.

**Avoiding Negative Historical Experiences:** The historical legacy of the Holocaust still exists in Western memory, strengthening the vision of protecting Israel as a safe state for Jews in the Middle East. This explains the unconditional support from Berlin, which still carries the Nazi guilt towards Jews, as Chancellor Olaf Scholz affirmed before the Bundestag: “At this moment, there is only one place for Germany. It is alongside Israel,” adding, “This is what we mean when we say Israel’s security is a reason for the existence of the German state.”

**Internal Political Battle:** Amid the political division in the American field, all issues are directed and employed in the conflict between the camps, including the violent escalation in the Palestinian theater. Several Republicans, including former President Donald Trump, blamed the Biden administration, considering that the primary reason behind Hamas’s attacks is the administration’s policy towards Iran and the hostage release deal. This provides clear explanations for the American administration’s insistence on supporting the Israeli stance without any concern for de-escalation. Europe, on its part, recognizes the necessity of aligning with the American administration’s stance supporting Israel, as a parallel stance to the American support for Ukraine and European security against Russia.

**Economic Interests:** Israel and the West, the United States and the European Union, have significant economic relationships and interests, expected to become more central and extensive following the US announcement of the “India-Middle East-Europe” corridor project, linking Europe to the Indo-Pacific region via Israel, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. If completed, it would challenge China’s “Belt and Road” initiative launched in 2013 to improve China’s global influence from East Asia to Europe. Additionally, Israel has become one of the gas suppliers to Europe, located in a promising region facing security threats from Iran and its proxies.

**Complex Regional Context:** The current military escalation occurs in an unstable regional context suffering from political and security fluidity. This means that continued violence and escalation could significantly increase the chances of expanding battlefronts, potentially leading to a regional war. In this context, Israel

represents the West's proxy in the region, especially the United States, which considers Israel its most important partner in the Middle East. Therefore, in light of increasing violence by Iran's proxies on various fronts, the West recognizes the necessity of upholding a message that it will not allow the anti-Western regional axis in general, and anti-Israel in particular, to achieve any major victories.

The issue of prisoners and detainees: The release of detainees held by Hamas represents an urgent priority for the Western bloc. It is estimated that ten Americans are still being held by Hamas, and approximately 35 American citizens have been killed since October 7. For European powers, this issue has been a primary driver in their engagement with the situation, particularly Germany, the United Kingdom, and France. These countries have been prompted to coordinate cooperation and partnership with Israel on one hand, and regional powers, mainly Egypt, on the other hand, in an effort to resolve this issue amidst the ongoing escalation.

## **Challenges Facing Western Bias Towards Israel:**

Historically, Washington has led the Arab-Israeli conflict scene as a supporter and mediator, although never retreating from the goal of protecting Israel and ensuring its security. European powers have also supported resolving the historical conflict between Palestinians and Israelis according to international law and United Nations resolutions aiming for a two-state solution. However, in response to the "Al-Aqsa Flood" attacks on October 7th, the Western reaction confirmed full support and complete bias in favor of Israel, lacking any serious efforts to calm and contain the situation or even to restrain Israel from committing more violence. This enforced a set of challenges on the Western stance towards the bloody scene in Gaza, including:

Power Versus Values: While policies can sometimes determine and direct situations on the ground, at other times, the situations on the ground dictate the shape of policies and the limits of movements. Looking at the current scene, it is apparent that it represents a new and different round of escalation, reflecting the modest performance of Israeli intelligence and a notable increase in Hamas's capabilities. This requires, from the Israeli perspective, the strongest and most violent response to enhance Israel's image and achieve deterrence against Hamas and other Palestinian factions.

Consequently, Western stances emphasized Israel's right to self-defense, with American statements even emphasizing the absence of "red lines" on Israel's actions. This scene was accompanied by numerous massacres resulting in thousands of civilian casualties in Gaza, mostly women and children, along with the destruction of infrastructure, schools, hospitals, and places of worship. Additionally, the violence in the West Bank increased, both from the Israeli occupation forces and settler groups.

This means that the Israeli aggression on Gaza, with all its excesses, not only represented a violation of international laws and norms but also a regression from all the values the West attempted to market as purely Western values forming the foundations of the current international system, especially democracy and human rights. This has put Western values in question and harmed the West's image and standing in the international system. Therefore, the West faces a dilemma of reconciling its relations with its traditional ally (Israel) and defending the "Western values," especially in light of the widespread and bloody violations committed by occupation forces in Gaza.

Internal Political Battles: Amidst the political division in the United States, all issues are directed and employed in the conflict between the camps, which also included the violent developments in Gaza. Several Republicans, including former President Donald Trump and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, criticized the Biden administration, considering that the primary reason behind Hamas's attacks is the administration's policy towards Iran and the hostage release deal. This has been a powerful motive for the Biden administration to provide immense support for Israel.

As a result of the American administration's commitment to providing "unlimited" support to Israel, several officials have resigned, including Josh Paul, Director of the Office of Political-Military Affairs at the State Department. Reports also indicated that more than 400 officials signed a letter criticizing the Biden administration for "neglecting support for Palestinians." This can be considered one of the reasons for Biden's repeated assurances about the necessity to protect civilians in Gaza and deliver humanitarian aid. This means that the political division and the ongoing partisan battle represent one of the most important challenges affecting Washington's handling of the situation in Gaza, especially as it moves towards a new presidential race.

In Europe, the violent developments in Gaza have been a subject of political clashes between the right and left on the political scene. In Britain, for example, Labor Party leader Keir Starmer caused discontent within the party by saying that “Israel has the right to cut off electricity and water to Gaza,” and he did not call for a ceasefire, arguing that it would encourage Hamas. As a result, prominent figures in the party accused Starmer of providing “excessive support” for Israel, leading to the resignation of dozens of party members. In Spain, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez tried to alleviate the situation following statements by the leader of the left-wing Podemos party, who described the Israeli aggression as genocide and called for prosecuting Benjamin Netanyahu for war crimes, urging her country to sever diplomatic relations with Israel and enforce economic sanctions on it.

Division of Western Public Opinion: Until recently, some analyses dealt with the general sympathy of Western public opinion, especially American, with Israel as a given. However, in recent years, some changes have happened in this regard, particularly in light of some Americans linking their stance on Israel with the internal struggle against racism, as well as the shift in the positions of some leftist parties in Europe, which associated Israel with colonialism.

In this context, the American stage witnessed several demonstrations condemning the Israeli aggression on Gaza and supporting the Palestinian cause, including protests in Washington, New York, and New Jersey, as well as protests and divisions at universities such as Harvard and Indiana, and protests in schools like Fairfax County high schools in Virginia. Additionally, some American Jews took a stance supporting the Palestinian cause and rejecting the violations committed by the occupation forces, displayed in a march organized by two major Jewish organizations (Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now), with thousands of Jews participating in Capitol Hill, some of whom set up a sit-in inside the building. Europe saw similar scenes, with thousands marching in support of Palestine in Manchester, Utrecht, Milan, Paris, Denmark, and other places.

This scene reflects a clear dilemma for the West in dealing with the Israeli aggression on Gaza, as it needs to balance the conservative and evangelical currents in the United States and the right-wing currents in Europe that support Israel without bounds, against the progressive currents in the United States and the leftist currents in Europe that reject blind support for Israel and support the rights of the Palestinian people.

European Position Variations: The Israeli aggression on Gaza reflected a disparity in European positions on several issues, primarily the suspension of

development aid to Palestinians. While the European Commission declared the suspension of aid and then reversed it, Ireland, France, and Spain opposed the decision, Denmark temporarily suspended its aid, Germany suspended its aid pending review, and the UK announced it would review its development aid to Palestinians.

Additionally, there was a division between those supporting Israel's right to self-defense, such as Austria, Hungary, and Germany, and those supporting a humanitarian ceasefire to deliver aid, led by Spain, which was revealed during the European Union summit held on October 26, 2023.

These internal divisions regarding the war between Israel and Hamas weaken the European Union's attempts to present itself as a cohesive geopolitical player with a strategic orientation. The EU summits in Brussels failed to display an image of unity within the EU concerning the Israeli-Hamas conflict. This means that the West faces a dilemma in presenting a unified transatlantic stance that explicitly and fully supports Israel's transgressions.

**Israel's Security Versus Regional Security:** The issue of protecting and ensuring Israel's security is an important Western commitment in all the developments taking place in the Middle East. This is reflected in the American approach aimed at protecting Israel and supporting its security in the region as an essential goal for Washington across successive administrations, considering it a solid American commitment based on the necessity of maintaining Israel's qualitative military superiority and improving its ability to defend itself against any threat.

On the other hand, the issue of regional stability is one of the most important Western goals in its view of the Middle East, rooting from the concern about the stability of energy sources in the region, as well as the potential increased role of anti-Western forces, linked to a potential increase in the role of the West's adversaries in the region. Additionally, Europe has strong fears of the consequences of instability in the Middle East, considering its repercussions for increasing waves of migration and asylum, and activities related to terrorism and organized crime.

In this context, amidst the bloody violations committed by the Israeli occupation in Gaza, it is evident that ensuring Israel's security according to its current extreme right-wing vision does not only fail to support regional security and stability but also goes beyond that to stimulate the outbreak of a regional war, posing a dilemma for the West in dealing with the ongoing Israeli aggression.

Escalation Path Versus Normalization Path: The current escalation is taking place in a turbulent regional context suffering from political and security fluidity. This means that Western support for Israel and encouraging its continuation on the bloody path and committing more massacres to frame its image as a strong state in the region means driving the region to the brink and increasing the chances of the situation in Gaza turning into a multi-front war, and perhaps even a regional war.

This issue clearly contradicts the path of regional stability based on normalization launched by the Trump administration and continued by the Biden administration, aimed at enhancing Israel's position in the region. This means losing the gains achieved in recent years, the latest reflection of which was the Saudi-Israeli normalization, which now seems likely to be interrupted given the difficulty of Saudi Arabia continuing rapprochement with Israel while Palestinian blood is still being spilled. Therefore, Washington faces a real dilemma in reconciling support for Israel's approach in elevating the language of violence and destruction, and the regional normalization path that Washington has been keen to promote in the region.

Western Role Versus Adversaries' Role: In light of the Western approach to protecting Israel and supporting its security as an essential goal in the region, which was reflected during the current escalation in complete and clear bias towards Israel and its actions, regardless of the human and humanitarian cost in Gaza. This scene has led to a clear dilemma for the West in the form of the increasing exploitation by adversaries (Russia and China) of the Western bias towards Israel to promote their roles on the regional and international stages as reasonable, moderate roles supporting Arab rights and the Palestinian cause.

Accordingly, the statements and actions of Moscow and Beijing conflict with those of Washington and European countries, as they criticized Israel in a manner that appeared to showcase the efforts of the two countries to improve their roles and leadership as an alternative to the biased American leadership. Therefore, the two countries aimed to play a diplomatic role aimed at reducing Israeli escalation in Gaza, clearly reflected in their vetoing the American resolution at the Security Council, which aimed to condemn the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation led by Hamas. This might reflect the adversaries' desire to exploit the current Israeli aggression on Gaza within the context of the ongoing international competition between the two camps, so to speak.

## Balancing International Competitors' Roles:

Some analyses consider that the ongoing escalation in the Palestinian-Israeli arena has refocused attention on the Middle East, which serves as an additional incentive for Western adversaries like Russia and China, or emerging powers like India, to utilize the scene in framing it as one of the balancing or perhaps confrontational theaters with the West. This is especially true when considering Israel as the West's most important partner in the region, alongside the increasing opportunities to exploit the clear Western bias towards Israel despite its atrocities against civilians in Gaza.

### *China: A Balanced Stance:*

China commented on the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation launched by Hamas against Israel by expressing its regret over civilian casualties and emphasizing the need to protect them from violence, but it did not condemn the attack. Beijing also supported the Palestinians, as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi considered the intense Israeli bombing of Gaza to be beyond the range of self-defense and rejected Israel's collective punishment policy against the Palestinians. China, through its special envoy to the Middle East, Zhai Jun, attributed the crisis between Israel and Gaza to the absence of assurances for Palestinian rights.

In this context, China condemned the Israeli attacks on Gaza, describing them as disproportionate military actions, and called on Israel to immediately stop the violence and evacuate all civilians and civilian areas from attacks. Simultaneously, China urged both parties to return to peace talks based on the "two-state solution" principle and international legitimacy resolutions, emphasizing that the only solution is the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. China also offered its mediation efforts to reduce tension and reach a peaceful solution, supporting Egyptian and UN mediation efforts to ceasefire, and announced sending urgent humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Thus, it can be said that China has taken a balanced stance condemning violence and calling for a diplomatic solution without bias towards either party. China has specific calculations regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that affect its position in the international competition. It maintains strong trade relations with both Israel and Arab countries and does not want to take a stance that could negatively affect these relations, consequently harming its international

economic influence. Additionally, China does not want to take a stance that could anger any party and deteriorate its position. Moreover, China is concerned with regional stability that serves its economic interests in the region and the world.

### *Russia: The Observing Party:*

Russia preferred to take the position of an “observing party” in the Israeli aggression against Gaza rather than fully aligning with either side. Therefore, the Russian Foreign Ministry did not hold Israel or Hamas responsible for the explosion at the Baptist Hospital, describing the incident as a “crime” without accusing either Israel or Hamas. On the other hand, Russia is working to connect the Palestinian-Israeli conflict with its crisis with Western powers, especially the United States and Europe. Russian President Vladimir Putin considered the crisis between Israel and the Palestinians a result of “the failure of American policy in the region,” and that the only solution to the crisis is to return to the United Nations Security Council resolution regarding the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state, calling on both parties to minimize civilian harm as much as possible.

Russia’s cautious policy is due to its upholding of strong historical ties with Israel, especially considering the presence of Jews in Russia and Russian speakers in Israel. On the other hand, Moscow maintains diplomatic and economic relations with many Arab countries, attempting to play an effective mediating role in the Middle East by pressing for a ceasefire and finding a peaceful solution to the conflict that considers the interests of both parties according to international legitimacy resolutions. However, Moscow might utilize the current crisis to increase its regional influence, such as facilitating arms deals or enhancing economic cooperation to serve its economic and strategic interests.

Russia had submitted a draft resolution to the Security Council calling for an immediate ceasefire and condemning all forms of violence and acts of combat against civilians. However, the draft resolution was rejected as it did not attain the required number of votes for adoption, with five members in favor, four opposed, and six abstaining.

Russia is one of the biggest beneficiaries of the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as it distracts the Western powers from the war in Ukraine. The continued American and European support for Israel militarily and financially might lead,

from Moscow's perspective, to a reduction in Western aid to Ukraine, which would benefit Russia's military progress in the Ukraine war.

### ***India: Balancing Interests:***

India's policy towards the crisis between Israel and the Palestinians reflects a "balance of interests." Following the outbreak of the crisis, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a phone call with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on October 10, 2023, expressing the Indian people's support for Israel during this difficult time and voicing concern for the "safety and security of Indian citizens in Israel." However, New Delhi made sure to send humanitarian aid to Gaza, and Modi also had a phone call with the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on October 19, 2023, to express condolences for the civilian victims who died after the attack on the Baptist Hospital in Gaza, reaffirming New Delhi's constant support.

This stance can be understood in light of India's general policy towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, not just the developments since October 7th. Despite India's extensive and varied interests with Israel, including importing Israeli weapons, it tries to maintain balanced foreign policies regarding the Palestinian cause. India does not want to damage its economic interests in the region by fully siding with Israel at the expense of Arab parties. This balance was evident in India's abstention from voting on a resolution proposed by Jordan to the United Nations General Assembly on October 27, 2023, to end the war on Gaza.

Therefore, India frames its position on the Gaza war by adopting a cautious policy, not favoring one side over the other, to maintain its growing role on the international stage and safeguard its multiple interests in the Middle East.

## **Limits of International Competition and Its Impact on the Gaza War:**

The clear Western bias and the "unlimited" American support for Israel have contributed to the growth of some anti-Western currents and trends, based on the questions raised by the Israeli aggression on Gaza about Western values and international legitimacy. While the West has provided full support and sympathy to the Ukrainian people against Russian aggression, the Palestinian people have only received limited sympathy, within the context of the West justifying Israel's actions as "self-defense."

The extensive and widespread Israeli violations, not only in Gaza but also in the West Bank, have led to a shift in Western stances towards the Israeli aggression on Gaza, but it has not developed to the point of using Western pressure tools to push Israel to stop its violations against the Palestinian people. One strong evidence of this is the modest Western talk about a ceasefire.

The Western bias towards Israel in its aggression against the Palestinian people faces a set of dilemmas that could contribute to recalibrating its compass towards more balance. Among these dilemmas is the issue of international competition between the West and revisionist powers, which contains opportunities for Washington's adversaries, especially Russia and China, to exploit this crisis to discredit the West and highlight the injustice of the current international system, while improving their positive image, accordingly supporting their regional and international influence and interests.

In more clear terms, despite what appears to be a desire from Moscow and Beijing to balance their positions towards the Israeli aggression on Gaza, there are still opportunities to exploit through a propaganda war aimed at highlighting the Western bias and the insincerity of the values it adopts. Indications of this include China's support for the Russian proposal at the Security Council, opposed to the American resolution, as well as discussions between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing about the Middle East situation, particularly the Palestinian issue. This was followed by a meeting between the Chinese and Russian envoys to the Middle East to discuss working together to help de-escalate the situation, confirming their commitment to the two-state solution.

Thus, it appears there is a Russian-Chinese desire to enhance their roles and influence as balanced powers compared to the biased West. Consequently, their more balanced stances towards the Palestinian cause can be understood as an attempt to gain the support and respect of Arab and Islamic countries and their peoples, destabilizing the Western dominance, and developing the model they present, perhaps allowing them to play a more influential role in the Middle East and making them more reliable allies for the region's countries.

However, it can be said generally that China and Russia do not yet possess the capabilities to replace the United States in the region. Despite attempts to discredit the West and highlight the moral and ethical failure of the West in the current crisis, the West, led by the United States, remains an important and main player

in dealing with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The presence of the United States in the region does not essentially represent an evil; in previous times, its influence and capabilities have led to positive results. During the Tripartite Aggression against Egypt in 1956, the stance of President Eisenhower's administration was positive, contributing to the complete withdrawal of the aggressor countries. Again, following the October 1973 war and the oil crisis, Washington played a crucial role in the Egyptian-Syrian-Israeli peace process.

Moreover, Washington organized the Madrid Peace Conference for the Middle East, paving the way for the Oslo Agreement between Palestinians and Israelis, leading first to the Jordanian-Israeli peace and second to the establishment of the first Palestinian political authority on Palestinian land. This means that on these occasions, the American role was influential in dealing with major crises and turning them into opportunities that could be utilized and employed. Therefore, the American presence once again in the region after October 7th could add to the Arab-Israeli peace and regional security.

In this context, it is clear that despite China's apparent desire to present a path to calm the Palestinian-Israeli scene, the general scene reflects the absence of a proposal from Washington's adversaries (Russia and China) or emerging powers like (India) regarding the future of Gaza or "the day after" scenarios in Gaza. In contrast, there is significant Western focus on this proposal even before Israel's ground operations inside Gaza began. This gives indications of the limited chances of actual engagement from Moscow, Beijing, and New Delhi in the ongoing Gaza crisis, compared to the continued and main Western, especially American, role despite the negative bias and "immoral" support shown by the Biden administration for the atrocities committed by Israel.



## Section Ten

# The Diplomatic and Media War: Other Aspects of the War in Gaza

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This section addresses the other aspects of the war in Gaza, through two main parts; the first reviews the different responses by the active forces in the Gaza war on the diplomatic level, which rooted from their fixed and historical positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, continuing their previous efforts intended at achieving a just and lasting settlement of the issue. Foremost among them is the Egyptian state, which directly interacted with the events, warning of the consequences of the continued escalation on the region. Egypt intensified cooperation and consultation with all parties involved in the war to contain the escalating situation, as well as proposing a comprehensive settlement initiative that aligns with Egypt's set positions on the issue and the current developments both in the Gaza Strip and within Israel. This initiative also includes sustainable delivery of aid to Palestinians and rejects the liquidation of the issue through forced displacement of Palestinians, as well as rejecting the solving of the issue at the expense of Egyptian national security. Additionally, it addresses the settlement of the prisoners' file.

Many international forces, led by the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France, also aimed to communicate with major regional powers to limit the ongoing military escalation, fearing its potential repercussions that could harm their interests in the region if it expands, or contribute to creating a state of political and societal division in their countries. Despite this, their diplomatic

moves carried within them a discouragement of the settlement path, as a result of their support for Israel's right to defend itself without condemning it for the violations and aggressions it committed against the Palestinian people. Moreover, their diplomatic moves were aligned with the depth of their relations with Israel more than being in the interest of the issue itself.

This is in the context of the successive developments in the international security environment over the past decade, which intensified in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian war, imposing more challenges on the stances of different countries and enhancing the state of international competition. This was clearly reflected in the voting process within the United Nations Security Council concerning the war in Gaza.

The second part addresses the use of the media machine by both Hamas and Israel and their supporting forces, and the impact of this on international and regional public opinion. While Hamas promoted the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation as a "reaction" to the Israeli violations and practices against Palestinians and religious sanctities, Western media defended Israel as a "victim," biased towards it without looking into the roots of the conflict and the reasons for its reappearance, and the credibility of the Israeli narrative.

This part also provides explanations about the performance of Western media in its coverage of the current war, trying to understand the reasons for its bias towards Israel despite its violations against Palestinians. Finally, it points to the gradual shifts in Western coverage of the war, where some media outlets have attempted to adopt a policy of "apparent neutrality" in dealing with the events to improve their credibility.

## **First: Diplomatic Efforts Regarding the Israeli War on the Gaza Strip:**

The Gaza war represented a qualitative turning point in the course of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as a result of both parties adopting an unconventional approach in terms of planning, execution, and range of operations. This contributed to a high number of casualties and prisoners, deteriorated the humanitarian situation, and prolonged the war for more than three months without reaching a ceasefire agreement. It also enforced on regional and international powers the need to intensify cooperation and coordination to stop the war and settle the conflict

to prevent its recurrence. Given that the recent war took place in a turbulent international context, its repercussions have already impacted diplomatic efforts aimed at de-escalation, preventing the condemnation of ongoing Israeli violations against Palestinians, which have reached the level of “genocide.”

In this context, we will address the most prominent diplomatic movements on the regional and international levels in response to the war on Gaza. Some responses were consistent with the deep connection to the Palestinian cause and the constant previous efforts, while others were reactions to the developments, which can be summarized as follows:

### *1. Regional Efforts:*

Some regional powers’ responses to the Israeli war on Gaza were based on their historical stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While there were differences in the mechanisms and procedures, their stances agreed that the recent escalation is the result of decades of systematic Israeli violations and aggressions against the Palestinian people. They emphasized the importance of de-escalation, rejecting the liquidation of the Palestinian issue, and seeking ways to achieve a final political and peaceful settlement of the conflict based on the two-state solution, and based on international legitimacy resolutions.

Egypt was at the forefront of major regional powers that acted swiftly from the first day of the war by monitoring developments in Gaza to ease their repercussions, prevent the humanitarian situation from worsening, and avoid escalating the conflict to a level that threatens regional peace and security. This was evident in the reciprocal communications between Cairo and international and regional powers, both at the presidential and ministerial levels, as well as receiving several leaders and heads of governments to discuss the current developments, such as the King of Jordan, the French President, the British Prime Minister, the German Chancellor, the US Secretary of State, and the German and French Foreign Ministers during their regional tours to discuss the latest escalation and its consequences on the Gaza Strip and the region. Furthermore, Egypt highlighted the importance of keeping the Rafah border crossing open, rejecting the liquidation of the issue at Egypt’s expense, and making more efforts to deliver aid to the people of Gaza to alleviate the siege enforced on them. Additionally, Egypt adopted mediation efforts regarding the prisoner exchange file.

As a result, the Egyptian leadership's call to hold the Cairo Peace Summit in October 2023, with the participation of more than thirty countries and three international organizations, was a practical translation of Egypt's efforts to immediately settle the crisis. The summit sought not only to stop the war but also to seek international consensus on a roadmap to revive the peace process in the region, including "sustainable delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, moving to negotiations on a truce and ceasefire, preparing for negotiations to revive the peace process, and ultimately implementing the two-state solution and establishing an independent Palestinian state living side by side with Israel, based on international legitimacy resolutions, while earnestly working to strengthen the legitimate Palestinian National Authority to fully carry out its duties in the Palestinian territories."

This is in the context of the centrality of the Palestinian issue to Egypt's leadership, government, and people, maintaining Egypt's supportive efforts to resolve the Palestinian issue based on the two-state solution, establishing a Palestinian state within the June 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. Additionally, Egypt persists on rejecting the liquidation of the Palestinian issue through the forced displacement of Palestinians from their lands.

It is worth noting that the Cairo Peace Summit was the first international action regarding the war in Gaza after the cancellation of the quadripartite summit, which was scheduled to be held in Jordan with the attendance of the US President and leaders of Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine, following the Israeli occupation forces' bombing of the Baptist Hospital in Gaza, which resulted in hundreds of Palestinian casualties.

As the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip continued, the humanitarian situation worsened, and the occupation state's intransigence in allowing aid into Gaza persisted. After about a month of siege, Saudi Arabia called for an extraordinary Arab-Islamic summit on November 12, 2023, to unify the Arab and Islamic efforts regarding the unprecedented developments in the Palestinian territories, with the participation of more than fifty Arab and Islamic countries, including Egypt. During the summit, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi emphasized "Egypt's condemnation of the targeting and killing of all civilians from both sides and all acts contrary to international law and international humanitarian law, emphasizing at the same time that collective punishment policies against the people of Gaza, including killing, siege, and forced displacement, are unacceptable and cannot be justified by self-defense or any other claims, and must stop immediately. The international community, especially the Security Council, bears direct responsibility."

As a result of Cairo's role, the summit's final statement supported all Egyptian efforts to address the current war's consequences, alongside "mandating the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia as the chair of the Islamic and Arab summits, along with Jordan, Egypt, Qatar, Turkey, Indonesia, Nigeria, Palestine, any other interested countries, and the secretaries-general of the two organizations, to start immediate international action on behalf of all member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League to stop the war on Gaza and push for a serious and genuine political process to achieve lasting and comprehensive peace according to the approved international references." Additionally, the statement condemned the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, the war crimes, and the brutal massacres committed by the Israeli occupation government against the Palestinian people in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, calling for an immediate cessation of the aggression.

**Based on that, the Riyadh Arab-Islamic summit decisions regarding the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip represented an exceptional moment due to several factors:**

The first relates to the participating countries; it was the first time leaders from 57 Arab and Islamic countries met to discuss and agree on a unified vision on one of the most important issues concerning the Arab and Islamic public opinion, as well as large and noble-willed sectors in many European countries and the United States, despite the pro-aggression and supportive positions of their governments.

The second factor pertains to the summit and its decisions, embodying the intertwined dimensions of the Palestinian issue: religious, national, and humanitarian, which occupy a large space in the interests of the Arab and Islamic worlds. On the other hand, the brutal Israeli aggression on innocent people, both young and old, in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank poses a serious threat to security and stability in the Middle East and the world. In other words, the summit is not only concerned with an Arab-Islamic issue but also with a set of exalted principles and high interests that concern and benefit the entire world, increasing its security and stability.

The decisions express a collective vision linked to various political, humanitarian, and media actions on the ground, challenging everything the Israeli war elite and their international supporters aim for, from forcing a reality that ends the Palestinian issue, forcibly displacing its people, intentionally killing

its young generations, and re-imposing explicit Israeli occupation in the Gaza Strip under feeble security pretexts.

In this context, the decision to build a digital platform documenting Israeli violations, supervised by the general secretariats of the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, with the participation of all humanitarian actors rejecting Israeli violations, represents a shift in the Arab-Islamic performance to confront the Israeli arrogance and expose it to the largest possible extent worldwide. Israel's image as a victim state surrounded by enemies from all sides is no longer acceptable globally.

Moreover, strengthening the image of the aggressor state to public opinion and young generations in the West and other societies that get their information and perceptions from social media will considerably support the legitimate Palestinian rights. The documented images from Gaza and the West Bank are the most effective response to victimhood claims. Additionally, adjusting these prevalent wrong Israeli perceptions in Israeli society, based on extreme drift towards unprecedented violence against Palestinians, is crucial and requires a specific confrontation approach, considering the powerful influence of the information space.

The third factor relates to the summit's outcomes and their implications; the Arab-Islamic summit's message and its emphasis on the need to stop Israeli aggression and eliminate its inhumane consequences immediately, and directly start a political path leading to two states coexisting under internationally accepted rules between states, as defined by the United Nations Charter and international law in general. This will regulate future Arab-Islamic actions without any exaggerations from anyone, achieving consensus on the centrality of the Palestinian issue without concession and agreement on a political path under international sponsorship to establish a Palestinian state according to international resolutions and the Arab initiative. It also accomplishes the principle of balanced security; there is no security for Israel without the security of the Palestinian people and their sovereignty over their liberated land, creating a regional environment extending across the Arab and Islamic worlds, pressuring major countries, primarily the United States and President Joe Biden specifically, to make difficult decisions transforming the White House's alleged acceptance and adherence to the two-state solution into a reliable political process capable of turning into a practical reality, achieving balanced interests for all parties, and

positioning the entire region before a peaceful competitive phase rather than a vengeful, barbaric conflict against all human heritage, which Israel insists on and considers its only fate for its survival and existence.

The fourth factor is identifying the responsible parties for the current situation; the exceptional aspect is not only in explicitly describing what Israel, as an occupying power, has done by violating all international laws and treaties associated to war and human rights, and committing war crimes deserving punishment, but also in defining the shared responsibility for these crimes with its supporters, who have provided and continue to provide weapons to the Israeli army, making them accomplices in action and crime. This clarity in description may push these supporters to review, reassess, and stop their actions, responding to the growing voices within their societies condemning those inhumane stances.

The responsibility extends to the relevant international human rights organizations and relief providers, holding them accountable for not ignoring the horrific actions of the Israeli occupation, not just condemning them, which is important but exerting the strongest possible pressure to stop the aggression and hold its perpetrators accountable, abandoning considerations of flattery and submission to the Israeli-Zionist blackmail.

Responsibility also extends to the International Criminal Court prosecutor to start an immediate investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Israel against the Palestinian people in all the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

## *2. International Efforts:*

Despite regional efforts agreeing on the importance of stopping the war on Gaza and condemning the Israeli aggression, Western stances, particularly European ones, were generally unified in condemning the attack carried out by Hamas but differed in regarding the call for a “ceasefire.” This was evident during the European Union summit held on October 26–27, 2023, the first summit since the events of October 7, which concluded with the importance of calling for “humanitarian corridors and truces” to deliver aid to Palestinians, fearing a deterioration of the humanitarian situation, while confirming Israel’s right to defend itself according to international law and international humanitarian law, and calling on Hamas to immediately release all hostages “without any preconditions.”

This European consensus on these decisions came after disagreements among member states on how to deal with the current war and the appropriate formulation regarding the call for “humanitarian truces” or “a humanitarian truce.” These stances revealed the extent of support Israel enjoys from some bloc countries. While Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic supported Israel’s right to defend itself and blocked the Spanish proposal for a “humanitarian ceasefire,” Spain, which occupied the presidency of the EU Council at the time, managed to convince bloc countries to hold an international peace conference on the “two-state solution,” including this proposal in the summit’s official statement.

It is worth noting that this disparity was not new, as European powers had previously divided over the issue of developmental aid to Palestinians. The European Commission announced, two days after the events of October 7, the suspension of aid, then reversed this decision, justifying it by saying that it would be reviewed. In contrast, Spain, Ireland, and Luxembourg opposed the decision, while Austria and Germany suspended aid to Palestinians to ensure it did not reach the “wrong party.”

This division originates from several reasons, including the general European stance towards Israel shaped by a set of considerations such as historical relations, shared democratic values, and growing economic relations with the European Union. Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, European powers support resolving the conflict based on the “two-state solution.” However, other factors also influence their positions, such as Germany, where the historical memory related to the Holocaust is a critical driver of its absolute support for Israel in the current scene. Additionally, domestic politics influence country positions, such as Spain, where the support for a humanitarian ceasefire cannot be separated from Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez’s efforts to form a coalition government with leftist forces in the country.

Furthermore, some countries attempt to adopt a balanced policy at times, especially in light of the deteriorating humanitarian situation and the increasing civilian casualties, as well as the gradual influence of European public opinion. This was reflected in French President Emmanuel Macron’s foreign tour to the region, which included Israel, the West Bank city of Ramallah, Jordan, and Egypt, to discuss the escalation between Israel and Palestinian factions and consult with regional leaders active in the current crisis to limit the humanitarian situation’s deterioration in Gaza and avoid the conflict’s expansion to other fronts, as addressed during his visit to Cairo as follows:

Reviving the Political Process: President Macron stated that the political aspect is the most challenging in the conflict but is the main reason for fueling it, indicating the need to make all efforts to achieve the two-state solution, affirming his country's work to push this path forward once more with all its regional partners.

Hostage File with Hamas: This file was a top priority for the French government, like all foreign governments, given the threat it poses to their direct interests concerned with ensuring the safety of their citizens. President Macron confirmed this during his meeting with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, explaining that the number of hostages is about 200, including 9 French citizens, appreciating the Egyptian and Qatari efforts in this regard.

Containing the Conflict and Preventing Its Regional Expansion: France fears the escalation in the Middle East since the Gaza war, prompting it to work and coordinate with international actors to de-escalate, alongside continuously warning Iran against engaging in this war through its proxies or directly in the current conflict. This was revealed on October 15 when the Élysée announced that President Macron "warned his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi in a phone call against any escalation or expansion of the conflict between Israel and Hamas, especially in Lebanon." President Macron restated this warning during his meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister, warning Iran and its allies Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen against risking opening new fronts and expanding the ongoing conflict. This also aligned with the Egyptian stance, where President el-Sisi emphasized that the current crisis cannot bear expansion to include other parties and that joint efforts should be intensified to contain the crisis and prevent its escalation.

Humanitarian Aid and Rejecting Displacement Plans: President Macron emphasized the need for continuous aid flow to Palestinians, thanking Egypt for its efforts in this regard. In addition to protecting the French citizens in Gaza, who number 54, along with 170 French workers in various institutions and their families there, he called for their evacuation. He affirmed that two French planes would arrive in Egypt loaded with aid and announced his intention to send a French Navy ship to support Gaza hospitals.

**The French stance on the Israeli war on Gaza can be understood in the context of several determinants as follows:**

Historical Stance on Both Sides of the Conflict: Despite France being among

the first countries to recognize the establishment of Israel and establishing diplomatic relations with it since 1949, continuing to defend its right to exist and live in peace, it also supported the establishment of a Palestinian state living within secure and recognized borders alongside Israel, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states. France voted in favor of recognizing the Palestine Liberation Organization as an observer in the United Nations in November 1974. President François Mitterrand was the first French president to declare the establishment of a Palestinian state before the Knesset in 1982. France also voted for Palestine to be a non-member observer state in the United Nations in November 2012. Therefore, the French stance on the current situation is consistent with its historical position, with President Macron confirming Israel's right to defend itself and emphasizing the importance of decisively reviving the political process between Palestinians, which he stated during his visit to Israel: "We must listen to the Palestinian cause sensibly (...) I will be with many regional leaders tomorrow to move forward tangibly with the agenda we set."

Resolving the Issue According to International Law: France supports resolving the historical conflict between Palestinians and Israelis according to international law and United Nations resolutions, particularly the two-state solution under Resolution 181, and a fair resolution of the refugee issue under Resolution 194 of the United Nations General Assembly, and compliance with Security Council Resolution 242 to end the Israeli occupation. France also calls for keeping the status of Jerusalem according to Security Council Resolutions 476 and 478. Based on this, France calls on both parties to reaffirm their commitment to a negotiated settlement and the two-state solution, abstaining from any unilateral actions that would damage the conditions for achieving this. France also calls on Israel to fully comply with international humanitarian law applicable in the Palestinian territories, condemning the growing settlement policy adopted by successive Israeli governments. President Macron emphasized this approach during the recent Gaza war, stressing the need to respect international humanitarian law in any Israeli action in Gaza, ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid, and keeping the Rafah crossing open for this aid.

Deteriorating Humanitarian Situation: France seeks to contain the current escalation in preparation for a ceasefire that guarantees sustainable aid delivery, as expressed by the French Prime Minister during her speech before the National Assembly, calling for a "humanitarian truce that could lead to a ceasefire." She linked France's vote on the Brazilian draft resolution in the Security Council to this goal, as it included a clause on the humanitarian truce for aid delivery.

Alongside President Macron's regional tour, the French Foreign Minister emphasized this approach on October 24, 2023, at the Security Council, stating: "France, like the European Union, has increased its aid to the people of Gaza by about 20 million euros, directed to UNRWA, the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Committee of the Red Cross, and NGOs." She also mentioned chartering a special flight stocked with emergency humanitarian aid for Palestinians to support the Egyptian efforts, adding that France's total aid to Palestinians would reach 100 million euros in 2023.

**Ensuring the Release of Hostages:** The hostage file with Hamas is one of the main motives driving President Macron to enhance cooperation and coordination with the active forces in the war to resolve it, as it is a high priority for France. He highlighted this during his meeting with his Israeli counterpart Isaac Herzog, stating that "France stands shoulder to shoulder with Israel, and the primary goal should be to free the hostages in Gaza." Supporting this file's resolution, President Macron met with the families of the French hostages and those killed or taken hostage after arriving in Tel Aviv, numbering around 30 French nationals, a significant number for France since the Nice attack in July 2016, which resulted in about 86 victims.

**Fear of Terrorist Attacks:** President Macron's statements about fighting terrorism during his regional tour were prompted by France's fear of a new wave of terrorist attacks following the events of 2015, particularly after a French citizen was stabbed in Arras in northern France, leading to a state of high alert for combating terrorism following the Gaza war outbreak. The French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin stated: "There is no doubt about a connection between the Arras attack and the conflict between Israel and Hamas." It is noted that the attack occurred three days after the third anniversary of the beheading of a teacher in the Paris area in 2020 for showing caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad to his students during a class.

**Reducing Political Polarization:** The French government might fear that the consequences of the Gaza war could lead to further political polarization and a lack of alignment in France due to the differing positions on the current escalation. While the French government condemned the Hamas attack and supported Israel's right to defend itself, the far-left party "La France Insoumise" refrained from calling the attack "terrorist," with its leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon accusing the National Assembly's President Yael Braun-Pivet of "supporting Israeli massacres in Gaza" after her visit to Israel on October 22, 2023. In contrast, the far-right National Rally party condemned the attack. Political parties seek to

take advantage of the current escalation to align with their interests and expand their voter base.

*Avoiding Social Division:* The current situation in the region could have potential repercussions on the French society, which hosts the largest Jewish community in Europe, the third-largest globally after Israel and the United States, alongside the largest Muslim community in Europe. This may justify the French Interior Minister's ban on all pro-Palestinian demonstrations on October 12, 2023, dispersing protesters with tear gas and water cannons. Therefore, President Macron called for unity and alignment in his speech on October 12, 2023, saying: "Those who mix up the Palestinian cause with justifying terrorism are making a triple mistake: morally, politically, and strategically."

Thus, regional and international responses to the war in Gaza were varied due to several reasons, including these powers' relationships with both sides of the conflict and related interests that may drive their positions. Additionally, the fear of the conflict's escalation motivated steady measures in cooperation with concerned parties to form a response reducing the growing humanitarian and material losses as the war continues. Some also attempted to use this war to reposition themselves in the region as alternative powers that could be relied upon in light of the American reluctance to directly engage in the region's increasingly complex crises.

## **Second: Media Coverage Trends of the Israeli War on Gaza:**

Both Israel and Hamas have utilized the media machine, trying to rally Arab and Western public opinion in their favor, convincing them of their narratives and motives for the war. Media outlets did not only cover and report the event but also played a decisive role in influencing public positions, reflected in the mass protests in many Arab and Western capitals to stop the war. They also showed the qualitative shift in the capabilities of both sides of the war regarding response and military confrontation mechanisms.

### ***1. Hamas' Media Discourse:***

Since the launch of the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation, the media discourse of both the military and political wings of Hamas, whether through the statements of its

political office leaders or the military spokesperson for the Al-Qassam Brigades, Abu Ubaida, played a role in shaping the battle's features, objectives, and developments. Recognizing the importance of media discourse in shaping public awareness as a supportive element for the military machine, Hamas appeared to have a particular media strategy from the onset of the operation. This strategy was evident in the continuous appearances of military and political leaders since October 7, to the extent that some, especially Abu Ubaida, became symbols of the military operation, with his speeches widely interacting with the Arab public opinion.

Hamas devised a media plan aimed at using the media weapon to wage a psychological war against Israel as a supporting factor that could boost its winning cards in the ongoing war, especially since Israel did not hesitate to use the same weapon to cover up the shock of October 7 on the one hand and rally popular and official Western support on the other. This can be clarified by analyzing the content of the words and statements of Hamas leaders, military and press statements, and the materials and video clips presented by the movement through its media platforms from October 7 to November 2, 2023, by dissecting the main elements in this discourse in its political, operational, and humanitarian dimensions, and reviewing the observations that can be concluded, potentially outlining what the movement is thinking and what actions it might take in the ongoing war on both political and military fronts.

#### **a. Operational Dimension:**

Hamas' speeches since the first day of the war highlighted the movement's capabilities and potential to control the battle's pace so far and achieve strategic surprise against Israel. Abu Ubaida, the spokesperson for the Al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas' military wing), appeared almost daily since October 7, announcing the daily details of the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation, focusing significantly on the strategic surprises created by the Palestinian factions on several levels:

Firstly: Strategic: Highlighting the success of Hamas in planning and launching the operation away from the eyes of Israeli intelligence, which failed to read the movement's intentions despite the involvement of thousands of members in preparation for the battle, described repeatedly by Abu Ubaida as an unprecedented and echoing failure for the Israeli political and military institution.

Secondly: Tactical: Showcasing the use of new qualitative weapons by the Al-Qassam Brigades, such as gliders carrying combatants up to approximately 25

kilometers inside Israeli towns, drone bombers and suicide drones, a homemade air defense system “Mutbar 1,” new long-range missiles, incendiary bombs, and the use of the locally-made “Al-Aasif Torpedo” against Israeli naval targets, and introducing new “charges” used at point-blank range against tanks.

Thirdly: Operational: Utilizing the limited human and armament capabilities compared to the Israeli side to achieve penetrations into the Israeli depth and hit high-value targets, enhancing its balance of field victories. Abu Ubaida’s speeches referred to the operational approach adopted by the Palestinian factions in their interaction, with the expansion of Israeli military operations in Gaza by land, sea, and air, intensifying direct engagements with Israeli soldiers and targeting the Israeli depth on multiple fronts, attempting to transfer the battle to Gaza envelope settlements to disrupt and confuse the Israeli forces and deter their attempts to expand their infiltration.

Hamas’ speeches also focused on highlighting the material and human losses inflicted by the Palestinian factions on Israeli forces, especially since the start of the ground incursion operations in Gaza on October 27, 2023. However, the announced losses by Hamas differ from those announced by the Israeli side, assuming one of two interpretations: Israel might be concealing the actual number of losses to avoid demoralizing its soldiers and provoking the Israeli interior against Netanyahu’s government, or Hamas might be exaggerating the size of Israeli losses in its propaganda efforts and media strategy aimed at waging a psychological war against Israel.

Based on the above, it can be said that Hamas’ media plan has succeeded so far in showcasing what the movement has achieved in field gains and raised many questions about the announced Israeli losses, especially since the start of the limited ground operation in Gaza on October 27, 2023. This possibly caused Israel to begin announcing its losses gradually, appearing as an attempt to prepare the Israeli public opinion to accept significant numbers of casualties among its soldiers. In other words, Hamas’ emphasis on the losses inflicted on Israeli forces has placed Israeli narratives in doubt even among the Israeli interior, forcing Israel into a position of having to start admitting its losses.

#### **b. Political Dimension:**

Hamas’ speeches contained several political dimensions, the most prominent of which can be summarized as follows:

Condemnation of Israeli Violations Against Palestinians: Hamas adopted a rhetoric since October 7, emphasizing that the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation erupted as a “reaction” to Israeli violations and practices against Palestinians, the Israeli siege on Gaza, and the resulting humanitarian crises, as well as Israel’s repeated infiltrations into the Al-Aqsa Mosque and its expansionist settlement policies accompanied by increased violations and provocations by the Israeli settlers against Palestinian residents.

Rallying Arab Public Opinion: Hamas’ speeches were “mobilizing par excellence,” addressing the Arab and Islamic sentiments where the Palestinian cause holds a symbolic and key place in shaping their awareness. The speeches aimed to stir emotions and rally solidarity with Palestinians facing various forms of illegal and unlawful violence and collective punishment, pressing for the humanitarian aid entry. Hamas called for general mobilization, confrontation, and engagement with occupation forces at all sites, expelling the Israeli ambassadors from Arab and Islamic countries, and halting all forms of normalization. This call found wide resonance, reflected in the widespread demonstrations in the West Bank, many Arab countries, and even Europe, activating general boycotts in some countries like Egypt, of products and goods from all countries, companies, and institutions supporting the occupation and its aggression against children and women in Gaza. Some countries like Jordan, Chile, Colombia, and Bolivia withdrew their ambassadors from Israel.

Based on that it can be said that, the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation and the subsequent Israeli aggression on Gaza revived the Arab public opinion, forcing it to reconsider some established norms. In previous years, Middle Eastern governments considered Arab public opinion in policymaking and decision-making. However, the importance of the Arab opinion declined over the past decade, leading governments to act freely without regional public opinion constraints, only to be forced by the returning public opinion to reconsider some near-established norms.

Affirmation of Egypt’s Role in the Palestinian Issue: References to Egypt and its role in the current escalation were “positive” and praised Egypt’s stance against the displacement of Palestinians from their lands, with calls for opening the Rafah crossing and allowing the wounded to travel for treatment.

Setting Aside Differences with the Palestinian Authority: Despite some signs of reproach in Hamas’ speeches regarding the Palestinian Authority’s stance on Gaza events, Hamas notably avoided highlighting its disagreements with the

Authority, framing the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation within a national and anti-occupation struggle, steering clear of politicizing it or making it part of the political division, even though some analyses attribute the operation partly to Hamas’ fears about its future position in the Palestinian political equation. This was supported by statements from Hamas’ Deputy Political Bureau Chief Saleh al-Aroui, describing the “Al-Aqsa Flood” as an “open battle with one goal: the freedom of the Palestinian people and the liberation of their sanctities, and it is not limited to Gaza alone but involves Jerusalem, Palestine, and the entire nation.”

Addressing Western Public Opinion: There was a noteworthy qualitative shift in Hamas’ speech direction. Previously focused primarily on addressing Arab and Islamic audiences, Hamas, during the recent escalation, began focusing on addressing the Western public opinion as well. This reflects an understanding of the pressure Western public opinion can exert on their governments, which rushed to support Israel since October 7. Hamas’ speeches called on Western media to verify the information and materials received from the occupation government, held some press conferences in English, named English-speaking spokespersons, and translated its press releases into several languages, such as English and French, to counter the Israeli false claims about the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation. These actions helped break the absolute pro-Israel Western wave, evidenced by some demonstrations in American cities and Western capitals in solidarity with Gaza and opposing the Israeli occupation aggression.

Utilizing the Hostage File: The issue of hostages held a central place in Hamas’ speeches during the recent escalation. Almost none of these speeches overlooked mentioning the situation of Israeli hostages held by Hamas. The movement’s position on the hostage file evolved to serve field developments and pressure the Israeli government by inflaming already hot internal opinion against it and leveraging the Western position demanding the release of its citizens, aiming to achieve a political victory by ending the Palestinian prisoners’ file. Hamas’ conditions ranged from refusing to negotiate during the military operation to accepting exchange efforts under the “all-for-all” formula, meaning emptying Israeli prisons of Palestinian detainees, to an apparently more flexible position involving the release of some hostages, especially those with foreign nationalities, while keeping military personnel for negotiating the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons.

Hamas also used the “hostage file” in its speeches to wage a psychological war against Israel, boasting about capturing many Israelis, estimated at around

250 or slightly more according to Abu Ubaida. The movement released videos of some hostages showing their humane treatment by Hamas elements and accusing Netanyahu's government of political and military failure to protect their lives, seeking to inflame anger within Israel and refute and counter Israeli and Western narratives attempting to label Palestinian factions as terrorists. Abu Ubaida repeatedly stressed that these hostages face the same danger as Gaza's residents, with some killed by the ongoing Israeli bombing, and that Israel delays in the hostage file despite opportunities for reaching an agreement, stating that Hamas wanted to release two American hostages for humanitarian reasons, but the Israeli government refused to accept them. This had significant repercussions within Israel, where accusations of government stubbornness and failure in this file increased, particularly from the hostages' families.

From the previous overview, the political dimensions of Hamas' speeches have succeeded in achieving a significant part of their goals, rallying Arab support for the Palestinian cause and condemning what happens to Palestinians, with this influence extending to some extent to Western and European public opinion. Hamas' media strategy on the hostage file has increased pressure on the Israeli interior and Netanyahu's government, noticeable by the severe accusations faced by Netanyahu from hostage families. The Israeli public opinion shift in the hostage file was noticeable; initially, families raised slogans condemning Hamas, but now they highlight Netanyahu's failure in these slogans during demonstrations in Tel Aviv following the current escalation. Even the Israeli media increasingly focused on Netanyahu's failure in the hostage file specifically.

### **c. Humanitarian Dimension:**

On the humanitarian front, Hamas emphasized the dark humanitarian situation in Gaza, drawing attention to the number of martyrs and wounded from the ongoing Israeli bombing and condemning Israeli violations against Palestinians. The speeches pointed out the Western double standards in dealing with provocative Israeli practices against the Palestinian people, demanding the entry of humanitarian aid to Gaza and stopping the targeting of civilians.

Although Hamas' speeches succeeded in achieving some goals related to attracting global public opinion to what Israel is doing to Palestinians, they also had some negative aspects. For example, the Al-Qassam Brigades announced that the Israeli targeting of Palestinian civilians without prior warning would be met by executing a civilian hostage, which would be broadcast in audio and video. This warning was one of the speeches utilized by Israel in its attempts to demonize

Palestinian factions before global public opinion. Hamas seems to have quickly realized this mistake, drawing attention in its speeches to its ethical treatment of civilian hostages, broadcasting videos of the good treatment received by these hostages and their children from Al-Qassam elements. However, this warning from Abu Ubaida and the videos of Hamas members infiltrating settlements and capturing many hostages on October 7 still linger in many minds and are used by Israel in its narratives to justify its actions in Gaza. Western countries, primarily the United States, use them to justify their blind support for Israel's "right to self-defense."

Thus, within nearly a month since the outbreak of the recent Gaza war, Hamas has effectively used its tools to implement an active and flexible media plan, aiming to utilize its field victories in the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation and its pressure cards, primarily the hostage file, to wage a psychological war against Israel and refute its false narratives marketed to global public opinion.

In contrast, the element of surprise accompanying the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation was a decisive factor in international media reactions and within Israel on political and media levels, revealed in the Western media's coverage of the war, focusing on serving the Israeli narrative internationally.

## *2. Initial Western Media Stances:*

Western powers and their media tools quickly condemned the surprise Hamas attack, with Western media altering facts related to the crisis and being clearly biased towards the Israeli perspective of the right to self-defense at any cost. Western media described the Hamas attack as "costly" because it not only legitimizes the occupation but also provides a pretext for the Israeli decision-makers to go to extreme lengths in the current massacre. Despite Western unity, some distinctions on the official level were reflected in media coverage. While Washington and London were busy sending military support to Israel, Paris seemed keen on pushing for an eventual political solution to the Palestinian issue based on the two-state solution, ensuring security and peace for Israelis and Palestinians.

**American Media Coverage:** Most American media outlets framed the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a one-sided war, using language biased for Israel. Recent coverage focused on criminalizing Hamas and ignoring the Israeli violations over the years, making the Palestinian attack appear as an unprovoked

outbreak of violence and anti-Semitism. For instance, in an interview with CNN's Mustafa Barghouti, the network focused on criminalizing the Palestinian resistance and portraying the Israeli occupation as a victim of Palestinian classical terrorism against Israeli civilians, women, children, and the elderly. American media also focused more on claims of Israeli children killed by Hamas than on the Palestinian Ministry of Health's report that Israel killed 447 children in Gaza.

American media coverage did not stop there but extended to deploying numerous reporters in Israel without significant presence in Gaza. American media provided more airtime to Israeli voices compared to Palestinian ones, contributing to biased reporting that focused on Israeli victims while almost ignoring Palestinians. For example, CNN and MSNBC's coverage anchored around the situation and destruction in Israel, with interviews like Andrea Mitchell's with the former Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren on MSNBC and Boris Sanchez's with retired Israeli Colonel Michael Milstein on CNN, emphasizing that the Israeli attack was not "brutish" and that Israel "has no interest in harming civilians."

CNN interviewed George Birnbaum, a former aide to Prime Minister Netanyahu, who compared Hamas attacks to the Nazis. CNBC interviewed Nadav Zafrir, a former commander of Israel's military technology unit, who called for flattening Gaza. Dana Bash of MSNBC interviewed former Israeli Ambassador Danny Danon, letting him claim that Israel does not target civilians and would hit Hamas hard.

Therefore, American media's initial coverage treated Israelis as humans with full rights, while Palestinians were deemed less deserving of humanitarian empathy, reflecting a double standard that shows how American media distorts the crisis using biased language and frameworks, referring to Israeli soldiers as "Israel Defense Forces" and the Palestinian resistance as "terrorists."

Mainstream American media (AP News, CNN, NBC News, Washington Post) used the term "hostages" to describe Israelis captured by Hamas fighters. It is noteworthy that during the first intifada (1967-1993), Israel imprisoned about 700,000 Palestinian men and boys in the West Bank, about 40% of the total male population there. To this day, Israel continues to arrest Palestinians and detain them for lengthy periods without fair trial. Yet, mainstream media in the United States does not refer to Palestinians as "hostages."

The New York Times and Washington Post described Palestinian combatants as “militants.” The Nation magazine described Hamas’ actions as a blatant incursion comparable to the September 11 attacks by al-Qaeda on the United States, suggesting that Hamas committed more war crimes by kidnapping civilians. The magazine justified Netanyahu’s use of brute force against Gaza similar to what George W. Bush did in Iraq.

As Israel intensified its bombing of Gaza, Instagram and Facebook (owned by Meta) hid hashtags related to Hamas and the “Al-Aqsa Flood” from searches. This was not the first time that periods of violence between Israel and Palestinians saw suppression of Palestinian users on social media. In 2021, for example, Instagram blocked posts mentioning Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Social media platforms’ restrictive policies do not target both sides equally in the conflict. While Palestinian accounts are banned or deleted for vague reasons, some pro-Israel accounts use hostile and provocative language without punishment.

**British Media Coverage:** British media views Israel as being at war with Hamas, a Palestinian armed group designated as a terrorist organization by many Western countries, including the UK and the US. British media adopted the Israeli narrative that the Hamas attack is comparable to September 11, resulting in significant Jewish casualties for the first time since the Holocaust, justifying the Israeli assault on Gaza to guarantee Hamas does not commit violations inside Israel again.

British media used biased language in favor of Israel. Following the attack, The Guardian published an article titled “The murderous rampage of Hamas.” Similarly, The Economist referred to the “bloodthirsty Hamas attack.” While this language may or may not be appropriate, the fact is that it was not used by the British media to describe Israeli crimes of similar or even worse magnitude. Israeli murders of thousands of civilians in Gaza were not described as an “Israeli murderous rampage” or an “Israeli bloodthirsty attack.”

Initial British media coverage also revealed bias for Israel by covering Israeli casualties, captives, and humanitarian stories without mentioning Palestinians. Notably, British newspapers like The Sun, The Times, The Independent, The Telegraph, Mail, Metro, Express, and others reported the Israeli claim that “Hamas killed 40 children” in headlines without any evidence, photo, video, or even official confirmation from the Israeli army.

Some British media claimed that Israel is not responsible for displacing and starving Gaza civilians due to the siege, blaming Hamas instead. They argued that Israel has no obligation under international law to supply Gaza because it does not occupy Gaza. This stance was confirmed by The Daily Mail's headline highlighting that Gaza's war is for Israel's future. The Times used its columns to depict Palestinians and their supporters as "merchants of hate."

BBC News focused heavily on criminalizing Hamas in an interview with the Palestinian Ambassador to the UK, Husam Zomlot, who exposed the host's misconceptions by asking, "Do you support what Hamas did on Saturday morning?" Zomlot responded, "This is not the most important question." He pointed out that "the most important question is how to stop the Israeli massacres against Palestinian civilians. You cannot equate occupation and people under occupation; this does not serve justice and will not help your audience understand the true picture."

French Media Coverage: French media did not deviate much from the American and British supportive coverage of Israel, especially since France hosts the largest Jewish community in Europe. However, it was to some extent neutral in most of its coverage known for its distinctive political positions within the Western bloc. Overall, there was broad harmony between American, British, and French media on standing with Israel, which led the French press to highlight pro-Israel demonstrations, focus on Israeli casualties, and the aid provided by the European Union to Palestinians.

At the beginning of events, Le Point magazine sided with Israel in its coverage, noting that eight French people were killed and twenty were missing. It stated that the Israeli response should match this crime's level and that the terrible act committed by Hamas leaves no room for operational caution. Israel must be very aggressive. As events escalated, the magazine touched on the catastrophic situation in Gaza hospitals.

Liberation journal highlighted a pro-Israel demonstration in Lyon, asserting that Hamas' actions are terrorism that must be dealt with harshly. Le Monde described the situation as the most violent acts of war against Israel since the Jewish state's emergence in 1948, noting that Hamas managed to hide its preparations, necessarily long and complex, from the Israeli intelligence. It also emphasized France's solidarity with Israel and its right to self-defense.

La Croix discussed the tragic situation in Gaza, the ongoing Israeli bombing, the aid provided by the European Union to Palestinians, and France's opposition

to suspending the European aid to Palestinians after the EU announced a review of its program. The newspaper emphasized that more than 80% of Gaza's population depends on aid due to the siege and hostilities damaging Gaza's economy.

### *3. Main Trends in Western Media Coverage:*

Since the launch of the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation on the morning of October 7, 2023, several main trends have emerged in the Western media coverage, reflecting the shock experienced by Israel and the Western world due to the attack and the rush to adopt the Israeli narrative. These trends include:

**Talking About Crimes Against Israeli Civilians:** The main focus of international media during the first hours of Hamas' attack was discussing crimes committed by the movement against Israeli civilians, portraying it as an attack targeting Israeli civilians in their homes early on Saturday, a Jewish holiday. This portrayal highlighted that Hamas executed innocent Israeli civilians, including women, children, and the disabled, in cold blood in their homes, as described by *The Economist* and a BBC report based on Israeli sources. Additionally, vague stories about random shootings at a music festival were promoted by *The Guardian*, and reports suggested that civilians taken hostage in the attack were intentionally killed, relying on unverified claims and fragmented videos, such as CNN's coverage of an Israeli-German girl named Shani Louk. Comparisons of Hamas' actions to ISIS were made, with American and Israeli schools warning that "Hamas terrorists will use widespread apps to spread gruesome hostage killings, urging parents to make their children delete social media."

**Israeli Intelligence and Security Failures:** Another prominent trend in international media coverage was discussing the major security and intelligence failure of Israel highlighted by the Hamas attack. Several Israelis expressed shock at the slow response of Israeli security forces and the capture and killing of Israeli soldiers in their positions. The media pointed out that Hamas had been planning this attack for months without Israeli intelligence knowing, making it a significant failure for the Israeli defense institutions, similar to Israel's greatest intelligence failure in the October 1973 war. Most international media blamed the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu for this failure, stating that his government neglected its primary responsibility of protecting its citizens, allowing Hamas to grow stronger while being preoccupied with internal battles, particularly judicial reforms. This made it difficult for Netanyahu to avoid responsibility for the attack despite his political resilience over the years.

**How the Attack Was Executed:** Western media focused on understanding how Hamas carried out this meticulous and surprising attack to Israeli circles. This focus was divided into two main parts: the first detailed the tactical execution through maps of the attack and illustrated how Al-Qassam fighters infiltrated Gaza envelope settlements under the cover of thousands of rockets launched at Israeli cities. The second part discussed the extent of Iranian support for Hamas in planning this attack. For example, The Wall Street Journal reported that Iranian security officials helped plan this attack and gave the final approval in a meeting in Beirut on October 2, and The New York Times confirmed this with people familiar with the operation, stating that Iranian and Hezbollah officials aided in planning the attack, but the US and its allies found no evidence directly linking Tehran.

**Motivations Behind the Attack:** Some media outlets suggested that the attack might have resulted from anger, particularly due to the continuous provocations in Al-Aqsa Mosque and the absence of a Palestinian state, reinforcing a harsh reality in Gaza and elsewhere, with the Gaza Strip suffering from a 16-year siege and growing Palestinian anger over humiliation and marginalization leading to increased violence in the West Bank this year. However, most Western media pointed to other motivations behind this attack, including Hamas' thirst for blood as previously mentioned and being a terrorist group constantly thinking of ways to kill Americans and their allies, or the attack being encouraged by Iran to disrupt movements towards normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel or looking for political gains from it.

**Justifying Israeli Crimes:** By depicting what it claimed were Hamas' crimes against Israelis, Western media justified any Israeli retaliatory actions, describing them as justified revenge against Hamas, even at the expense of Gaza's civilians. They asserted that "Hamas must pay for its atrocities," and that "Israel will retaliate more fiercely than before" in response to the deadliest assault since the 1973 October War, with Israeli airstrikes targeting residential buildings, tunnels, mosques, and homes in Gaza as part of Netanyahu's vow for severe revenge. Cutting off electricity, fuel, and supplies to Gaza was portrayed as "another attempt to pressure Hamas," indicating that Israel should have expected such a fierce response and perhaps involved it in their plan to draw Israel into urban warfare in Gaza.

#### *4. Tools of Bias Towards Israel:*

Western media used various tools and methods to display clear bias in favor of Israel and its narrative of the events at the expense of the Palestinian or realistic narrative of what is happening in Gaza. These tools included:

Using “War on Terrorism” Terms: Two main narratives emerged from Western media after the attack. The first focused on the “targeting civilians” angle, around which most Western media coverage revolved. The second narrative drew numerous similarities between Hamas and groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS, fully adopting the Israeli perspective and framing the event as an attack by terrorist groups on a sovereign state’s towns and villages, no different from other terrorist attacks that Middle Eastern and African countries have faced in recent years. This second narrative was rooted in the US President Joe Biden’s remarks about “Palestinian slaughter of children,” primarily derived from Israeli analyses and statements, such as those from the Israeli military spokesperson, about evidence of “child beheadings” in Gaza envelope settlements or Prime Minister Netanyahu’s tweet saying “Hamas is worse than ISIS,” or even Israeli forces finding an ISIS flag during the cleansing operations in the Sufa settlement near Gaza.

This aligns significantly with Israeli attempts to further associate Hamas with fundamentalist groups active in the region. For example, the British Daily Mail published a report titled “As ISIS flags found left by Hamas terrorists in Gaza, the Israeli army says children were beheaded, and the forensic doctor confirmed it.” The report included pictures showing Israeli soldiers’ “emotion” from scenes of blood and destruction in Israeli settlements and highlighted the narrative of “child beheadings” promoted by Israel, adding to the use of the term “terrorists.” Similarly, Fox News was among the few Western media outlets that mentioned an ISIS flag found by Israeli soldiers in the Gaza envelope and linked this to Netanyahu’s remarks around Hamas and ISIS.

Although the “child beheading” story was later retracted, the main focus of Western media coverage of what is happening in Gaza remains the “targeting of civilians.” This, however, did not stop the U.S. and Israeli defense ministers, in their recent press conference, from once again comparing “Hamas” to “ISIS,” attempting to frame the events of October 7 as similar to previous ISIS attacks.

Fabrication of facts and promotion of lies: Western media outlets portray Israel’s horrific attacks on the Gaza Strip as attempts to eliminate “terrorism,” as they describe it, and ensure the safety of the Israeli people. These media outlets follow a clear policy in crafting their news, exaggerating the scale of Israeli losses due to Hamas attacks while downplaying the scale and significance of Palestinian losses due to Israeli attacks.

For example, on the British “BBC” morning news program, while the presenter was reviewing some statistics of casualties from both sides, she said: “212 people, including 61 children, have died in Gaza, and 12, including two children, have been killed in Israel.” This phrasing illustrates that, despite the significantly higher number of civilian and child casualties in Gaza compared to Israeli casualties, the presenter used the word “killed” for the Israeli victims, while avoiding the same term for Palestinian victims, opting instead for the softer phrase “have died.” This choice of wording helps to evoke more sympathy for Israeli victims while downplaying the causes and focus on the deaths of Palestinian victims.

This selective focus does not stop at highlighting Israeli losses and ignoring Palestinian casualties and the war crimes committed by the Israeli army, nor is it limited to spreading misinformation, but extends to publishing many false stories and fabricating facts. Below are some examples of fake news stories promoted by Western media:

**Beheading of 40 children:** A report spread widely in many Western newspapers that Hamas had beheaded more than 40 infants, after a statement by the leader of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories, “David Ben Zion,” on the Israeli channel “i24 News,” where their correspondent claimed during the coverage that these bodies had been found. This news spread extensively across most Western newspapers without verifying its accuracy, even leading to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu confirming the report and U.S. President Biden stating that he had seen horrific images of the incident. However, the White House later denied this statement, explaining that the president had not meant it in that way. The channel’s correspondent then clarified that she had not seen the bodies or any pictures of them and had only taken the statement from Israeli officials. To date, no evidence has surfaced of this incident, which Hamas has denied. Notably, the media’s handling of the incident, despite its inaccuracy, was unfair to the Palestinian side, which has faced similar events continuously for decades without international concern. Even amidst the current events, international media have focused on Israeli victims and losses while marginalizing Palestinian ones.

**Burning of an Israeli child:** The Israeli Prime Minister’s Facebook page posted images of a burned Israeli child’s body, allegedly the result of a Hamas attack on Israeli civilians, stating that these images had been shown to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. This was widely reported by the media, but it was later revealed that the images were fabricated using artificial intelligence and were originally of a small dog receiving medical treatment, which had been altered using AI techniques.

Attack on a CNN reporter: CNN aired a segment showing their reporter lying on the ground out of fear of Hamas's attacks and explosions, apologizing to viewers for the unusual filming position but stating it was necessary to maintain their safety. However, a leaked clip of the pre-filming showed the reporter and two cameramen choosing the spot to take this position, and a voice (likely from the production team) can be heard telling her to try to appear more frightened in the clip and to catch her breath from running and fear, as this would better convey the intended emotion to viewers.

Rape of women: Some of the lies also published by various Western newspapers and media included reports of Hamas members raping women during their attack on Israelis and taking hostages, as well as raping girls who were captured. Israel's war room published a post on "X" (formerly Twitter) claiming that Hamas had used rape as a weapon of war, which was widely covered by Western media and some newspapers, accompanied by several images of Israeli women who had been taken hostage. This was despite many of the released hostages denying these stories, repeatedly confirming that their rights were not violated in any way or that they were treated poorly or savagely.

Killing of 250 people at a music festival: Many videos circulated showing civilians fleeing, with claims that they were at a music festival that Hamas had attacked, killing over 250 people. However, it was later revealed that these escape videos were from a completely different location, and it was unclear what they were fleeing from. In the same incident, another horrific video spread, allegedly of a 14-year-old Israeli girl attending this festival and being burned by Hamas members. This, too, was proven false as the video was from 2015 and showed a 16-year-old girl from Guatemala, unrelated to the current Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

Attack by four armed men: The Israeli army released a video, widely covered by Western media, showing four armed Palestinian men being neutralized after they attempted to infiltrate and attack Israeli forces, as the Israeli army sent the message that "this is what happens to those who try to infiltrate the Israeli army." However, it was later revealed that these individuals were unarmed civilians, and when they saw the Israeli forces, they removed their shirts and waved them as a sign of surrender. They then sat on the ground as instructed by the Israeli forces. Later, they appeared in the footage after being killed, with weapons placed beside them. However, drag marks were visible behind them, indicating that their bodies had been dragged into position to make them appear as armed Palestinian militants who had been neutralized.

These are not the only cases of falsification carried out by Western media. Despite exposing much of this falsehood and spreading misinformation, these newspapers and media outlets continue along the same path without even making an effort to hide it. This blatant bias from media outlets that claim to be free and supposedly highly professional points to the stance of Western countries that consistently advocate for democracy, granting freedoms, and focusing on human rights. Yet, they are prepared to abandon all these political and humanitarian principles to ensure their interests and presence in the Middle East by providing unconditional protection to Israel, no matter the crimes and violations it commits.

**Image Manipulation:** After Hamas launched its attack, an uncountable number of related images spread, many of them misleading, from unrelated events or altered online as previously mentioned. Other images were taken out of their historical context in the media coverage of the events, leaving the public with a distorted perception of what is truly happening in the Middle East. This distortion opened the door for Israel to respond more brutally, this time with broad international support, both from governments and the public.

Images of destruction from the Israeli side garnered the most attention in Western media coverage, including pictures of the dead, collapsed and burned buildings, and bloodstains in various locations, especially on a child's chair, during the early hours of the event. Even after Israel retaliated by bombing various locations within Gaza, those images did not receive the same level of attention. For instance, the "Daily Mail" published a report documenting the atrocities committed by Hamas, prominently featuring dozens of images of violations against Israelis at the beginning of the article.

The "Daily Mail" highlighted the claim that Hamas had beheaded 40 Israeli children, and then appended the report with several images of wounded Palestinians, including children, and rising smoke from shelling, portraying the situation as Israel's response to Hamas' actions, downplaying the importance of these images. Israel successfully used war images in Western media to further its interests, regardless of the credibility or context of these images, providing new evidence of Western media bias and their tailored framing of events to suit their interests, far removed from the principle of truth-seeking.

**Superficial Neutrality:** Although various Western media outlets have, in one way or another, sought to condemn Palestinian factions and portray them as the "aggressor," they have simultaneously tried to appear neutral in their coverage as

a core tool in convincing the public of the truthfulness of the other side's lies or purely Israeli narratives. This tendency is evident through certain tactics, such as some media outlets avoiding labeling Palestinian factions with terms that imply they are terrorist groups. For example, the BBC stated that its editorial guidelines stipulate that the use of the term "terrorist" could hinder the audience's ability to accurately understand the news and its details and that the public should be left to form its own opinions regarding news and coverage. Therefore, it prefers terms that describe the perpetrators more specifically, such as "bomber," "attacker," "gunman," "kidnapper," "rebel," and "militant." This approach put the BBC in the crosshairs of government criticism, with British Defense Minister Grant Shapps explicitly calling it "shameful," arguing that since the British government considers Hamas a "terrorist" group, the BBC should follow the same path in describing Hamas fighters.

Additionally, alongside the intensive promotion of the Israeli narrative, some media outlets have sought to present certain Palestinian perspectives, such as the "New York Times" in its editorial published on October 9th titled: "The Global Context of the War Between Hamas and Israel," which included two images: the first of a boy running against the backdrop of burning buildings in the city of Ashkelon, while the second showed a Palestinian mother crying beside her son's body. The article discussed how former U.S. President Donald Trump's encouragement of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to ignore Palestinian interests, instead pursuing maximum Israeli gains, contributed to the current situation. It also highlighted Netanyahu's failure to recognize the level of risk he was leading Israel into by forming the current government. The article further presented the views of Palestinian-American voices, who argued that U.S. politicians and media ignored the root causes of the conflict and sided with Israel.

Hosting Palestinian voices during coverage is one form of this superficial neutrality, such as when Channel 4 News presenter Cathy Newman interviewed Palestinian Ambassador to the UK, Husam Zomlot, immediately after interviewing an Israeli politician from the Likud Party. The first question Newman posed to the Palestinian ambassador was whether he would condemn Hamas' actions. Naturally, the ambassador refused to answer, pointing out an important issue: that this is the question often posed to Palestinians in Western media, while the focus in these media outlets is on Palestinian rockets and their impact on Israel, without giving the same attention to Israeli airstrikes.

In another interview with Ambassador Zomlot on BBC, he was asked whether he supported or condemned Hamas' actions, which he also refused to answer. He highlighted the fact that Israeli officials are not subjected to similar questions and that Western media consistently portrays Palestinians as targeting civilians, even though Israel has done so not only in this recent crisis but for 75 years. Yet no one has asked Israeli officials to condemn any of the attacks or assaults on Palestinian citizens and land.

In addition, the Secretary-General of the Palestinian National Initiative, Mustafa Barghouti, appeared twice on CNN, where he clearly responded to questions about "targeting civilians." His appearances were on the program hosted by renowned journalist Christiane Amanpour two days before she interviewed former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who compared Hamas to ISIS during his interview with her.

### *5. Multiple Interpretations of Western Media Coverage:*

Several analyses suggest observations about the performance of Western media in general and French media in particular. On the one hand, the rhetoric of many participants in coverage—journalists, program hosts, and experts—revealed a belief that Israel is part of the Western family, the democratic family, or Western civilization. Meanwhile, the other party is seen as an outsider. This does not mean that Israel is above criticism or infallible; there is general criticism of Israel and especially of its current and past governments. However, this criticism, no matter how harsh, is often framed as a sibling criticizing another sibling. Most participants in these discussions speak as though the battle against Hamas and Gaza is their battle and their nation's battle, and that any victory for Israel is a victory for them. One could look for explanations to excuse this unconscious position and its implications. For instance, it can be argued that the nature of the October 7th attack reminded several Western capitals, especially Paris, of terrorist incidents that targeted Europe in this millennium, creating a sense of empathy among societies that have experienced similar events.

Furthermore, the domestic landscape affects perceptions and the interpretation of the external situation. Within Europe, Jewish citizens live in fear because they have been targeted by jihadist terrorism in the past. Additionally, since October 7th, the number of attacks against Jews has multiplied several times (though the number of attacks against Muslims has also increased, albeit at lower rates).

In short, the dominant sector of public opinion views Jews as victims, and Israel's narrative is successfully promoted as a civilized people, few in number, living in a small state surrounded by numerous uncivilized enemies. This narrative aligns with what the European sees in his own country: a small minority being attacked by a larger one. However, this image began to shift as the war in Gaza dragged on. While other factors can be mentioned, a simple truth stands out: Jews are part of the fabric of Western society. They do not reject the prevailing values and culture of this society, whereas the prevailing perception among the majority of the public is that large sectors of Muslims are in radical opposition to this system. This perception is reinforced by events of the past years and the dominance of the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists, and Tablighi Jamaat in large segments of Islamic communities. Former French President Hollande even pointed to this in discussions with journalists.

This does not mean that the Arab or pro-Palestinian discourse is absent. Media outlets invite Palestinians, Arab affairs experts, sympathetic UN officials, and humanitarian organization officials to participate in panel discussions, and they are given a platform. However, their presence is far less than that of pro-Israel voices, and most of them display average or modest communication skills. Some even harm the Palestinian cause, believing they are serving it, and their rhetoric is often rejected by the audience and other participants in the discussions. There are exceptions, but this is the general picture. It can be said that most influential figures in shaping the middle and upper classes' opinions are biased toward Israel, though there are significant differences among them regarding their stance on the current Israeli government and its policies, and on the two-state solution.

Most of the pro-Israel participants are sympathetic to the rhetoric of the Israeli left rather than the rhetoric of Netanyahu and his government. They harshly criticize him for his policies, those of his religious right-wing allies in the West Bank, and his catastrophic management of security. They blame him for killing the peace process, his reactions, and his rhetoric. For instance, "The New York Times" published an article analyzing the discourse of the Israeli right-wing, criticizing its violence and its explicit or implicit calls for the extermination of Palestinians or the denial of their humanity. The newspaper also analyzed the significance of some of the scandalous images exposing the lies of the Israeli government or military (as well as other images disproving Hamas' claims).

Overall, this does not mean that the tragedy experienced by the people of Gaza is being ignored, nor the potential consequences of this tragedy for the

future of the Arab-Israeli conflict. As the days go by, the inclination to downplay or solely blame Hamas for the situation has decreased.

Other analyses have suggested that Western media performance has been biased in favor of Israel due to several factors:

**Imbalance of Power Between the Two Sides:** Israel is a recognized state with strong commercial, military, and diplomatic ties to the West, unlike Palestine. Israel is seen as a free, democratic, sovereign state that tries to minimize civilian casualties by targeting Hamas' infrastructure and military apparatus, such as rocket launchers and weapons depots. Israel uses the "roof knocking" tactic to warn civilians, sending texts or making calls to evacuate buildings before striking them. In contrast, Hamas is portrayed as deliberately endangering Palestinian civilians by storing weapons in civilian areas like homes, schools, mosques, and hospitals.

**Strong Political Ties:** Pro-Israel biases in Western media reflect the broader political connection between Israel and Western governments, helping Tel Aviv escape accountability for its crimes, which are often not even recognized as such. While the U.S. sends weapons and ammunition to Israel, Western aid to Gaza has stopped, despite the desperate need of families and children there. This imbalance exacerbates the situation, leading to more casualties and delaying any possibility of a comprehensive solution.

**Ignoring the Context and Motives of the Attack:** Initial Western media positions overlooked the long history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, daily occupation violations, and assaults on Al-Aqsa Mosque. They ignored 16 years of the inhumane and illegal siege on Gaza and remained silent for decades regarding the brutal military occupation and apartheid imposed by Israel on Palestinians. Consequently, the pro-Israel bias remains a deliberate approach in Western media, a characteristic rather than a flaw.

## ***6. Issues and Debates:***

Starting from the observation that Western media coverage, particularly in French channels, treats Israel as part of the Western family while viewing Arabs as outsiders, and that there is a deliberate attempt to allow different narratives and analyses to varying degrees depending on the channel and team involved, there remains a clear preference for the narratives and analyses of the Israeli left and its sympathizers. Additionally, there is a persistent assumption affecting the coverage

that the Gazan side is lying while the Israeli side tells the truth. The fallacy of this assumption is evident because both sides are at war, and as in any war, the first casualty is the truth, with both sides omitting facts and presenting narratives that serve their purposes. On the other hand, Western media does not go too far in defending an Israeli narrative if it is proven false, aided by the Western distrust of the current Israeli government and its prime minister. However, news corrections are often delayed and insufficient to repair the damage caused by initial misinformation.

**Given these dynamics, several key issues arise, including:**

Arab States' Positions on the Crisis: A significant concern is the ongoing and often deliberate misunderstanding or distortion, at times intentional and at times unintentional, of Arab states' positions on the crisis. A corrupt narrative prevails, suggesting that Arab regimes secretly wish for Israel to succeed in its invasion of Gaza and support its military and political objectives but refrain from voicing this due to fear of what some describe as a "hysterical and ignorant" Arab street. The main argument used by these so-called experts is that deep crises have marked the history of relations between Arab regimes and Gazan-Palestinian factions.

To understand the fallacy of this perspective, it might be useful to reference the history of Western (particularly European) relations with Ukraine. European countries frequently criticized Ukraine's political corruption, refused its NATO membership, and rejected its inclusion in the European Union. Does this history imply that Western states secretly desire Ukraine's occupation, the slaughter of its people, and the fall of its political regime today? Of course not. These experts also assume that establishing relations with Israel means completely abandoning the Palestinian cause, overlooking the possibility that such relations could be a form of diplomatic pressure on Israel, which can be debated and criticized, of course, but does not imply total abandonment. Their third argument is that Arab states are upset by the alliance of some factions with Iran, but being upset by such alliances, even if true, does not mean condoning or desiring the massacre of an entire people. Instead, it reflects a desire to persuade these factions to reconsider or distance themselves from this alliance.

Dominance of the Israeli Left's Narrative: The narrative of the Israeli left, which remains committed to the Zionist project, and its supporters dominates much of the historical discourse around the issue and the background of the situation. Figures such as philosopher Alain Finkielkraut and Caroline Fourest emphasize

that Israel's colonial nature is only apparent in the territories it occupied after 1967, with responsibility for its crimes lying with right-wing governments, particularly Netanyahu and the extreme religious right (although the left is not innocent, this is not the focus here). Resistance to settlement expansion is seen as legitimate and enshrined in international law, especially since settlers are armed and resort to significant violence. These critics also condemn the current Israeli government's exploitation of the Gaza conflict to escalate violence against Palestinians, particularly in the West Bank, though there is some disagreement among them regarding Gaza. However, according to this Israeli left, the claim that Israel has been a colonial-settler project since the inception of Zionism is a flawed argument, and those who make such claims—whether in the Arab street or among radical Western leftists—are seen as wanting to destroy Israel, exterminate its people, and hate Jews. This is seen as a thinly veiled pretext for anti-Semitism and a revival of Hitler's project. The main arguments this camp uses to justify their analysis include:

Some argue that Israel is a state internationally recognized and established by an international decision, joining the United Nations even before countries like China or Spain. Others claim that Palestine is the historical homeland of the Jews since the days of the prophets, and their return to this homeland cannot be considered colonialism or settlement. In reality, much of this rhetoric is fraught with logical, political, ethical, and academic flaws. This group further argues that "as long as there is colonialism, its victim has the right to expel or even kill the colonizer." However, since Israel is a state recognized by international law, this means the international community has acknowledged that it is not a colonial project. In contrast, the occupation of the West Bank is considered colonialism, as it is not recognized internationally. This perspective implies that the international community has the authority to write history and describe reality as it pleases, and that terms like "colonialism" and "settlement" do not describe specific realities, which they consider a fundamentally flawed logic.

## Conclusion:

### **Observations on the Characteristics of Arab Analyses of Western Coverage:**

Arab analyses of Western media coverage of the Gaza War tend to share common narratives and stories, asserting that the Western media machine continues to operate with double standards. Whether intentionally or not,

and whether deceiving or being deceived (or both), it promotes the Israeli narrative, which some describe as overly sentimental. These Arab analyses argue that unfolding events, continual debunking of Israeli claims, and the weight of popular and diplomatic pressures have reached a critical point, forcing Western media to adjust its coverage to speak more on the brutality of Israeli practices. Many colleagues focus on the intentional or unintentional selection of terms, vocabulary, and topics in Western media, selections that often (if not always) work against Arab parties.

The accusation of double standards is valid but also relative. More importantly, such an accusation exposes its proponents to being reminded that they, too, may be guilty of the same double standards. Specifically, it is true that the Palestinian victim does not receive the same level of care and attention as the Israeli victim. However, the Palestinian does receive far more attention than Black victims (in Sudan, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Congo, and some significant Asian Muslim populations), as well as Iraqis and Syrians, among others. The Palestinian's plight, to some extent, intersects with the Western preoccupation with the Jewish experience of suffering in Europe. Still, this intersection also benefits Palestinians, as attention to Jewish issues inevitably leads to attention to Palestinian issues. The Israeli oppressor receives harsher criticism than others, and Israelis and Jews often complain about this, seemingly unaware that this is the "price" of the world's focus on their pain and destiny.

Here, a few examples and observations concerning double standards are sufficient. A quote attributed to Edward Said circulated on social media, stating: "Being a victim does not give you the right to do everything and anything." This is undoubtedly a moral truth. However, this statement can be applied to criticize Palestinians and Arabs just as it is used to criticize Israelis. Additionally, the fact that most of Egypt's foreign policy elites adhere to the realist school of international relations often results in less attention being paid to the practices of certain regimes against their own people and others.

It is worth noting, without aiming for a contentious argument, that the Arab selection of certain terms sometimes backfires, harming our interests and our messaging to the West. One such example is the use of the phrase "Israeli victimhood" to criticize Israel's portrayal of itself. There are numerous examples that provoke frustration and disgust. For instance, during the early hours of French coverage of the Israeli army's invasion of Gaza, much airtime was dedicated to sympathizing with the suffering of Israelis who couldn't sleep due to worrying

about their family members participating in the operation. Yet, not a word was said about Palestinian victims or the destruction in Gaza. Thus, belittling all Israeli narratives and reducing them to “victimhood” exposes the Arab side to damaging criticism, such as claims that we do not value human life or recognize the human cost of our actions and those of our people. This mirrors comments made by influential French commentators like Caroline Fourest, who remarked that she “hears Arabs appealing to human conscience but not adhering to it themselves.” She argued that she has the right to demand from them what they demand from others.

Therefore, when presenting our grievances, criticisms, and the injustices we face, it is more effective to cite specific incidents—of which there are thousands—rather than resorting to generalizations, accusations, or demeaning language that could be used against us as proof of our lack of humanity.

In summary, this discussion concluded that the multifaceted response to the repercussions of Israel’s “Iron Swords” operation, launched in retaliation for the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation by Palestinian factions on October 7, 2023, revealed a parallel, unconventional war unfolding on both diplomatic and media fronts. This involved not only the two warring parties but also international powers active in the situation. While diplomatic efforts at the regional and international levels aimed to curb the escalating consequences of Israel’s war on Gaza and address the worsening humanitarian crisis exacerbated by the siege, as well as Israel’s stubborn refusal to allow aid into Gaza, the media machine played a role in reviving public opinion in both the Arab world and the West. This, in turn, pressured many governments to reconsider reviving the peace process in the region as an urgent priority. However, Western media coverage of the war also exposed a series of challenges and issues.



# The International Community in the Face of Israeli Human Rights Violations in Gaza: Blind, Deaf, and Mute

DR. MAHMOUD SALAMA - DR. WALAA JAD - SALMA ABDEL MONEIM

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Since October 7, 2023, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have experienced severe human rights violations. Following the “Al-Aqsa Flood,” the Israeli occupation government decided to kill as many Palestinians as possible without distinguishing between civilians and resistance members. They resorted to intense and continuous air and sea bombardments, targeting schools, hospitals, places of worship, and refugee camps before a ground invasion of the Strip, leaving no safe place in Gaza. The Israeli violations extended to using starvation as a weapon by blocking aid, collective punishment, and forced displacement of residents from northern to southern Gaza, forcibly driving them towards neighboring countries. Palestinians are thus living another chapter of impossible life under occupation practices for nearly 80 years, amid complete silence from the international community and, in many cases, justifying these violations.

In contrast to the Western bias against Palestinians under the pretext of “Israel’s right to self-defense,” Egypt’s stance has been steadfast since the crisis began. President Sisi, during the graduation ceremony of military college students on October 12, 2023, less than a week after the Gaza conflict broke out, emphasized the international community’s responsibility to facilitate urgent humanitarian aid to Gaza. This call coincided with deteriorating humanitarian conditions after six days of continuous bombardment and a complete siege since the third day of the war, including the occupation’s refusal to open safe corridors for civilians or allow

aid convoys, violating the international humanitarian law. Egyptian institutions continue to work to bring in aid, prepare field hospitals and temporary shelters, and pursue diplomatic efforts to rally international opposition to Israeli actions and violations against Palestinians.

## **First: Humanitarian Situation in Gaza... A Worsening Disaster with Prolonged War:**

The air raids launched by the occupation forces on Gaza since October 7, 2023, under the military operation named “Iron Sword,” included sea bombardment and ground incursion into Gaza, continuing until the time of writing, leading to the demise of over 23,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health. The total number of injured in Gaza exceeded 60,000, mostly children and women. These attacks worsened the already long-standing crises for Palestinians, with 60% living below the national poverty line, reliant on UNRWA and World Food Programme aid due to poverty and high unemployment rates; as Gaza, one of the most densely populated areas globally, suffers from high unemployment rates and over 95% of residents lack clean water, largely due to the siege imposed on them, according to the UN in 2022.

Among these crises is the inability to access food, leading individuals in UNRWA camps to wait in lines for over four hours for a loaf of bread. Conditions deteriorated to the point of making life impossible in the northern areas, with the occupation using starvation as a weapon, leading to forced displacement towards the south. The occupation allowed aid into southern Gaza and urged Palestinians to move south for assistance, a goal pursued since the first day of the aggression. The occupation’s objective to empty Gaza of its residents through forced displacement is evident in calls from an occupation army leader for the Palestinians to move to Egypt for safety, and repeated calls by the army spokesperson for Gaza residents to move south, avoiding the border fence with Israel in preparation for expanded military operations in Gaza.

In addition to using starvation, the occupation escalated further by cutting off all communication services, electricity, and drinking water, hindering supply access, further worsening the humanitarian situation in blatant violation of all international agreements and treaties, challenging the entire international community. The electricity and fuel crisis led to deteriorating hospital conditions and prolonged crises for citizens accessing water, confirmed by UNRWA data

highlighting a water crisis across Gaza due to damaged infrastructure, lack of electricity to operate pumps and desalination plants, and limited current water supplies. Water resupply is impossible due to the complete siege imposed by the Israeli authorities, compounded by the inability of the UN organization to bring in fuel or supply Israeli water to Gaza.

Another indicator of the humanitarian crisis extent is the occupation forces' use of over 25,000 tons of explosives until early November, averaging 1086 tons per day, plunging Gaza into darkness with only 3 to 4 hours of electricity daily, shutting down medical facilities and hospitals, preventing medical teams from assisting over 60,000 injured.

By doing so, the occupation forces violated international conventions and laws prohibiting collective punishment and forced displacement. According to Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilians, no person should be punished for an offense they did not personally commit, prohibiting collective penalties and measures of intimidation and terrorism. However, throughout the war, the occupation forces violated every stipulation of this article, killing over 23,000 Gazans, destroying the already weakened infrastructure due to repeated Israeli bombings over the years, and terrorizing the remaining 2.3 million residents, forcing over 1.9 million into displacement.

The occupation's actions also break international treaties on the responsibilities of the occupying state towards the residents of occupied territories. Despite Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, the area remains under occupation, with Israel retaining control over land, sea, and air access, the population registry, communications networks, and many daily life aspects. Israel imposed unprecedented collective punishment on Gaza residents, using multiple tools in clear violation of the international humanitarian law.

## **Second: The Israeli Occupation Tools Violating International Law Against Palestinians:**

The UN Security Council sessions discussing the humanitarian situation in Palestine, the UN General Assembly resolutions, and South Africa's recent lawsuit against Israel at the International Court of Justice confirmed Israel's violation of international law and its committing of genocide against Palestinians. The occupation's tools in breaching international law included indiscriminate

bombing without distinguishing between combatants and civilians, using starvation, bombing prohibited sites such as schools, hospitals, and refugee camps, forced displacement, and collective punishment to resolve the Palestinian issue under the alleged reason of ending Hamas' control over Gaza and eliminating its military capabilities. Below is an explanation of the primary tools of occupation violating international law in its war on Gaza.

### *1. Forced Displacement as a Tool for Resolving the Issue:*

Forced displacement is defined as “a systematic practice executed by governments, paramilitary forces, or terrorist groups against ethnic, religious, or sectarian groups, aiming to evacuate certain lands and replace them with other population groups.”

Forced displacement differs from deportation or voluntary or forced migration as it normally occurs within the region's borders to alter the population composition of a specific area or city. This is precisely what the Israeli occupation authorities are doing in Gaza, where the Israeli army announced military operations in Gaza City, urging all residents on October 13 to evacuate their homes and move south for their protection, stating that “returning to Gaza City will only be allowed after a formal announcement.”

Thus, forced displacement is considered a means of ethnic cleansing and genocide under international humanitarian law, categorized as an international crime against human rights and fundamental freedoms under Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, alongside the 1945 UN Charter binding on the Israeli government. Article 49 of the 1949 Geneva Convention, which forbids the mass or individual forced relocation of protected persons from occupied territories to the occupying state's territories or any other state's territories, whether occupied or not, for any reason, is binding on Israel by the UN Security Council, General Assembly, International Committee of the Red Cross, International Court of Justice, and high contracting parties. Numerous international declarations and agreements also criminalize forced transfer of citizens, making Israeli authorities' actions in forcing the Palestinians south a violation of all human rights and a blatant breach of international laws in which Israel is always considered part.

According to a series of treaties on the treatment of civilians, soldiers, and prisoners of war, collectively known as “laws of armed conflict,” attacks on military

targets must be proportionate, meaning they should not cause excessive civilian loss or property damage compared to the direct military advantage anticipated. Therefore, the deliberate targeting of civilians and indiscriminate attacks by Israeli forces amount to war crimes under international humanitarian law. Due to Israel's indiscriminate aerial bombardment, hospitals are no longer safe havens, lacking space, failing to treat patients, and encountering medicine shortages. The World Health Organization documented over 137 attacks on health facilities in Gaza from October 7 to November 12, 2023. The same applies to refugee camps, schools, and UN complexes, all of which have been bombed throughout the war.

International humanitarian law explicitly prohibits the forced removal or transfer of protected persons in occupied territories. Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, binding on Israel, prohibits forced or mass transfer or individual displacement of citizens under any pretext. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court also criminalizes deportation or forced transfer, considering it a crime against humanity. Despite these provisions, the Israeli army announced forthcoming military operations in Gaza City, urging the residents to evacuate southward for their protection, stating that "returning to Gaza City will only be allowed after a formal announcement." According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), this led to the displacement of approximately 1.9 million people since the escalation began, with over 1.3 million residing in UN facilities unequipped for refugees while Gaza suffers from resource shortages, service outages, and supply disturbances. These violations necessitate urgent action from the UN and the international community to protect civilians, as displacement and resulting practices destabilize regional security and stability, affecting international peace and security.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), more than 118,000 buildings have been totally or partially destroyed, with 45-56% of Gaza's buildings affected. The Israeli army's combat strategy evolved to target international relief headquarters in Gaza. UNRWA reported significant damage to its headquarters in Gaza City due to airstrikes. By early January 2024, 142 UNRWA employees providing support and assistance to Palestinians, who should be protected under international humanitarian law, had been killed. These Israeli practices represent an unconcealed violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

Against Women. Article 71 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions requires guaranteeing the safety and protection of international relief teams while performing their humanitarian tasks.

## *2. Collective Punishment Mechanism Against Palestinians:*

Examining the situation in Gaza reveals a severe humanitarian crisis amid continued collective punishment of civilians. Israeli forces not only target unarmed civilians, children, and women but have also escalated to targeting relief workers, creating surreal scenes reminiscent of historical massacres not even described in ancient history. All humanitarian agencies and their staff face severe restrictions in providing humanitarian aid due to the Israeli airstrikes on Gaza, movement restrictions, electricity, fuel, water, medicine shortages, and other essentials.

According to Article 55 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, Israel must secure all necessary needs for the population in occupied territories without discrimination, including food, clothing, and medicine. Hospitals, schools, civilians, relief workers, and safe routes for emergency aid are among those protected under international humanitarian law, specifically the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1977 Additional Protocols. However, the Israeli forces disregarded these rules and agreements, with no international community action taken against them.

International inaction towards occupation brutality encouraged continued indiscriminate killing of elderly, women, and even children, demonstrating their increasing savagery and barbarity. Israel's refusal to allow aid and relief supplies into Gaza is a clear indication of the collective punishment plan intended to liquidate the Palestinian issue. Israel kills, tortures, slaughters, burns, demolishes, and denies burial for the dead and treatment for the injured, tightening the siege on Gaza and blocking all aid despite Article 23 of the Fourth Geneva Convention requiring Israel to allow unimpeded passage of humanitarian supplies. Humanitarian aid must be distributed equally without discrimination based on race, religion, or territory.

From these points, it is evident that Israel defies all humanity with no respect for international humanitarian law, which should bind it legally. The international community must act to lift the Gaza siege, allow humanitarian aid, and ensure Israel respects its international obligations. Current international silence is a primary factor encouraging Israel's brutal practices against the Palestinian people without accountability

### **Third: Western Powers Adopting a Position Against Palestinian Rights:**

The brutal Israeli aggression on Gaza since October 8, 2023, following the Palestinian resistance attacks on Israeli settlements around Gaza, revealed blatant Western governmental and major human rights organizations' double standards in applying human rights norms. Despite quick adoption of harsh human rights stances and the leading of many negative campaigns against many Arab countries based on alleged human rights violations, their declared positions on recent Israeli practices, including clear war crimes and severe human rights violations against Palestinians, were weak, supportive, or justifying Israeli crimes. Some European countries moved beyond justifying and supporting Israeli crimes to attacking their own citizens' and residents' rights to peaceful protestation and assembly against the Israeli aggression.

In the war's early days, Western political reactions and declarations mostly contradicted human rights norms, justifying the Israeli aggression and encouraging more violations. These responses can be summarized as follows:

#### ***1. Distortion of Facts and Ignoring Context to Justify Israeli Violations:***

Western governments' declared positions and major human rights organizations like Human Rights Watch showed significant distortion, ignoring facts and essential contexts leading to the current situation for Palestinians in Gaza. Key features of these responses included:

- Ignoring the original cause of the current crisis, the ongoing illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, and its continuous damaging of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.
- Overlooking the historical suffering of Palestinians in Gaza, living in the world's largest open-air prison for nearly 16 years under an Israeli blockade, strictly limiting their movement and daily goods entry, causing constant crises in services, job opportunities, and basic needs.
- Neglecting the ongoing Israeli aggression in the West Bank and Gaza, illegal settlement construction, and the excessive use of apartheid measures.
- Overlooking continuous Israeli assaults on Arab holy sites in East Jerusalem, highlighted by the repeated armed Israeli force and political and governmental figures' incursions into the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

- Failing to base responses respecting international legitimacy on Israel's continuous violation of numerous UN and Security Council resolutions since 1948, notably Security Council Resolutions 194 (1948) on refugees' right to return, 248 (1968) on withdrawal from territories occupied by force in 1967, 271 (1969) on invalidating any changes to Jerusalem's status, and 2334 (2016) which promotes terminating the Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories.
- Ignoring the ongoing tragedy of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, numbering around 5200 in 2023, including women, children, and administrative detainees without any trial.

By omitting these crucial points, Western governments and human rights organizations' responses to the recent war lack credibility. A legitimate human rights assessment and judgment on the parties' adherence to humanitarian and international norms necessitate considering the historical context and the broader picture, not focusing solely on a single moment where the oppressed Palestinians, deprived of their rights, target the occupying power violating their rights for 75 continuous years.

## *2. European Governments Practicing Collective Punishment on Gaza Citizens:*

Even after acknowledging some Palestinian militants' actions against Israeli civilians as violations of war laws, the Israeli retaliation through a comprehensive war, with most victims being civilians and children, and subsequent Western governments' reactions, reflected collective punishment of an entire people. Important evidence of Western governments' complicity in collective punishment includes:

- The United States quickly deploying an aircraft carrier near Palestinian and Israeli shores, indicating the clear support for continued Israeli aggression on Gaza.
- Complete European and American silence on Israel's bombing and destruction of infrastructure, cutting off all relief service lines, targeting medical facilities and water supply, tightening the Gaza siege, and refusing entry of any food or medical aid.
- Western support extended beyond solidarity and military aid to the occupation, with the European Union declaring suspension of aid to Palestinians, which was later retracted after opposition from Ireland, Spain, and

Luxembourg, but remained superficial as Germany, Austria, Denmark, and Sweden suspended their aid to Palestinian territories. Western nations that injected over \$160 billion to support Ukraine in its war against Russia directly contributed to worsening the humanitarian situation in Palestine, participating in the war crime committed by the Israeli occupation forces against Palestinians since the war began.

- Major European countries suspended developmental aid programs to the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian civil society and UN relief agencies for Palestinian territories and Gaza, with Denmark (\$13 million), Sweden (\$5 million), Germany (\$131 million), and Austria (\$20 million). The UK began reviewing its developmental programs without suspending its payments, while the EU stated that the ongoing developmental aid would be reviewed to avoid providing indirect support for Hamas. All aid programs do not pass through Hamas, which has no legal status in Gaza, making Palestinians the sole victims of these measures.
- Germany, France, Britain, and Italy declared their unwavering support for Israel, guaranteeing Israel can defend itself and its citizens. Germany provided two drones to the occupation forces and possible ammunition supply for ships, and the UK announced maritime and air patrols starting October 13 to monitor the alleged regional stability threats.

### *3. Limiting and Weakening Europeans' and Residents' Rights to Expression and Peaceful Assembly:*

One of the most shocking reactions from European governments during the recent war was discouraging and preventing their citizens and legal residents from exercising their legal right to expression and peaceful assembly. The French Interior Ministry banned any pro-Palestinian demonstrations and used excessive force to disperse protests against Israeli crimes. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán stated that his country would not allow marches supporting what he called terrorist organizations, a stance repeated by the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who said the pro-Palestinian group Samidoun would be banned. The UK Home Secretary warned senior police leaders in England and Wales against any public support for Hamas, urging full force to prevent what she called anti-Israel symbols or slogans in the streets.

These strict measures against protest rights and using force and arrests to prevent peaceful protesters from expressing their views contradict the established image of European governments as tolerant to the point of extremism in opening

public space and allowing free expression and protest rights. This also contrasts with Sweden's recent stance with allowing extremists to burn copies of the Quran.

## **Fourth: Major Human Rights Organizations: Between Bias Towards Israel and Ambiguous Positions:**

Analyzing major international human rights organizations' speeches reveals varying positions, from bias in favor of Israel and justifying its aggression to, at best, ambiguous responses equating the victim and perpetrator. Below is an overview of three prominent European and American human rights organizations' stances during the first five days of the Israeli aggression on Gaza: Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network.

### ***1. Human Rights Watch:***

The organization issued six press releases and reports from October 9 to 12, 2023, on events in Palestine. All statements highlighted the Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians in Gaza border settlements, dedicating significant space to what it described as "human rights violations." The organization implied that the Israeli military actions were "responses" to the Palestinian militants' actions. Although some statements mentioned major Israeli violations, like using white phosphorus and targeting civilians, the language used was not powerful or prominent enough to match the severity and nature of Israeli crimes. Overall, the organization's responses during the recent war can be described as "justifying" Israeli aggression while severely condemning the Palestinian side and treating the Israeli criminal practices with "softness."

### ***2. Amnesty International:***

The organization's responses were more professional than Human Rights Watch but still to some extent justifying the Israeli crimes. It issued two statements during this period; the first focused on civilians on both Israeli and Palestinian sides paying the war's price, and the second called on Israel to lift its Gaza blockade. Amnesty adopted a sharper tone against Israel's collective punishment practices, with Secretary-General Agnes Callamard stating: "Israeli authorities must immediately restore electricity supplies in Gaza, remove additional restrictions, and lift the unlawful 16-year blockade on Gaza. Collective punishment of Gaza's civilian population amounts to a war crime; it is cruel and inhumane."

### *3. Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network:*

During the initial period of the Gaza war, the organization issued one statement in English, not translated into Arabic, calling on the European side to adopt a comprehensive approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and address its original causes. However, the organization's stance was not strong, fair, or accurate in describing the violations by each party.

## **Fifth: Western Pragmatism Hinders UN Efforts to Save Gaza:**

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that imposing a blockade endangering civilians' lives by depriving them of essential survival goods is prohibited under international humanitarian law. Human Rights Watch described Israeli military leaders' statements as "calls for war crimes," affirming that depriving civilians in occupied territories of food and electricity constitutes a war crime, comparable to using starvation as a weapon.

Despite the UN and international organizations' warnings of Israeli war crimes against Palestinian civilians, the US and EU took steps worsening the humanitarian catastrophe in the occupied territories. Western support for the occupation went beyond declaring solidarity with victims of the Hamas attack on October 7, expanding to military aid from the US, including an aircraft carrier with a 5,000-strong crew, preparing military aircraft to support US bases in the Middle East, and deploying special operations forces to rescue hostages.

Excessive military support from the US and European countries clearly indicates that the occupation forces' plan is not limited to rescuing hostages held by Hamas or destroying the Palestinian resistance infrastructure but extends to a wide-scale criminal act against Palestinians to liquidate their issue, potentially prompting regional powers' intervention. Which indeed happened, when the Houthis attempted to intervene by launching drones or ballistic missiles at Israel.

The West (its governments, parliaments, and human rights organizations) has consistently adopted a negative discourse towards human rights conditions in many Arab countries, using aid and trade and military exchanges to pressure

some countries to adopt stances deemed consistent with human rights standards. These pressures, statements, and decisions from some Western bodies often crossed the line between commitment to the universality of human rights and respecting state sovereignty and non-interference in its internal affairs.

The Western side has long relied on its self-established image as societies and governments upholding human and public rights, but the recent Western stances on the Israeli aggression on Gaza have tarnished this image, revealing blind European and American support for Israel. This blatant contradiction between their stance on Israel and their discourse towards Arab countries means many Western credibility justifications have fallen and will not return as before.

This analysis leads to the conclusion that the West, at least in the near future, will not be able to play an active and influential role in pushing Arab countries to make reforms in the field of public rights and freedoms. Western stances and statements will no longer have the same impact they relied on to promote these positions. Overall, the West, especially Europe, has lost much of its ability to influence this issue.

Western pragmatism in dealing with human rights issues has become more exposed than ever, making reliance on it a form of futility and ineffectiveness. This may present an opportunity for the UN system, which showed more credibility during the recent crisis, to regain its role and vitality, relying on its mechanisms to lead a global reform movement for human rights based on respecting state sovereignty and avoiding politically biased pressures.

## **Sixth: A Consistent Egyptian Stance Against the Western Position:**

Contrary to the Western bias in favor of the Israeli occupation, Egypt's stance on the Palestinian issue remains steadfast. The Egyptian state, represented by President Sisi and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, insists on preserving Palestinian rights to remain on their land and not yielding to forced displacement attempts practiced by the occupation that began a week earlier from the moment of writing. Since the escalation between the resistance and occupation forces, Egypt has aimed to de-escalate tensions between both sides and provide humanitarian aid to Palestinians through the Rafah crossing, which the Palestinian side was bombed multiple times, but the occupation

forces refuse to ceasefire or open humanitarian corridors for international aid until all hostages are freed from Hamas.

Egypt's vision for resolving the Palestinian issue is that a just and comprehensive peace based on the two-state solution is the way to attain true and sustainable security for the Palestinian people. Egypt does not abandon its commitments to Arab issues, foremost the Palestinian cause, and consistently condemns such ongoing provocations against the Palestinian people, considering these steps as a fragment of a series of escalatory measures risking further violence and tension in the occupied Palestinian territories, undermining the entire region's security and stability.

Egypt's stance emphasizes coordinating regional and international efforts to urge immediate de-escalation, prioritizing the current moment to save Palestinian and civilian lives on both sides, avoiding further humanitarian suffering from armed conflicts.

As the Israeli bombardment on Gaza continues, cutting water, electricity, and food supplies, President Sisi directed preparing an aid convoy announced by the National Alliance for Civil Development Work on October 10, including large amounts of humanitarian aid for Palestinians in Gaza. The Egyptian National Alliance for Civil Development Work announced the convoy, comprising doctors from various specialties, medicines, and medical equipment to support the Palestinian people, alongside significant efforts made by the Egyptian Red Crescent on the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing to receive the injured and others needing aid.

Egyptian efforts did not stop at preparing Egyptian relief convoys and directing them to the Rafah crossing but also include coordinating all international relief efforts from entities wishing to aid Gaza, receiving international aid at Al-Arish International Airport to direct it to Gaza through the Rafah land crossing when humanitarian corridors open. Egyptian efforts with friendly countries to open humanitarian corridors resulted in continuous aid flow to Gaza's residents. International aid trucks and planes arrived at Al-Arish Airport from various countries worldwide, with most of the aid directed to southern Gaza.

Egyptian efforts also included communication with all active international parties, agreeing with the European Union to ensure humanitarian aid access into Gaza, and reaching an agreement with the British Prime Minister and several

world leaders to intensify efforts to de-escalate tensions, protect civilians on both sides, and prevent the deterioration of the security and humanitarian situations.

In summary, the humanitarian situation in Gaza has reached a catastrophic level amidst the continued occupation crimes against civilians, amounting to war crimes. Israel's actions in Gaza represent blatant violations of international humanitarian law principles, constituting crimes against humanity and war crimes under international law. Israel bears full responsibility for the dangerous escalation damaging all efforts to maintain comprehensive calm and prevent escalating violence threatening international peace and security. With continued significant Western support for Israel's actions, the hope for preserving Palestinian lives lies in Egypt's tireless efforts to coordinate with Europe and the US to stop the occupation's attack on Gaza and open humanitarian corridors, while rallying international relief efforts and delivering aid to Palestinians.

## Section Twelve

# The War in Gaza: What Comes Next?

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There will come a time when the fire ceases, and the war ends, but the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will persist, and the fact that Israel has been an aggressor on Palestinian land and rights since its international recognition in 1948 will persist. This ongoing conflict threatens everyone as long as the Palestinian issue remains unresolved. A genuine political settlement based on the foundations of just and comprehensive peace and international legitimacy resolutions is required.

While a ceasefire is the current priority in diplomatic efforts to aid civilians and stop bloodshed, and to prevent a regional escalation of the war as well, the question “What comes after the war?” regarding the fate of the Gaza Strip troubles political and intellectual circles globally. The answer will determine whether the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will erupt again, as it has previously, or whether the current confrontation will establish new foundations for sustainable peace.

Many Western think-tanks and individuals interested in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have rushed to propose different approaches and visions for the “day after” the ceasefire in Gaza, assuming an inevitable “vacuum” will arise in Gaza if Israel achieves its declared goal of eradicating Hamas. This could create new conditions and end the status quo in the Gaza Strip before October 7. Regardless of whether this assumption is realistic or still under the dynamic

military developments in Gaza, it reflects a clear Western bias towards the Israeli perspective. Western approaches to the future of Gaza warrant an examination of their realism and feasibility in the Palestinian context. Simultaneously, a group of experts and specialists at the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies presents a different thinking approach, based on a comprehensive vision of fair Palestinian rights in the post-war phase, asserting that solving the “Gaza dilemma” is after all a Palestinian responsibility.

The different visions presented for Gaza have several levels: first, ideas on ending the war and resolving this crisis; second, the future of Gaza, regarding who will manage the Gaza Strip; and third, the potential implications of the Gaza war on the internal situation in Israel and Palestine, as well as on the regional level.

## **First: Different Outlooks on the means to end the War:**

The current reality shows that all efforts by regional and internal forces have not yet stopped the brutal Israeli war on Gaza. Despite the ongoing killings of unarmed Palestinian civilians, which we all witness, there should be an active international action to stop this war, rather than just watching it unfold. While there have been recent attempts to reach a temporary humanitarian truce, it is important but does not entirely stop the bloodshed.

Israel is operating according to the goals it set from the first day of the operations, including eradicating Hamas’ control over Gaza and destroying its military infrastructure. Recently, it added a new goal, which is keeping its army in the Gaza Strip for a while to ensure the events of October 7 do not repeat. These combined goals indicate that Israel is determined to continue the war regardless of the losses, whether among its ranks or the increasingly high numbers of Palestinian civilian casualties, which exceed fifty thousand, including dead, wounded, and missing.

After more than a hundred days of this fierce war, it can be said that Netanyahu has relatively yielded, possibly for the first and last time, to internal demands and American pressures to reach a temporary and conditional truce to implement a prisoner exchange deal. This would involve the release of a limited number of Israeli and American civilians in exchange for a larger number of Palestinian prisoners in the Israeli jails. In this context, it is necessary to question whether the humanitarian truce will lead to a complete ceasefire and whether it can be built upon to end the war. It can be said that Israel, which solely holds the answer

to this question, intends to continue its operations after the truce is completed and will not move towards ending the war. Achieving the goals it set from the beginning and trying to restore its prestige and deterrence, which were damaged by Hamas' operation, will force it to continue the war regardless of the results.

In this context, the stance of the United States, as one of the main parties involved in this war, shows unprecedented negativity. While it is accepted that Washington generally adopts the Israeli view, this war has proven that American support for Tel Aviv politically, militarily, and economically exceeds any other American interests in the region. It also clearly demonstrates that the United States adopts double standards that favor Israel.

The American administration has focused on the issue of prisoner exchanges to release its citizens held by Hamas, which will support Biden's position in the presidential elections. Apart from that, the American move has mainly demanded three things from Israel: first, to avoid killing Palestinian civilians; second, to reject occupying the Gaza Strip after the war ends, while emphasizing that Hamas should not return to control Gaza; and third, not to expand the conflict.

In general, it can be said that Western ideas are biased. These Western perspectives are largely based on the assumption that Israel will succeed in its goal of eliminating Hamas, focusing mainly on eradicating Hamas by any means, and considering that the Israeli ground operation can achieve this goal. However, the current developments in Gaza after a month of military action do not reflect this, given the high human cost resulting from the Israeli military operation. Additionally, these ideas overlook the possibility of the conflict expanding geographically beyond Gaza and even beyond Israel's borders. These perspectives align with the Israeli narrative that what is happening in the Gaza Strip aims to eradicate Hamas, not Palestinians, by adopting a policy of collective punishment and fatigue, and preventing humanitarian aid from reaching the civilian population in the Gaza Strip.

The latest proposal was presented by the European Union as a European vision for the settlement in Gaza during the European Union Foreign Ministers meeting in January 2024, which included procedural steps and a timeframe extending for about a year. It focused primarily on post-war Gaza as a priority, then achieving security and stability there as a secondary priority. A review of all Western perspectives reveals that despite showing interest in the humanitarian aspect, they did not consider the idea of pressuring Israel to stop the fire. This

means that the proposed formats ignore much of the current political reality, creating a Palestinian and Arab environment angry and rejecting of these Western perspectives, which are clearly biased in favor of Israel.

Based on these issues and dilemmas, it can be said that Western perspectives on the day after in Gaza primarily aim to ensure that Israel emerges completely victorious from this war. They reflect an Israeli desire to avoid its responsibilities as an occupying power and seek to assign this responsibility to other parties, staying slightly detached from directly dealing with the complexities of Gaza, thereby ensuring gains without expenses.

### *The Palestinian Outlook:*

Regarding the Palestinian stance, it is unfair for the Palestinian Authority to bear more than it can handle, as the problems it suffers from are due to the Israeli policies deliberately weakening the Authority and its security and political institutions, making it incapable of fulfilling its commitments. Therefore, there is no Palestinian partner in the peace process, confirming that the Palestinian separation is a strategic interest for Israel, which is keen to maintain it.

Regarding the Palestinian resistance, it is clear that it tries to face Israeli operations with the resources it has, manipulating with the hostage card to achieve gains on the ground, particularly to reach one or more humanitarian truces, hoping they become breathing spaces and possibly lead to a relative change in the war's trajectory.

### *The Egyptian Outlook:*

The Egyptian perception on the day after the current Israeli-Palestinian escalation is primarily based on the necessity of a ceasefire. The discussion should not be limited to the day after in Gaza but should include the Palestinian issue, considering that the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza form a single political unit that together constitutes the Palestinian state. Egypt has made substantial efforts to keep the peace process or political settlement of the conflict alive, despite obstacles from Israel first, then from some Palestinian factions.

Egypt demanded a ceasefire on the peaceful Palestinian people in Gaza and stated its rejection of the collective punishment of the Palestinian people by Israel. With the political horizon gridlocked due to the unprecedented Western

bias in favor of Israel, Cairo adopted a humanitarian path, seeking to mobilize the international community to adopt this path, resulting in the agreement allowing the opening of the Rafah crossing on its Palestinian side to deliver urgent humanitarian aid to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

At the same time, Egypt confronted Israeli plans to exploit the October 7 attack, realizing that Israel's goal from the escalation was to implement the "forced displacement" plan of driving the Palestinians towards Sinai, exporting the crisis to Egypt by conducting the largest military operation with extensive bombing on the Gaza Strip, turning it into a "human bomb" ready to explode towards Egypt. In response, Egypt clearly announced that the forced displacement of Palestinians is rejected, attempts to liquidate the Palestinian issue are rejected, and exporting the crisis to Egypt is a red line that is non-negotiable.

The Rafah crossing has a unique significance. Under the Israeli siege imposed on Gaza since 2008, Egypt emerged as a key player in aiding the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing, the only artery connecting the Strip to the world. Egypt committed to keeping the crossing open for Palestinians, despite the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, which states the crossing operates with three parties on the Palestinian side: the Palestinian Authority, Israel, and the European Union. With Hamas controlling Gaza, Palestinian Authority employees, and EU officials withdrew, meaning the crossing should close under the agreement. Egypt worked for years to avoid this, ensuring the crossing remained operational. During the current Israeli-Palestinian confrontation, the need to use the crossing for aid deliveries has become urgent, which Egypt succeeded in facilitating despite the Israeli obstacles.

Given the importance of the Rafah crossing, scenarios for its status on the day after need to be considered within a comprehensive approach to the Palestinian issue. The Western perspectives attempting to absolve Israel of its responsibilities towards Palestinians imply ending the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, suggesting Israel will no longer be involved in the crossing's operation, making it a purely Palestinian-Egyptian crossing. This scenario implies complete Palestinian sovereignty over the Palestinian side of the crossing, regardless of the anticipated scenarios for the day after in Gaza.

In summary, Egypt's stance is more active than any other party, using all its tools to effect any positive change in the current situation in Gaza, whether through introducing more humanitarian aid via the Rafah crossing, continuously pressing

for a humanitarian truce, achieving a prisoner exchange deal, or advocating for a future political settlement to implement the two-state solution.

The legitimate and logical question everyone asks is when and how will the war end? What will the situation be after it ends? Reality indicates the following:

- Israel is determined to continue its operations in Gaza until it achieves its goals, meaning the war will take a long time.
- The party most suffering from this war is the Palestinian civilians, who endure all forms of collective punishment.
- Egypt will not allow the displacement of Gaza residents to Sinai, which is a red line for our national security.
- American, European, and Arab pressures alone will not end the war, which necessitates strong internal Israeli pressure.
- The Palestinian resistance has no choice but to continue facing the Israeli army until the final picture of the war becomes clear. The Israeli Defense Minister announced that Israeli forces would adopt a more targeted approach in northern Gaza, including raids, tunnel demolitions, and air and ground attacks. In the southern part of the Gaza Strip, the Israeli army will continue its efforts to hit Hamas and its leaders and free the Israeli hostages.

Most estimates indicate that the Gaza conflict will continue for several more months, with an undefined and unknown duration. This statement was confirmed by US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan after visiting Tel Aviv and meeting with Israeli war ministers, echoing the same sentiment to Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, reflecting complete harmony between American and Israeli policies regarding the Israeli aggression on Gaza. Some details may suggest disagreement over the course of action of the assault in the next phase, but the essence remains the same: supporting the continuation of the Israeli killing machine without restrictions and maintaining American support with weapons and political stances against the whole world, calling for an immediate ceasefire, as blatantly evident in rejecting a UN Security Council resolution for a ceasefire without delay.

The continuation of aggression for an unspecified period is contingent, from an American and Israeli perspective, on achieving their primary goals, often repeated by officials from both countries: eliminating Hamas, liberating hostages, establishing a security zone in the Gaza Strip to protect Israel, and ensuring Gaza poses no future threat to the existence of the Israeli state. These goals, aside from being unrealistic and contrary to the fair historical logic of peoples

and their legitimate resistance against all forms of occupation, regardless of its strength and brutality, practically insist on further destruction of the Strip and killing its people, while further losing reputation, prestige, and deterrence. The second element is mutual between both the American and Israeli sides, as they are the ones who manage the war practically and in full coordination, setting its goals and seeking to use it to create a new reality not only in Gaza but in all the occupied Palestinian territories, aiming to liquidate the Palestinian issue according to their vision at the expense of other Arab and non-Arab parties, after avoiding any serious action to guarantee a historic settlement through political negotiations leading to a two-state solution.

In light of the past period's experience of brutal Israeli aggression, Palestinian resilience, and active and effective resistance, despite the material military power gap, the other side of the picture emerges, reflecting the failure to achieve the previously announced main goals. No hostage was freed through the brutal ground operation; some hostages were killed by the Israeli bullets, many soldiers and officers were killed in direct confrontations with Hamas elements, Hamas and Palestinian resistance did not fall, and did not ask for mercy and surrender as many Israeli war and killing ministry officials deluded themselves. Instead, the Israeli army suffered significant blows in various aspects, most notably the combat and moral reputation, which evaporated into thin air, proving it is an army without morals and lacking professional competence in direct combat, relying on indiscriminate destruction to instill fear in the hearts of the resisting Palestinians, which did not happen, as admitted by American military analysts before others. Instead, fear now resides in the hearts and minds of Israeli soldiers, their leaders, families, and all their foreign mercenary supporters with dual citizenship.

The failure extends to the reputation of the Israeli military industry, which frequently boasted about the unparalleled capabilities of the Merkava tank, considered the most armored, robust, and protective for the soldiers inside. It became a child's plaything in the hands of the Palestinian resistance, burning easily from shells made by clever minds with minimal resources, proving effective beyond anyone's expectations. Not to mention the destruction of Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) made in the United States, which lost their reputation without dispute, prompting all countries that previously requested dozens of these Israeli tanks to abandon their orders after seeing the vast difference between baseless propaganda and real capabilities on the ground.

The double American-Israeli failure is not far from the eyes of American analysts, which explains the current language used by President Biden, containing some subtle and soft criticism of the performance of the Israeli war ministry, urging them to consider civilians in their indiscriminate strikes, while insisting on unconditional support and ordering the American Pentagon to keep two American aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean near the Israeli shores, sending shells from the Pentagon's private stockpiles for the Israeli Merkava tanks, bypassing American Congress oversight, and urgently to support the killing and destruction operations in Gaza as part of the plan to continue the war for several more months.

The new title devised by American strategists for the next phase of the conflict is killing Hamas leaders, specifically the movement's leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, the military wing leader, Mohamed Deif, and his deputy, Marwan Issa, and any other symbols they can reach. Jake Sullivan stated this clearly after his talks in Israel, implying that the goal of eradicating Hamas as a movement is no longer a priority, as it has proven impossible, and the goal has been downgraded to merely killing the movement's leaders and military symbols who have humiliated the Israeli military, despite their modest capabilities compared to the immense American and Israeli capabilities mobilized to eliminate the movement, proving the eternal lesson of human history: it is not about capabilities and brash voices, but about willpower, faith, and defending a just cause, enduring losses, and standing firm against aggression, regardless of its brutality and savagery.

## **Second: Different Outlooks for the Future of Gaza:**

Before the situation in Gaza reflects field results that can be built upon, what is conventionally referred to as the "Future of Gaza" must be considered, more specifically, the nature of governance and administration in the Strip and the status of its Palestinian residents. The main parties and other involved parties have expressed their visions for Gaza's future, shown in the following:

### *The Palestinian Outlook for the Future of Gaza:*

Given the circumstances of the current Israeli-Palestinian escalation and the biased Western visions for Gaza's future after the war, a more realistic and fair vision for Palestinian rights in solving their issue comprehensively and fairly is proposed. This vision is fundamentally based on the "Palestinian solution"

scenario, free from regional and international interventions. This proposed solution has one bridge or gateway: the return of the Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza, attempting to restore the “normal situation” before 2007, as the only safe path to addressing the real causes of the current outburst in Gaza and solving the Palestinian issue realistically.

This proposed scenario involves the Palestinian Authority being present and politically and socially governing Gaza, with Hamas and Jihad becoming Palestinian factions like all the other Palestinian factions, united in the Palestinian right to establish a state, differing politically in the means of achieving it. Here, working towards including Hamas and Jihad in the Palestine Liberation Organization will grant legitimacy to all factions of the Palestinian people. However, this scenario requires essential prerequisites, including:

1. Preparing the public base for the Palestinian Authority in Gaza to avoid a Palestinian–Palestinian conflict with uncontrollable consequences. In other words, the next day in Gaza, managed by purely Palestinian entities or individuals without popular or factional disputes, has a better chance of success.
2. The return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza should be part of a comprehensive approach to the Palestinian issue, under Arab and international guarantees or commitments aimed at reviving the political process within the framework of a two-state solution, broadening the political horizon and hope for the Palestinian people.
3. Providing economic and institutional support to the Palestinian Authority to address the difficult situation caused by the Israeli bombing, destroying infrastructure, housing, economic and health facilities in the Gaza Strip. This support will grant the Palestinian Authority new popular legitimacy to exist in the Strip, changing the factional balance, and restoring Palestinian national consensus.

This envisioned scenario for the Palestinian Authority’s return to Gaza the day after the war helps avoid the sustainability of Palestinian division, keeps the Palestinian issue away from regional and international manipulations, and manages relations with Israel, preventing the explosive confrontations that destroy residents’ lives in the Gaza Strip. Finally, it can pave the way for launching the settlement and peace process in the Middle East.

On the other hand, this scenario avoids the severe consequences that could arise from visions involving regional, international, or UN management of Gaza the day after the war, especially since the Western thought about this presence under the pretext of assistance or creating conditions for the Palestinian Authority's return, theoretically justifiable, carries the seeds of total failure. The Palestinian Authority will not accept a Western-backed return to the Gaza Strip against the Palestinian factions, nor will Palestinians in the Strip or the West Bank welcome it.

The Western experience of restoring some parties to power in this manner, as happened in Iraq about twenty years ago, is enough to cause the rejection of this experience by the people. Additionally, Western scenarios proposing an international presence under the guise of a transitional period remain theoretical and unwelcome, especially given the negative experience of this idea in the region, with no guarantees for ending the transitional period on time, restoring a natural situation serving the Palestinian cause and the settlement process. Concerns or at least fears of the transitional phase becoming a sustained state difficult to amend or change remain and provide a sufficient reason to reject the idea entirely.

### *The Israeli Outlook for the Future of Gaza:*

Israel proposes implementing a plan based on “four pillars” to manage Gaza after the war: preventing Hamas from returning to govern Gaza, maintaining full Israeli security control over the Gaza Strip, including inspecting goods entering and exiting the area without Israeli civilians living there. A multinational force led by the United States, including regional and European partners, would be responsible for rebuilding Gaza. The plan involves a significant role for Egypt, without detailing this role further. Finally, under this plan, the Palestinian side plays a limited role, conditional on “No hostilities or threats to Israel”.

The core of the Israeli vision for Gaza's future is reflected in the study presented by the “Mishkaf” Institute for National Security and Zionist Strategy, a renowned research center founded and chaired by former defense and security officials. They published an assessment on October 17, 2023, directly urging the Israeli government to seize the “unique opportunity” to evacuate Gaza entirely and “resettle” Palestinians in Egypt. They recommended establishing a “buffer zone” along the border with Egypt to guarantee that they do not return to the Gaza Strip. The American Center referred to these Israeli plans as not entirely new, having old precursors within the same framework in different forms, consistently based on the concept of “ethnic cleansing” for Gaza, taking advantage of Egypt's

geographical proximity and its significant involvement in bearing the burden of this issue, aiming to be a solution point that Israel cannot reach.

Israeli political and military elites clarify that eliminating Hamas in the Gaza Strip does not entirely guarantee Israel's security. The Gaza Strip itself is a problem for Israel, particularly the southern Strip, which the Israeli army must consider. There is no cohesive and clear plan for the next day, as Israel improvises its vision based on its forces' ground progress.

According to indicators, Israel's vision for local governance in Gaza will be based on local officials and individuals not belonging to Hamas. In reality, entire governance bodies in Gaza still receive salaries from the Palestinian Authority (\$114 million annually, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Finance data for 2023), after 16 years of Hamas control over the Gaza Strip. Thus, they see the likely future of Gaza as follows:

- Arab countries will inject funds to stabilize the humanitarian situation. In the first phase, the Israeli army and Shin Bet will continue to control security in Gaza, but Israel has no intention of controlling the Gaza Strip. Its objective is to exit Gaza as soon as possible, but only after ensuring the southern residents' security and preventing rocket launches.
- The emerging idea suggests a final phase of permanent settlement in Gaza, lasting several months, where the Palestinian Authority will have civil control over Gaza. Still, Shin Bet and the Israeli army will have freedom for intelligence work and limited military operations, as in Area B in the West Bank. Some experts believe Netanyahu chose Shin Bet for military operations in northern Gaza, preparing it for a future role comparable to its role in the West Bank.
- Defining a mechanism to facilitate interim governance through an international coalition until a stable Palestinian government is formed. Such a transitional plan requires political leadership, diplomatic efforts, Palestinian Authority acceptance, and cooperation with other regional governments.
- There are security buffer zones on Gaza's outskirts where Palestinians can be for agricultural work but cannot stay long or bear arms or establish observation points against Israel. Shin Bet will likely be responsible for this area alongside limited, flexible-moving Israeli forces. Shin Bet will have two main objectives: preventing harm to Israeli forces deployed throughout Gaza and identifying Hamas members in the political office remaining in the area.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that Israel would have a security role in Gaza “for an indefinite period” once the major combat operations end. Once the major combat operations in Gaza end, Israel is likely to keep its forces in key positions throughout Gaza to prevent Hamas and other surviving armed combatants from reorganizing and reclaiming the Strip while seeking a long-term governance solution in Gaza.

The most likely and trustworthy solution involves repeating Israel’s strategy in the West Bank, where Israel retains military supervision (and recently increasing civil oversight) over Israeli settlements in about two-thirds of the West Bank. Under this arrangement, Israeli forces must expand security responsibilities in Gaza, leading to attacks on Israeli forces and Palestinian casualties. Israel’s ability to manage the power vacuum in the post-conflict phase is less certain. Israel withdrew its forces from Gaza in 2005 after 38 years of occupation and does not want to bear responsibility for governing the Strip after Hamas’ fall. However, once Hamas is overthrown, more radical resistance movements are likely to emerge, keeping Israel stuck in its predicament.

### *The Egyptian Outlook for the Future of Gaza:*

Most Western perceptions for the day after in Gaza could not overlook Egypt’s crucial role as the “decisive factor” for any future scenarios in the Strip. However, these perspectives did not adequately recognize the determinants of this role, not only concerning the current Gaza crisis but also the overall Palestinian-Israeli conflict settlement. Egypt seeks a fair and comprehensive solution ensuring security and stability in the Middle East, establishing a Palestinian state on the June 4, 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. Ignoring the fixed and declared Egyptian stance on the Palestinian issue is among the main reasons for the unlikelihood of the proposed Western scenarios for Gaza’s future.

The Egyptian vision of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict firmly believes that the only solution to the Palestinian issue is through a two-state solution and that the idea of a military resolution to this conflict is out of touch with reality and unacceptable. Israel’s policy of locking the political horizon for Palestinians will have calamitous consequences, and therefore, reviving the political process is inevitable.

Reviving the political process remains a principal item on the Egyptian state’s agenda, even amid Israeli-Palestinian confrontations. The current confrontation

was no exception to this approach. Since the first day of the confrontations, Egypt has warned and worked to stop or reduce escalation, emphasizing the need to focus on the political path. Egypt's invitation and hosting of the international conference in Cairo on October 21, 2023, under the theme "Cairo Peace Conference," emphasized the necessity of a comprehensive approach to the ongoing war escalation.

### *The Western Outlook for the Future of Gaza:*

From the beginning of the war, the Western (American and European) approach has been focused on discussing strategic issues of direct interest, such as the future governance of Gaza. The declared Israeli goal of the military operation is to uproot Hamas, not only from Gaza but, more importantly, from managing the Strip itself, as its control over administration enables it to rebuild its military capabilities after each conflict. The main declared Israeli objective has been to destroy the infrastructure of resistance factions, primarily Hamas, and other factions.

Various proposals have been presented by Western countries regarding post-war options. The first proposal involved "internationalizing" Gaza's administration through an international coalition managing Gaza in cooperation with or through the United Nations. For example, Germany prepared a document which circulated among several key European Union capitals, mentioning the security aspect of dismantling tunnel and weapon-smuggling systems into Gaza. The proposed international coalition would ensure comprehensive security in Gaza after the war. Although the document expressed reservations about the indiscriminate bombing and excessive force against Gaza, it suggested replacing this pattern with precise surgical operations to eradicate Hamas' capabilities. The document elaborated on this, highlighting Israel's inability to eliminate Hamas militarily, and stressed the need for Israel's efforts to focus on drying up Hamas' financial and political support sources.

European Union leaders discussed for days to reach a unified position calling for "humanitarian corridors," without calling for a temporary or permanent ceasefire. Previously, eight EU countries, including Belgium, France, and Spain, voted in favor of a non-binding resolution calling for an "immediate humanitarian truce," while Austria and Hungary were among the four EU countries voting against it. Fifteen countries, including Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, abstained from voting. The EU received widespread criticism from the US and Israel for not mentioning Hamas in the resolution, a thing which is deserved for their crimes in their eyes.

American non-official entities also began to ask questions about the day after the war, primarily about who will govern and manage the Gaza Strip, given the immense destruction of life resources within Gaza cities. The “Carnegie” center, closely linked to American decision-making, published a report on October 31, 2023, about Israel’s intention to push Gaza residents south towards Egyptian Sinai. The report included many indicative references, the most notable being that Israel’s declared goal is to eradicate Hamas, but it increasingly appears that the war seeks to achieve a secondary goal: the mass expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza. The report mentioned Major General Amir Avivi and former Israeli ambassador to the US as supporters of a proposal urging Palestinians to flee Gaza through the Rafah border crossing with Egypt and seek refuge in the Sinai Peninsula, considering this a humanitarian measure to protect civilians while Israel conducts its military operation. Despite Carnegie’s confirmation of having other reports indicating the permanent resettlement of Palestinians outside Gaza in a complete ethnic cleansing operation.

In general, Western intellectual perspectives on Gaza’s future and expected conditions after the Israeli military operation vary. These perspectives vary in their ideas about proposed interim governance, including non-political technocrats managing Gaza, the United Nations governing Gaza with UN forces present, multinational forces maintaining security in Gaza, and some even proposing a group of Arab countries maintaining security in Gaza.

However, evaluating these Western perspectives reveals several issues and dilemmas, including:

1. Most proposed ideas ignore the necessity of a ceasefire, the crucial step without which these perspectives cannot be implemented.
2. Western perspectives on Gaza’s future show clear bias aligning with the official Western political bias towards Israel. Most of these ideas, if implemented, aim to absolve Israel of its responsibilities as an occupying power and assign complex responsibilities to other international and regional parties to alleviate Israel’s burden.
3. The proposed perspectives for Gaza’s future are considered only in light of the events since October 7, reflecting alignment with the Israeli view seeking to separate Gaza from the broader Palestinian issue or the future Palestinian state. Thus, these perspectives diminish the Palestinian issue

to just Gaza, without addressing the broader political settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in light of international legitimacy resolutions.

### **Third: Potential Implications of the War on the Parties Involved and the Region:**

Almost everyone agrees that the Gaza War of 2023–2024 represents a turning point not only in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict but in the entire region, with potential implications on several levels, as explained below:

Potential Implications of the Gaza War on the Future of the Direct Parties Involved:

#### ***Future of Hamas:***

As the Israeli army continues its military operations, announcing the third phase focusing on qualitative operations, especially assassinating the Palestinian resistance leaders, realistically, the Israeli goal of eradicating Hamas gradually recedes. Even if eradicated, Hamas will not disappear; its presence is not limited to Gaza but extends to northern West Bank, southern Lebanon, Beirut's southern suburbs, and southern Syria. Hamas' presence may be weaker in these areas compared to Gaza, but these locations necessitate special military operations to eliminate it, differing from Israel's military tactics in Gaza.

With this goal relatively receding and potential US pressure on Israel due to the American presidential election requirements, especially with influential American public opinion groups rejecting absolute American support for Israel in an inhumane war, it is expected that the US will pressure Israel to reach a humanitarian truce or a temporary ceasefire. However, in this case, Israel may face the challenge of diminished chances of eradicating Hamas, as a ceasefire may allow Hamas to reorganize above and below ground, possibly transferring hostages to other locations.

#### ***Future of the Palestinian Authority:***

Israeli and American demands for necessary reforms in the Palestinian Authority's structure to accept its return to govern Gaza involve excessive interference in Palestinian affairs. Despite these demands, the return of the

Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza appears to be the most acceptable future scenario for Gaza, despite the many challenges, but it is the closest solution to implementation, with gains such as ending the Palestinian division, proving the Authority's control in the Strip, restoring the Palestinian Authority's popularity in Gaza, uniting Palestinians, and paving the way for long-term negotiations for a comprehensive settlement of the future Palestinian state.

### *Future of the Israeli Interior:*

There is consensus within the Israeli public opinion on several matters, notably: accepting the war even if it prolongs, due to the increased influence of the religious and nationalist far-right. Also, removing Netanyahu from the political scene is a point of consensus among many different political currents, including Likud, which considers him a burden on its popularity, especially with the recurring tension between Netanyahu and the Biden administration. There is also consensus on turning the situation in Gaza into something similar to the West Bank's status under Israeli security control, with another Palestinian, Arab, or international administration for the civil and administrative affairs.

Arab-Jewish Cities Front in Israel (The Home Front): A survey by the Israeli Democracy Institute showed a significant increase in the percentage of Israeli Arabs considering themselves part of Israel and its challenges. In June 2023, only 48% of Israeli Arabs saw themselves as part of Israel's identity and challenges, while in a survey this month, 70% answered positively. Nevertheless, there was a decline in optimism among Israeli Arabs about the country's future, from 40% in June 2023 to 27%. Additionally, there was a slight reduction in Israeli Arabs' desire to stay in the country, from 62% in June 2023 to 59%.

Therefore, this front is unlikely to explode in the near future due to several factors that may explain the relatively neutral stance of Israeli Arabs inclined towards the Israeli narrative:

1. Media Interpretation: The Arab community in Israel is connected to Hebrew media, watching Hebrew television broadcasts and listening to Israeli radio, with Israeli media generally enjoying significant trust among Israeli Arabs.
2. Moral Interpretation: Israeli Arabs did not approve of the images and videos of Hamas storming settlers' homes and killing them, as these

scenes quickly reached the Israeli Arabs accompanied by popular Israeli condemnation.

3. Political Interpretation: Indictments were issued against dozens of Israeli Arabs for calling for demonstrations condemning Israel, but these did not resonate among the Israeli Arab citizens due to the Israeli police's oppressive grip and Israeli society itself. "Mohammad Baraka," head of the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens and former Knesset member, was arrested after announcing a demonstration in Nazareth against the war.
4. Judicial Interpretation: The Supreme Court rejected the petition and ruled against organizing protest demonstrations against the war: "In these special circumstances, the petition must be rejected."

In reality, within Israel, it is expected that civil-military relations and Israeli economic indicators will endure significant transformations, previously discussed in earlier axes.

### *Potential Implications of the Gaza War on the Regional Level:*

Wider Conflict Scope: With the war continuing for over three months, changes may lead to expanding the conflict and military operations beyond Gaza. These include clashes on the Lebanese-Israeli front between Israel and Hezbollah, despite Hezbollah's apparent unwillingness to escalate against Israel. Furthermore, the Yemeni Houthi group declared war on Israel, intending to prevent all ships heading to Israel from any nationality from passing unless Gaza receives needed food and medicine, warning that these ships "will become legitimate targets" if not realized. This threatens maritime navigation in the Red Sea near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. The Houthi group used the Gaza war to control maritime navigation routes, granting them strategic leverage used directly to pressure the international community or achieve their goals in Yemen, or indirectly benefiting Iran. This prompted the US and UK to conduct airstrikes on Houthi bases in January 2024.

Arab State Coordination: There is coordination among influential Arab states related to the Gaza war (Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar) on multiple issues, including rejecting the forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza or the West Bank, rejecting the continuation of the war, and pushing for

repeated humanitarian truces in response to the Egyptian initiative. This involves exchanging prisoners, delivering aid to Gaza, and intensifying the humanitarian relief efforts for its residents.

**Increased Pressure on Israel:** Enhancing efforts to pressure Israel through all legal, diplomatic, and media means to ceasefire and stop the crimes and legal and humanitarian violations it commits, by communicating with all the influential regional and international powers influencing Israel and its strategic interests.

**Future of Israeli-Arab Relations:** The Gaza war affected Arab public opinion, especially in countries with peace or normalization agreements with Israel. Despite these countries' continued commitment to these agreements and not declaring hostile positions against Israel, these relations are expected to be somewhat affected, particularly if the conflict expands regionally. This potential development is strengthened by the war uncovering many views of Israeli political and military elites, particularly their intentions towards Palestinians and neighboring countries.

**Future of Iran's Regional Policy:** Iran has been somewhat involved in the Gaza war, previously discussed in other sections. Still, the most likely impact is the emergence of Iran's proxies' capabilities to threaten regional security and stability. The roles of Hamas, the Houthi group, and Hezbollah were clear at this level. Some Iran-affiliated groups in Iraq directed operations against American forces there. The most likely regional impact is direct US intervention since the war's first hours, biased support in favor Israel, ensuring its security regardless of economic and humanitarian considerations, then direct military intervention against the Houthis in Yemen, sending a clear message to Iran that it will not ignore serious threats to its strategic interests in the region.

### *Potential Implications of the Gaza War on the International Level:*

**European Union Challenges:** The difficulties in reconciling the positions of different EU countries regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict mean the European bloc is likely to continue performing a marginal role in the crisis alone, without the US. The potential escalation of the Israeli ground invasion of Gaza has aggravated internal tensions within the EU, limiting its ability to influence the conflict's future, calm tensions, and promote its preferred outcomes, such as a two-state solution.

Impact on the Ukraine War: The Middle East situation risks diverting attention and resources away from Ukraine, especially if the conflict escalates further. This makes it harder for Brussels to reach consensus among the member states on large support packages for Kyiv.

Worsening Western Divisions: The Gaza war worsens divisions between the EU (and the West more broadly) and the Global South, as well as between the bloc and its southern neighborhood (North Africa), based on the Western double standards in supporting both Ukraine and Israel. This complicates Western efforts to expand international cooperation behind economic sanctions against Russia by alienating Global South countries, particularly in the Islamic world.

Impact on US Presidential Elections: Although foreign policy issues traditionally occupy a low priority for Americans during presidential elections, the 2024 elections may be an exception. The “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation raised the “issue of supporting Israel and the US stance on the Gaza war” to be one of the most important issues in the presidential race.

Some indicators in this context include: The Republican Party’s absolute support for Israel, while there are divisions within the Democratic Party between supporting Israel and sympathizing with Palestinians. President Joe Biden supports Israel entirely and opposes a UN resolution against Israel, but this unlimited support subjects him to severe criticism, especially as the US position has evolved since the war began, making it change some stances; this might be due to not having a comprehensive vision for Gaza’s future or the final solution, making it more flexible in developing this vision according to new developments. It might also be due to considerations of US interests, not just its interest in ensuring Israel’s security; its relations with other regional powers in the Middle East besides Israel, understanding Western public opinion divisions, and electoral considerations also impose the need to develop its vision according to realistic developments.

This possible evolution in the American vision might explain repeated visits by US Secretary of State Tony Blinken to the region, clarifying some American positions, such as rejecting Israel’s return to governing Gaza, rejecting reducing Gaza’s size, and rejecting the forced displacement of Palestinians. In short, the US realized it is difficult to continue Arab normalization with Israel without a ceasefire, and according to the American request, the conclusive phase will be political negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, perhaps within an international conference under regional, international, and UN auspices.

Finally, it can be said that the war in Gaza, while representing a threat to Palestinians and possibly the entire region, presents an opportunity to reintroduce the Palestinian issue on the international community's agenda, offering an objective discussion of Arab settlement perspectives, especially if the Palestinian Authority returns to Gaza after the war with regional and international support. This necessitates creating conditions that force Israel to negotiate and reach a comprehensive and just political settlement for the Palestinian issue.

