

The Gaza Conflict and Israel's Domestic Politics*

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On 7 October, Hamas launched a violent and complex attack against Israel in conjunction with other Gaza-based armed groups. It was the biggest failure of Israeli intelligence and military preparedness since October 1973, when Egypt launched a surprise offensive against Israeli forces occupying the Sinai Peninsula. As before, Israel's extensive intelligence apparatus failed to prevent a massive attack. Its vaunted high-tech security technology along the Gaza border fence was quickly overwhelmed and Israeli soldiers caught by surprise. It took the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) three days of fierce fighting to restore full control over Israeli towns and military bases in the border area and drive Palestinian fighters back into Gaza. By the time fighting subsided, 1,139 Israelis, including 685 civilians,¹ had been killed and a further 251² taken back to Gaza as hostages.

7 October was an equally profound political failure, too. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is widely seen as bearing the ultimate responsibility for the tragedy. Having long styled himself as the best person to safeguard Israeli national security, his popularity, and that of his Likud party, plummeted from 32 to 19 seats in opinion polling.³ Netanyahu's na-

tional standing has yet to recover. Today, 66 per cent⁴ of Israelis want him to quit.

Israel's veteran leader is accused of having weakened military preparedness by triggering widespread dissent amongst military reservists who refused to show up for national service during the first half of last year, in response to government efforts to limit the independence of Israel's judiciary. Netanyahu has also been criticized for enabling Hamas by agreeing to successive ceasefire deals⁵ that allowed for an influx of Qatari cash into Gaza, some of which went to support civil servants employed by Hamas.

In reality, Israel's political failure goes much deeper. Netanyahu has worked for decades to undermine a moderate Palestinian leadership and block the emergence of an independent Palestinian state through a negotiated two-state solution. He believed he could contain the consequence of a deteriorating humanitarian, political and security situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories even as Israel deepened its relations with the Arab world.

For Netanyahu, the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020 was a vindication of his long-held belief that peace with the Arab world did not require any concessions towards Palestinians. As he stated⁶ at the time, the "concept of peace through withdrawal and weakness is gone, replaced by peace through strength." While he may have succeeded in neutralizing the Oslo process launched in 1991, Hamas' offensive demonstrated, in all its brutality, the un-

* This article was written in June 2024 (editor's note).

¹ www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/08/the-numbers-that-reveal-the-extent-of-the-destruction-in-gaza.

² www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67053011.

³ <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2023/10/14/Israeli-poll-shows-Netanyahu-s-popularity-has-dropped-since-Hamas-s-attack>.

⁴ www.trtworld.com/middle-east/poll-shows-66-of-israelis-want-netanyahu-to-quit-and-not-run-again-18178142.

⁵ https://ecfr.eu/publication/gazas_fragile_calm_the_search_for_lasting_stability/.

⁶ www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-netanyahu-on-different-uae-deal-palestinians-lost-their-veto-power/.

sustainability of these policies and the lack of any Israeli strategy to resolve core issues linked to decades of occupation.

But Netanyahu and his far-right coalition partners do not bear the sole blame for eroding a political pathway with Palestinians. Politicians and prime ministers from across the Israeli political spectrum have espoused many of the same policies for years, if not decades. Most, if not all, governments since the beginning of the Oslo peace process have sought to block the emergence of an independent Palestinian state (even if they did engage at times in protracted negotiations with the PLO). And although Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett – two of Netanyahu’s main political opponents – have fiercely criticized the Prime Minister over his handling of Gaza, they too pursued the same “cash-for-calm” approach to dealing with Hamas when they were in power between 2021-2022.

Today, few Israeli Jewish parties openly embrace a two-state solution that would partition the West Bank from Israel in line with international parameters. Even Lapid, who is widely seen outside of Israel as a political moderate, has ruled out⁷ any Israeli withdrawal from the Jordan Valley as part of a future peace agreement. And even if they are not ideologically committed to the creation of a Greater Israel encompassing the West Bank and Gaza, as espoused by the Israeli settler movement, a growing number of Israelis do appear to have at least implicitly bought into aspects of this vision, which draws no distinction between Israeli towns and major settlements in the occupied territory.

From Far Right to National Unity Government

Israel began last year with a far-right government led by Netanyahu and his Likud party. Formed following the November 2022 elections, it consisted of five other parties: the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism and Shas; along with the far-right Religious Zi-

onist Party, anti-LGBT Noam, and the anti-Palestinian Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power).

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Prior to the attack, far-right ministers, such as Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, with close ties to the settlement movement focused much of their attention on the West Bank. Having gained unprecedented power, they saw a historic opportunity to secure what the government’s manifesto⁸ describes as the “Jewish people’s exclusive right over the entire Land of Israel [including the West Bank].” To this end, the ruling coalition has turbocharged Israel’s settlement project, allocating⁹ some \$1bn to expand Israeli settlement infrastructure and boosting efforts to displace local Palestinian communities. These dynamics have accelerated further since 7 October, with far-right ministers exploiting the international focus on Gaza and hardening Israeli attitudes towards the Palestinians to accelerate Israel’s creeping annexation of the West Bank. Alongside this has come the expansion of deadly Israeli military raids deep into Palestinian towns and spiralling settler violence. Last year, Israeli forces killed 509¹⁰ Palestinians (including many civilians) in the West Bank alone, making it the bloodiest 12 months¹¹ there since 2004 when the second intifada was still raging. Israeli officials maintain that this is a necessary response to Palestinian attacks against Israeli soldiers and settlers.

⁷ www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/lapid-future-peace-deal-must-include-israeli-control-of-jordan-valley/.

⁸ www.timesofisrael.com/judicial-reform-boosting-jewish-identity-the-new-coalitions-policy-guidelines/.

⁹ www.timesofisrael.com/budget-dedicating-billions-for-west-bank-roads-settlements-and-illegal-outposts/.

¹⁰ www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties.

¹¹ www.btselem.org/press_releases/20230108_the_occupied_territories_in_2022_largest_number_of_palestinians_killed_by_israel_in_the_west_bank_since_2004.

Nevertheless, the combined effect of Israeli actions has been to stoke further anger among Palestinians and strengthen public support for armed resistance. The deteriorating political, security and economic situation in the West Bank has been further exacerbated by Israel's confiscation of tax clearance revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority (PA), totalling \$1.2bn¹² since 2019. As a result, the PA can no longer pay full salaries to public sector employees and is teetering on the brink of financial collapse.

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Netanyahu's government has also taken an illiberal turn at home. Early last year it began using its parliamentary majority to push through legislation to increase its control over Israel's judicial system. Supporters of the move argued it would halt judicial interference by unelected judges in the decisions of elected officials. Opponents accused Netanyahu of orchestrating a judicial coup, decrying what they saw as a move to weaken the Courts' ability to protect civil rights that would prefigure other attacks on the judiciary. Many also saw it as a cynical ploy by Netanyahu that would eventually enable him to evade his ongoing criminal trials on charges of corruption and fraud.

As the months went by, Netanyahu faced increasingly large-scale, anti-government protests across the country and growing warnings that Israel was on the verge of a deep constitutional crisis and even potentially a civil war. Yet backing down would have infuriated hard-right members of his coalition, who threatened to bring down the government should the judicial reform legislation not pass.

The Knesset's 2023 summer recess bought Netanyahu some time. But he appeared to be running out of manoeuvring room, caught between the contrasting demands of "pro-democracy" protesters and far-right coalition members ahead of the Parliament's anticipated return in late October. Then came the 7 October "black swan," upending Israel and handing Netanyahu an escape out of his political predicament.

In the immediate aftermath, with the nation in shock, the Prime Minister shelved his judicial reform plans to form an emergency government of national unity. This brought into the ruling coalition the opposition National Unity party led by Benny Gantz, who was given a seat in a newly created war cabinet with responsibility for overseeing the war in Gaza. However, Israel's other main opposition figure, Yair Lapid, refused to join the emergency government, accusing¹³ it of an "unpardonable failure" to prevent the attacks and demanding Netanyahu first eject "the [right wing] extremists out of the government of extremists."

Operation Swords of Iron

After three weeks of intense airstrikes against Gaza, Israel began its ground offensive, initially targeting Gaza City then gradually expanding southwards over the following months to Rafah on the Egyptian border. Israeli officials set out two military objectives: freeing all Israeli hostages and defeating Hamas's military and governance capabilities; or, in the words¹⁴ of Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, to "wipe them off the face of the earth." nine months later, these objectives have still not been accomplished.

Israel's targeting of Hamas has undoubtedly hurt the group operationally. Thousands of fighters have likely been killed, along with senior leaders, including the deputy head of Hamas's armed wing, Marwan Issa. It has also lost many of its tunnels and military infrastructure. But the group is no closer to being destroyed.

¹² https://mas.ps/cached_uploads/download/2024/06/01/update-may-5-31-5-1717238645.pdf.

¹³ www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/lapid-says-wont-join-problematic-emergency-government-but-hell-back-it-from-outside/.

¹⁴ www.timesofisrael.com/gallant-vows-to-wipe-hamas-from-earth-after-the-worst-terror-attack-in-history/.

Together with other factions such as Islamic Jihad, Hamas continues to fight across Gaza, including in areas supposedly cleared by the Israeli military – killing at least 316¹⁵ Israeli soldiers since entering the Gaza Strip. There are also indications that Hamas is regenerating, reconstructing damaged tunnels and enlisting a new generation of fighters into its ranks thanks to widespread trauma and anger created by Israeli violence.

Nor has Israel made much progress in freeing its hostages. To date, 120¹⁶ still remain in Palestinian custody, with many of those feared dead. Although 105 were released as part of a temporary ceasefire deal¹⁷ in November, in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, the Israeli government has continued to prioritize military action. Security forces have indeed succeeded in rescuing seven hostages. But far more have been killed as a result of military force. This has come at a tremendous cost in Palestinian lives, with a high-profile operation to rescue four hostages in June reportedly killing 274¹⁸ Palestinians, many of them women and children.

Israel's use of disproportionate force has resulted in immense humanitarian suffering. At the time of writing, over 37,765¹⁹ Palestinians, the majority of which are civilians, have been killed by Israel in Gaza. Its civilian infrastructure has been completely devastated and over 1.5 million Gazans internally displaced, many forced to live in basic shelters in horrendous conditions. In its May report²⁰ into the conflict, the UN's independent Commission of Inquiry accused Israel of extermination, including widespread and systematic attacks against the civilian population.

While Israel's Western allies, such as the United States, have continued to stand by Israel, it is coming under increasing international pressure over its actions. This includes mounting criticism from European governments, which have reprimanded Israel over its international law violations and lack of protection afforded to Palestinian civilians. In some of the sharpest criticism to date, France's President

Emanuel Macron castigated²¹ Israel's indiscriminate targeting of Gazan civilians: "De facto – today, civilians are bombed – de facto. These babies, these ladies, these old people are bombed and killed. So there is no reason for that and no legitimacy [for such actions]."

Israel also faces a growing challenge from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) where South Africa has successfully brought forward charges of genocide. While a final decision by the ICJ remains some way off, Pretoria has secured an interim ruling²² from the court ordering Israel to "immediately halt its military offensive...which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."

But perhaps the most significant move to date has come from the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. In May, he requested arrest warrants against Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare and extermination. Arrest warrants have also been requested for senior Hamas leaders on charges of extermination as a crime against humanity.

Decision-Making Paralysis

As Israel faces unprecedented international legal and diplomatic challenges, and a protracted fight in Gaza, the Israeli government appears paralysed. Officials continue to stress their desire to avoid an open-ended conflict that would force Israel to directly administer 2.2 million Palestinians amidst utter devastation, at considerable expense, while confronting a Hamas-led insurgency. But in the absence of a viable "day after" plan, military figures are increasingly warning that Israel is sliding into an open-ended re-occupation of the Strip – the very scenario they have wanted to avoid.

¹⁵ www.timesofisrael.com/idf-infantryman-killed-in-southern-gaza-bringing-ground-op-toll-to-316/.

¹⁶ www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67053011.

¹⁷ www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/14/how-many-israeli-captives-have-been-released-or-rescued.

¹⁸ <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-hamas-war-news-06-09-2024-61eb1be9a9d0cf2dbf250cd4a8ed4dbf>.

¹⁹ www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-184-gaza-strip.

²⁰ www.un.org/unispal/document/coi-report-a-hrc-56-26-27may24/.

²¹ www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-67356581.

²² www.icj-cij.org/node/204100.

Despite pleas from the Biden administration, Israeli ideas about what the “day after” could look like remain relatively shallow and profoundly disconnected from reality.

Israeli officials continue to oppose the return of the PA to govern and help secure Gaza once fighting ends. The Israeli government’s inability and unwillingness to set out a realistic vision for what comes after fighting in Gaza ends is being exacerbated by a significant mismatch of Israeli expectations and tensions between the Israeli government and military leadership.

Even as the government continues to encourage the public to believe that the destruction of Hamas is an achievable goal, Israeli security officials acknowledge this is unrealistic. Once largely confined behind closed doors, these disagreements are now bubbling to the surface. In June, Netanyahu reprimanded the IDF spokesperson, who had warned²³ that “this business of destroying Hamas, making Hamas disappear – it’s simply throwing sand in the eyes of the public... anyone who thinks we can eliminate Hamas is wrong.”

Netanyahu’s War

Israel’s decision-making paralysis and internal discord are compounded by the Prime Minister’s apparent political calculation that a prolonged conflict remains the key to his political survival. Besides losing right-wing support, ending the war in the current circumstances could be interpreted as a failure of his policies over the past months, potentially hastening an investigation into his actions in the run up to the 7 October attacks and triggering national elections, which could see him ousted from power.

A more pragmatic approach to Gaza could also jeopardize his coalition, which remains ever more reliant on far-right ministers such as Ben Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich. They remain

deeply opposed to any ceasefire deal with Hamas, continuing to call²⁴ for total destruction of the movement through military actions even if this leads to the death of the remaining hostages. Both also remain implacable opponents of Palestinian self-governance after the war, calling instead for Israeli resettlement²⁵ of the Strip

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To this backdrop, Netanyahu has repeatedly undermined hostage talks with Hamas. As an Israeli negotiator involved in the talks put it:²⁶ “I can’t say that without Netanyahu there would have been a deal, but I can say that without Netanyahu, the chances of making a deal would be better.” Since leaving the coalition, Gantz has similarly accused²⁷ Netanyahu of allowing political decisions to influence hostage deal negotiations.

In perhaps the most explicit example of this, the Prime Minister poured cold water on a ceasefire proposal outlined by President Joe Biden on 31 May as part of a US effort to coax him into ending the war. Although Hamas was quick to accept²⁸ the US parameters, he threw a well-aimed wrench into ceasefire negotiations by vowing²⁹ to continue fighting the Islamist group, even if it released all remaining Israeli hostages.

Netanyahu’s personal animosity to Palestinian self-determination, combined with his efforts to placate

²³ www.timesofisrael.com/idf-spokesman-says-hamas-cant-be-eliminated-will-remain-in-gaza-if-no-alternative/.

²⁴ www.timesofisrael.com/far-right-parties-vow-to-bring-down-government-if-pm-backs-hostage-ceasefire-deal/.

²⁵ www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/12/israel-right-wing-settler-gaza-netanyahu/676943/.

²⁶ www.timesofisrael.com/negotiators-say-netanyahu-has-cold-indifference-to-the-fate-of-the-hostages/.

²⁷ www.timesofisrael.com/back-in-opposition-gantz-says-freeing-hostages-should-take-priority-over-gaza-fighting/.

²⁸ www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/hamas-says-it-sees-bidens-latest-gaza-ceasefire-proposal-positively/.

²⁹ www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/23/netanyahu-says-war-will-continue-even-if-deal-agreed-with-hamas.

right-wing allies, has also stalled US efforts to broker a historic deal to normalize relations between Israeli and Saudi Arabia by ruling out any move towards a two-state solution – a key Saudi condition which would endanger his coalition.

The Looming Northern Border

Beyond Gaza, Netanyahu is also under growing pressure to resolve the threat posed by Hezbollah on the country's northern border. Since 7 October, The Lebanese Shiite group has fired thousands of missiles into Israel, displacing 80,000³⁰ Israelis from the north of the country. Hezbollah has vowed to continue its attacks so long as the war in Gaza continues, leading to the most intense fighting across the Israeli-Lebanese border since the 2006 Lebanon War.

But although Hezbollah continues to signal its desire to avoid a direct war, intensifying Israeli strikes, incursions deep into Lebanon and a series of high-level assassinations, have pushed it to slowly escalate in kind, striking deeper into Israel with more advanced weapons. Israeli officials have repeatedly indicated they would not spare the Lebanese State, vowing³¹ to send the country "back to the stone age." Hezbollah could similarly wreak extensive destruction in northern Israel thanks to its stock of more than 150,000³² missiles and ample reserves of drones. Even though Washington is trying to contain escalation through a diplomatic solution, its commitment to supporting Israel in a wider war, along with Iran's backing for Hezbollah, could see the conflict quickly intensify, dragging in other regional countries. Israel's 1 April bombing on the Iranian consulate in Damascus provoked a far stronger response from Iran than Israeli officials had anticipated, pushing both sides to the brink of direct war. Tehran responded with an unprecedented missile and drone attack, which successfully struck two military bases in Israel, despite a well-orchestrated aerial inter-

ception campaign by the US and Arab countries such as Jordan.

Even if a direct war between Israel and Iran has so far been avoided, there is a growing risk that Israel's embattled Prime Minister could be tempted to launch a full-scale operation against Hezbollah to push it away from the Lebanese border and degrade its missile capabilities. And indeed, the dwindling prospects of de-escalating the northern front through a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has led Israel's Foreign Minister Israel Katz to signal³³ that all-out war is approaching.

As ever, there are political calculations at play. An Israeli offensive against Hezbollah could benefit Netanyahu, at least over the short term, by prolonging the state of crisis and his own prime ministerial tenure while neutralizing pressure from both his left and right to return northern communities to their homes. However, Netanyahu has also long been risk averse and hesitant, especially when it comes to committing Israeli forces into potentially costly and open-ended wars.

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Previous interventions in Lebanon have at best been inconclusive and tremendously costly for Israel, leaving past governments critically weakened. While the Israeli army may envisage a short and sharp intervention against Hezbollah, there is a high risk it could end up bogged down there too, with no clear exit plan, and lacking sufficient troops for a costly re-occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and southern Lebanon.

³⁰ www.rfi.fr/en/international-news/20240629-fighting-for-third-day-in-north-gaza-as-thousands-displaced.

³¹ www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel-at-war/arto-gallant-says-israel-can-send-lebanon-back-to-stone-age-prefers-diplomacy.

³² www.haaretz.com/israel-news/security-aviation/2023-10-23/ty-article-magazine/150-000-rockets-and-missiles-the-weapons-israel-would-encounter-in-a-war-with-hezbollah/0000018b-573d-d2b2-addf-777df6210000.

³³ www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20240618-israel-warns-hezbollah-all-out-war-as-us-de-escalate-lebanon-border-tensions.

A Resurgent Anti-Netanyahu Opposition

The past months have seen the return of large-scale anti-government demonstrations. Energized by hostage families, these have punished the government's perceived inaction, demanding a ceasefire deal to release Israeli hostages and early elections. The thousands-strong protests have also closed down highways and besieged the Prime Minister's home on a weekly basis, eliciting a violent reaction from Israeli police.

Rising public anger has been coupled with several government defections, most notably Gantz, who had grown increasingly frustrated with the Prime Minister's behaviour. In mid-May, he issued a three-week ultimatum, urging the war cabinet in which he was a member to formulate an action plan to bring the hostages home, dismantle Hamas rule in Gaza, and return northern residents displaced by Hezbollah. With no progress forthcoming on any of these issues, he withdrew his party from the government on 8 June.

But the opposition still faces an uphill battle to remove Netanyahu. If elections were to be held at present, the anti-Netanyahu coalition would win a majority of Knesset seats, allowing them to form an alternative government. However, beyond their collective opposition to Netanyahu, the disparate opposition parties differ on just about everything else. This is hardly surprising given that they span the political spectrum, from right wing parties founded by Likud defectors such as Naf-tali Bennett and Gideon Sa'ar, and the nationalist anti-Arab Yisrael Beiteinu of Avigdor Lieberman, to the left-wing Meretz and Arab Bedouin Ra'am. As happened in the past, any anti-Netanyahu government would be extremely unstable and prone to collapse under the weight of its ideological contradictions once it has to govern and pass legislation.

Netanyahu, the Survivor

The most immediate impact of Gantz's exit has been to make Netanyahu even more dependent on far-right coalition partners for his continued political survival. Smotrich and Ben Gvir's greater influence over the course of the war in Gaza will make it even harder for

Netanyahu to agree to a ceasefire deal in the future, even if he wanted to. Without Gantz to keep the government's hardline impulses in check, the chances of a full-scale war in Lebanon have also increased.

What Gantz has not been able to do through his exit is to topple the government, which has now reverted to its original far-right constellation. Even without Gantz' National Resilience, the ruling coalition still controls 64 out of 120 Knesset seats. Nor can he force the government into early elections as a large majority of the Israeli public wants – given that neither Netanyahu nor his coalition partners have an interest in collapsing the government and triggering fresh elections that could see them lose power.

So long as he retains a governing majority, Netanyahu will continue to use fighting in Gaza along with the threat from Hezbollah as reasons to avoid elections while he plays for time, in the hope that he can improve his polling numbers while sapping away at public support for Gantz. His next step is to survive until the Knesset's summer recess, from 28 July until 27 October, and from there delay elections until he feels the political winds changing in his favour, potentially exploiting the return of Donald Trump to the US Presidency next year.

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But threats to the ruling coalition still abound. The government is becoming increasingly unwieldy, in large part due to internal opposition from Likud lawmakers over ultra-Orthodox demands to pass legislation that would expand the Chief Rabbinate's authority and lower the exemption from mandatory service for Haredi yeshiva students from 26 to 21 years old. Shas members have warned³⁴ that internal obstruction is undermining the foundations of the coalition:

³⁴ www.timesofisrael.com/failure-of-rabbis-bill-shatters-haredi-trust-in-pm-putting-coalition-on-thin-ice/.

“There is no coalition, there is no discipline...the complete dissolution of the coalition is only a matter of time.” A July ruling by Israel’s Supreme Court has now brought these issues to a head by ordering the government to immediately begin drafting ultra-Orthodox Jewish men into the army in light of the IDF’s current manpower requirements, sparking violent ultra-Orthodox protests.

Ultra-Orthodox issues have been the cause of coalition crises in past Netanyahu governments. Ultimately though, the biggest threat to Netanyahu may come from within his own Likud. This could either take the form of defections to the opposition by individual members, which could reduce the coalition’s majority; or an internal coup to depose him as leader. After all, he has already thwarted a number of such attempts in the past, including in 2019 when he forced Gideon Sa’ar into exile from the party. It could be just a matter of time before that next attempt to oust him, especially if Likud fails to recover in the polls and/or the coalition appears to be on the verge of collapse.

A Nation Traumatized and Divided

The unprecedented death toll, acts of sexual violence, and mass kidnapping of Israeli civilians and soldiers on 7 October has created a multi-generational national trauma that will continue to reverberate through Israeli society and politics long after the fighting in Gaza has stopped. The enormity of the crisis momentarily obscured deepening divisions within Israeli society that had pitted secular liberals against the ultra-Orthodox and religious nationalists. As fighting subsides in Gaza,

Israel’s fault lines are once again emerging, driven by Netanyahu’s quest for survival and the relation between ultra-Orthodox communities and the State at a time of national crisis. These societal divisions over Israel’s future identity look set to outlast Netanyahu’s tenure as Prime Minister. Yet, while Israel does face a threat from within, it is its conflict with the Palestinians that remains by far the most existential.

There so far remains little real political or public demand to fundamentally break from the policies of the past that have led Israel into the current ongoing tragedy

One of the most immediate effects of the 7 October attacks has been to harden Israeli attitudes in opposition to a two-state solution. Even as Israelis find themselves increasingly caught in open-ended conflict in Gaza, the West Bank, and quite possibly Lebanon, there so far remains little real political or public demand to fundamentally break from the policies of the past that have led Israel into the current ongoing tragedy. Nor does the international community appear willing to intervene decisively to force an end to Israel’s settlement and occupation of Palestinian territory despite growing reprobation of its actions. Without such a fundamental recalibration of Israeli calculations, both sides risk plunging even deeper into a perpetual conflict.