

Policy Brief

Israel-Palestine: The Last Chance for a Just Solution

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On October 6, 2023, the Israeli authorities were warned of the imminent outbreak of war on their borders with the Arab states. This warning confirmed information received a few days previously, which Israeli political decision-makers and intelligence services had not taken seriously. Israel was taken by surprise and its army panicked. It was a debacle. Fifty years later, almost to the day, Israel was once again taken by surprise. On the morning of October 7, 2023, hundreds of armed men crossed the barrier between Israel and Gaza, spread out into more than 20 localities, killed more than a thousand Israelis, wounded around 3,000 others, and took a number of hostages (a number that will probably only be known precisely at the end of the war) back to the Gaza Strip. Several sources report that, this time as well, Israeli politicians may have underestimated reports of an imminent attack from Gaza¹.

INTRODUCTION

Certain similarities between the two events are troubling, and point to a high level of organization on the part of Hamas, probably with the help of foreign and/or neighboring forces in the region:

- In both cases, operations were launched on a Saturday, a sacred day for Jews, which could explain a certain relaxation of vigilance;
- In both cases, these sacred Saturdays coincided with Israeli religious holidays, which may have reinforced the slackening of vigilance on the part of the Israeli forces;
- In both cases, the Israeli services failed to interpret the warnings they received, demonstrating a certain arrogance, based on contempt for Arab and Palestinian capabilities, and an overestimation of Israel's technological defense potential;
- Hamas would therefore have timed its attack to coincide, to within a few hours, with the anniversary of October 1973, giving it greater symbolic value and power to mobilize crowds in the Arab and Muslim worlds;
- Hamas Intelligence would certainly have observed, over several years, the behavior of Israel's forces on Saturdays and religious holidays, particularly in the areas targeted by the attack, to ensure that vigilance would be reduced during these periods. The same was true of the 1973 operation, which was prepared over a long period of observation, information gathering, and information-intoxication operations on the adversary's forces.

What does this event represent in terms of the history of the Israel/Palestine conflict?

- Should it be placed within the usual framework of an enduring conflict of skirmishes between Israel and the Palestinians? In this case it would remain a mere episode in a series of confrontations, or a mere battle in the war, and its value would then be merely tactical. It could mark a success for Hamas, without it being able to claim final victory; or it could be interpreted as a failure for the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and Israel, without the latter being declared definitively defeated. In other words, the spectacular nature of the operation in no way changes the situation of the conflict.
- Would it have a certain singularity that would elevate it to the status of a 'game changer' and make it an important strategic fact, which could change the outcome of the Palestinian Question by initiating a lasting, or even final, solution to the conflict? Would it mean the end of the two-state solution, as the Israeli right and religious parties want? Would it mean the end of Israel's existence, as Hamas wants? Or could it lead to the international community implementing a two-state solution, as advocated by the Palestinian Authority, moderate Israeli parties, and any spirit of justice and fairness?

It is perhaps premature to predict future developments in the Question, so singular is the fact that the nature of the war between the two parties has changed:

1. According to The Times of Israel, an official from the Egyptian intelligence services stated that Israel ignored repeated warnings that Hamas was preparing "something gigantic." <https://fr.timesofisrael.com/egypte-israel-a-ignorer-les-avertissements-repetes-de-menace-enorme/>

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- On the one hand, the war is no longer between states, as it was in the 1970s, but between Israel and armed organizations more inclined to insurrectionary warfare;
 - On the other hand, Israel has never before been attacked on its own territory, and never before suffered such heavy casualties as in the October 7 attack.

The only consequence, almost a month after the events, is an Israeli campaign of reprisals against Hamas in Gaza, marked by unprecedented violence, accompanied by unprecedented American military support, and threatening and sulfurous, warlike declarations against Israel from Iran and its proxies in the region. All of this has been accompanied by a media war on both sides to try and influence international public opinion.

I. THE END OR PROBABLE WEAKENING OF THE TWO EXTREMISMS

1. A political certainty in the fog of war: the end of the 'reign' of Benjamin Netanyahu and the religious extremist wing that supports him

The October 7 attacks happened in a period of unprecedented instability in Israel, illustrated by socio-political fissures that threaten not only the reputation of Israeli democracy, but also its organization and social cohesion. Benjamin Netanyahu's plan to seize the reins of justice and the judiciary from the executive branch of government had inflamed the Israeli street, and led to protests even within the ranks of the military. The country reached this point of fragmentation and division because of the maneuvers of one man: Benjamin Netanyahu.

Leader of the conservative Likud party, he had already held the latter position from 1996 to 1999, then from 2009 to 2021. He returned to power after the parliamentary elections of November 1, 2022, to lead a coalition of six right-wing and far-right parties, whose main doctrine is to empty Palestine of its population and turn it into Israeli territory. The extreme right, which supports Netanyahu, encourages him to commit the worst abuses against the Palestinian population, and to do everything in his power to ensure that there will never be a Palestinian state.

In addition, Netanyahu has been the subject of four judicial investigations that have led to his indictment for corruption, fraud, and breach of trust. In 2019, he becomes the first Israeli head of government to be indicted while still in office.

Israeli public opinion is almost unanimous in blaming him for the failures of October 7, which cost Israel more than 1,400 dead, nearly 3,000 wounded and 242 hostages taken by Hamas. Beyond these losses, the success of the Hamas operation, which shattered the myth of an infallible Israeli army and intelligence service, is seen by Israelis as a national catastrophe for which Benjamin Netanyahu is responsible. Several political and security grievances are held against him:

- The policy implemented towards Hamas is severely criticized by a majority of Israeli public opinion. The Likud leader is accused of having encouraged the development of

Hamas and its access to power in the Gaza Strip, and of deepening the rift between it and the Palestinian Authority, a rift which is aimed at torpedoing any idea of creating a united Palestinian state;

- Benjamin Netanyahu is said to have ignored and underestimated the credibility of reports issued in 2016 and 2023 respectively by intelligence services and by states in the region, outlining Hamas's preparation of attacks against Israeli territory;
- Eager to weaken the Israeli justice system, which has indicted him in a number of criminal cases, Benjamin Netanyahu introduced bills that severely divided Israeli society and led to protests even within the ranks of the army.

In the opinion of observers of Israeli affairs, whatever the outcome of the war, and whatever the results achieved, however successful they may be, the political future of the current prime minister and the parties that support him is in jeopardy. Moreover, Netanyahu will be threatened, firstly in terms of his freedom, when he no longer enjoys immunity, and secondly in his life, by the fact that some believe that if the hostages are killed by Hamas, their relatives will not remain without reaction. Unconfirmed reports suggest that the Likud leader has already received threats, which are currently being investigated by the Israeli Services. To survive this war, the current prime minister will need a miracle: at the end of the war, he will be able to present a balance sheet showing the elimination of Hamas as a military force, or a significant weakening of its capabilities.

2. Hamas can only count on itself; Arabs and Iranians are ready to sacrifice it for different reasons

The extremism of the right and extreme right in Israel is matched by the extremism of Hamas.

Created at the end of 1987², Hamas entered politics in 2006, when it led a government formed following the legislative elections of January 2006. This participation in the government damaged Hamas and reduced its popularity. The organization then resorted to a coup d'état in 2007, in which its leaders ousted the Palestinian Authority in Gaza to seize power in the Strip and exercise it authoritatively. Some analysts claim that Israel encouraged the rise of Hamas to weaken the Palestinian Authority and diminish its power to represent the Palestinian people.

Despite the political maneuvering Hamas resorts to in its often ambiguous speeches on the recognition of Israel, the movement remains deeply rooted in the spirit of its original charter, drawn up in 1988, which includes in its preamble Sayed Qutb's phrase "*Israel exists and will continue to exist until Islam abrogates it as it abrogated all that preceded it*". Hamas believes in no other solution than Jihad against Israel. Article 13 of the charter states: "*There will be no solution to the Palestinian cause except through jihad ... initiatives, proposals, and other international conferences are a waste of time and futile activities*".

In certain circumstances, Hamas leaders distance themselves from the Charter. They even avoid publishing it on their organization's website, in the hope of remaining acceptable in international circles, and thus consolidating their power. Ahmed Youssef, former advisor to

2. Hamas was born in the context of Palestinian defeat, specifically five years after the encirclement and expulsion of the PLO from Beirut in 1982.

Ismail Hanieh, the political leader of Hamas, advocated distancing from the Charter in 2011, declaring that it was "not a constitution drafted like a law" and that it "*reflected the views of one of the movement's oldest leaders and was ratified during the particular context of the 1988 uprising, as a necessary framework for confronting a relentless occupation*". In 2017, Hamas even came up with another draft charter, which has yet to see the light of day. The charter also underlines Hamas's membership of the Muslim Brotherhood, a movement of political Islam that admits flexibility and recourse to political maneuvering in moments of weakness.

In the context of the day after October 7, 2023, it seems that it is this extremism of Hamas's doctrine that deprives it of certain support within the international community. In demonstrations around the world denouncing Israeli violence in the Gaza war, demonstrators express support for the Palestinian people, but few praise Hamas. The same is true of the international positions that stigmatize Israeli behavior; none criticize the targeting of Hamas cadres, they limit themselves to denouncing actions against the population of Gaza. Even the Arab media, which support the Palestinian struggle, overwhelmingly speak of Palestinian resistance, not Hamas resistance.

Moreover, the movement's history deprives it of supporters in the Arab world, where the debacle of the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly in Egypt, has marginalized Hamas as an organization affiliated to the movement. Within the 'axis of resistance' promoted by Iran, Hamas is frowned upon by the bases of Hezbollah, which had to confront Hamas fighters during the war in Syria; Hezbollah also does not forget that Hamas sided with the groups that fought the regime, which he is a strong ally of. Although the axis of resistance now seems to sponsor Hamas, it has to be said that the movement is not yet fully accepted. In his speech on Friday November 3, Hassan Nasrallah, the general secretary general of Hamas since the mid-1990s, had difficulty explaining to his base the total mobilization for the Hamas cause. He limited himself to describing Hezbollah's action as being in solidarity with Hamas.

Hamas therefore seems to have no chance of surviving the current war unless it can, by its own means, defeat the Israeli military apparatus, drive it out of the Gaza Strip, and thus retain its power in that territory.

On the face of it, Hamas seems doomed to the same fate as the Israeli right and far right. Unless one can eradicate the other, neither side can survive the current events in Gaza.

II. PROBABLE RELAUNCH OF THE PROCESS TO ESTABLISH A PALESTINIAN STATE: THE LAST CHANCE.

If the current war in the Gaza Strip leads, as expected, to the sidelining of the two extremist tendencies in the conflict and the rise to power of more moderate tendencies, the search for a peace solution will find a propitious framework and fertile ground with Israeli and Palestinian authorities inclined to peace. Today, the international community seems more convinced than ever that such a solution can only be a two-state solution.

1. Is the international community ready for a two-state solution?

International public opinion seems more mobilized than ever to support the right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital. In all the world's capitals, from Asia to Latin America and from the U.S. to Australia, as well as in Europe, demonstrators chant slogans calling for the Palestinians' right to an independent state.

While the current conduct of war seems to mark certain divergences as to the timing of the ceasefire and the rationality of the objectives set by Israel for its military intervention in Gaza, and on the proportionality of the measures and means adopted, the political outcome of the war can, in everyone's opinion, be none other than a final and just solution to the conflict.

Few protest speeches against the war in Gaza, whether in popular or official circles, mention Hamas. However, these speeches, whether in the streets of American, European, Asian, Arab, or North African capitals, call for the liberation of Palestine and the right of its people to statehood.

In official circles, chancelleries, and governments, the same tendency continues to be noticed. Even those states most sympathetic to Israeli theses, and which show little sensitivity to Israeli violence in the current war, are now convinced of the urgent need to allow the Palestinians to have an independent state. From the American President and his administration, to the German Chancellor, European, Chinese, Russian, Japanese, Australian, Arab, and other leaders, the two-state solution is unanimously supported.

The movement in favor of this solution is so strong today that its implementation might find the right moment as soon as the current war is over. International pressure will then have to be brought to bear to defeat any return to power of the Israeli right-wing and its far-right appendages. Israeli society is aware of the damage caused by the policies of the right and the far right, and of the threats these policies pose to the security of Israelis. But this awareness needs to be reinforced by international action, particularly on the part of the Americans, who must decree the suspension of aid to Israel whenever it is governed by governments that include far-right ministers.

It is at the end of the current war that international pressure must be stepped up on Israel to move directly and seamlessly into the process of establishing a Palestinian state. If Israel is allowed to procrastinate after the war, all the sacrifices made by the Palestinian people to date will have been in vain, and the cycle of violence will never be broken.

The best course of action today would be to conduct two processes in parallel:

- To ensure that the war ends, at the very least, by weakening both the Israeli far right and Hamas, and
- Prepare the conditions for the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

2. A just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would reshape American diplomacy in the Middle East

- **American return to the Middle East**

One of the obvious consequences of recent events between Israel and Hamas is the return of the United States to the Middle East, after the disengagement that seemed to characterize American policy in recent years. The gradual withdrawal from Iraq and Syria, differences between the Americans and their Saudi counterparts in the wake of the Jamal Khashoggi affair, and differences over the Kingdom's involvement in the war in Yemen and Saudi disappointment at American inertia in the face of Iranian attacks on Saudi oil installations, are all factors that have led to a certain lack of interest in American Middle East policy, despite the maintenance of military bases in the region in compliance with defense agreements signed with Gulf countries. For some internationalists and geopolitical analysts, the region has been a victim of the shift in U.S. strategy towards the Indo-Pacific.

This vacuum encouraged Russia to assert itself in the region by capitalizing on its military intervention in Syria, and opened a window of opportunity for Chinese diplomacy, which began by facilitating the resumption of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and strengthening its trade and economic ties with the Gulf states. Attempts by Moscow and Beijing to gain a foothold in the region were illustrated by the admission of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates to the BRICS.

If the war in Ukraine has reinforced the U.S.'s desire to return to the old continent to counter Russian ambitions in Europe, the one that broke out on October 7 between Israel and Hamas is forcing the Americans to return to put an end to Iran's ambitions in the Middle East. Never before has the American armada been so close, and with so many resources, to Iran and its proxies in the Mediterranean. American language towards Iran and its satellites has never been as threatening and clear as that used in October 2023. The American President visited Israel in person, and American ships intercepted Yemeni missiles fired at southern Israel in the Red Sea.

- **Capitalize on the current situation in the region, to reverse the anti-American trend that benefits Washington's adversaries.**

The U.S. administration, which has been seriously involved both militarily and diplomatically in the events following October 7, cannot, on pain of seriously damaging its credibility, allow things to return to the situation they were in before the military escalation began. What's more, the Americans, who seem intent on marking their return to the Middle East to counter Russia, Iran, and China, owe it to themselves to combat the growing anti-American sentiment in the region.

If the status quo remains in Palestine, the U.S. will suffer a double setback:

- Hamas will have succeeded, despite its October 7 coup, in retaining its power in Gaza and strengthening itself at the expense of Israel, an ally of the U.S. This will also be a success for Iran and its axis of resistance;
- if Hamas is removed from power and Israel returns to its violations against the Palestinian people, working towards an idea of a greater Israel that torpedoes the two-state solution, the U.S. will lose all esteem in the Arab world and will no longer be able

to be a global facilitator for solutions in the region.

The U.S. administration may be facing its last chance to play a role in the region. This chance lies in putting pressure on Israel to engage seriously in a peace process leading to a two-state solution. This is the only way for the U.S. to justify the spectacular shift of its impressive military, diplomatic, and intelligence machinery to the Middle East.

CONCLUSION

The attack carried out by the Al Qassam brigades on October 7, 2023, in Israeli territory bordering the Gaza Strip, reminded the international community that the emergence of new conflicts in the world should not lead us to forget the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has lasted for over seventy years, without seeking a just solution that meets the need of both parties, who want to live in peace.

This conflict, born in the aftermath of the First World War, has persisted through several subsequent conflicts. It persisted through the Vietnam War, the wars in Afghanistan (Russian and American), and Iraq (first and second). It has persisted through the wars waged by the international community against Da'esh and Al Qaeda. At the dawn of the third decade of the twenty-first century, this conflict was for a time overshadowed by the war in Ukraine and tensions in the Indo-Pacific zone, before resurfacing in October 2023. It is certainly a reminder to the United Nations that time alone, at the cost of endless procrastination, cannot solve conflicts or resolve crises, especially when these crises or conflicts are existential. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is mutually existential between Israel and the Palestinians. Indeed, for as long as the conflict lasts, there can be no life of sovereignty, independence, peace, and security for either of the parties, without the other being able to live under the same conditions. Failing this, war, fear, and instability will continue to dominate, in a climate in which any lull is only a harbinger of storms to come. There are only two solutions for either side:

- Eradicate the other and exterminate him, so as to cut off all his roots and any possibility of resurgence, or
- Accept the other and recognize its right to a dignified life, in sovereignty, peace, independence, and security.

Since neither side can eradicate the other, whatever the forces behind it, there remains only the second solution. This cannot be the result of the passage of time alone, or of endless procrastination.

As the extremist parties, who seek to eliminate each other, are likely to emerge weakened from this war, the window is opening for more reasonable visions to work towards resolving the conflict.

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He holds a master's degree in political science and international studies from the Faculty of Law, Economics, and Social Sciences in Rabat. His academic research delves into international rivalries, geopolitical analysis, and pressing security issues such as conflicts and terrorism in Africa. Since 2018, Bassou has been directing and editing the collectively written annual report on Africa's geopolitics, which is published by the Policy Center for the New South. His work has been disseminated through numerous prestigious think tanks and institutions. Notable contributions include 'Towards EUMENA Shared Prosperity' (Bruegel, 2017) and 'Evolving Human Security Challenges in the Atlantic Space' (Jean Monnet Network, 2019). He is also a frequent contributor and participant in the HEC-PCNS Strategic Dialogues and their corresponding written volumes.

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The Policy Center for the New South (PCNS) is a Moroccan think tank aiming to contribute to the improvement of economic and social public policies that challenge Morocco and the rest of Africa as integral parts of the global South.

The PCNS pleads for an open, accountable and enterprising "new South" that defines its own narratives and mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, as part of a forward-looking relationship with the rest of the world. Through its analytical endeavours, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give the floor to experts from the South. This stance is focused on dialogue and partnership, and aims to cultivate African expertise and excellence needed for the accurate analysis of African and global challenges and the suggestion of appropriate solutions.

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the author.

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