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FOR SECURITY POLICY

Strategic Assessment for Israel 2026

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Strategic Assessment for Israel 2026

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Israel's Strategic Assessment
2026
OVERVIEW

Hezbollah

Current status: Ceasefire

- Leader Hassan Nasrallah and a host of other senior officials eliminated.
- Lost 80% of its missile capabilities.
- Lebanon rejects resistance; fractured group stops retaliating against Israeli strikes.

Hamas

Current status: Phase 2 Trump Plan

- Release of 254 hostages.
- Phase 2 of Trumps peace plan began with the establishment of a 15-member National Committee for the Administration of the Gaza Strip (NCAG).
- IDF control over 53% of the Gaza Strip continuing to destroy Hamas infrastructer.

Iran

Current status: Ceasefire

- Over 20,000 protesters killed.
- Over 97% of Iran is currently suffering from some level of drought.
- Nuclear facilities critically damaged.
- Iran maintains a strategic arsenal of over 1,500 ballistic missiles.
- Snapback sanctions returned leading to high inflation.

Syria

Current status: Nego

- A new Sharaa-led gove calls for détente with Isr
- 650 sq km of New territo
- Turkey's growing domin hostile threat on Israel's

Houthis

Current status: A

- Lost +50% of its fire powe
- Port of Eilat still unactive
- Israeli Defence Systems b 90% of projectiles fired in

Introduction: Israel's Strategic Recalibration

Or Yissachar

Following over two years of war - the longest in its history - Israel engineered historic military and diplomatic achievements while integrating them into a reimagined regional security architecture. The October 7, 2023 massacre by the Iranian proxy Hamas has **pushed Israel into a proactive military posture following years of stagnation and procrastination.** Israel's long-practiced "campaign between the wars" doctrine that had dominated the so-called *misconception* that was accepted as doctrine among its highest political and military echelons, was confronted by the radical motivation of the Iranian regime and its proxy network. They deceived Israel and the West to misinterpret inactivity for a lack of willingness to engage in conflict. Rather, the Iranian axis was preparing for war across multiple dimensions, setting the stage to surprise Israel with a multifront attack that would lead to its demise. Instead, **Israel's reaction indicated a strategic recalibration of the old paradigms and its willingness to take on the root causes of the Iranian-led threat map** within and around its borders, reshaping the map of the Middle East.

The so-called "Gaza war" has evolved into the Israel-Iran War - a regional conflict foreshadowed by a larger global prism.

- **Hamas' attack on southern Israel on October 7** opened the doors to the larger conflict, killing some 1,200 Israelis and foreigners from over two dozen countries, injuring thousands, and the abduction of 254 hostages by Hamas, other militant groups, and everyday Gazan civilians who took advantage of Israel's vulnerable position. This has led to a long Israeli military campaign in Gaza, and the current cease-fire deal. Israeli forces are currently stationed along the "yellow line", covering over 50% of Gaza's territory, with the forming of the Board of Peace and the International Security Force (ISF) alongside the IDF overseeing the humanitarian aid effort. All hostages but one have so far been released.

- **The following day, theLebanese-Iranian terrorist group Hezbollah launched a military campaign executing Tehran's instructions,** resulting in almost 30,000 rockets, missiles and drones attacking the Jewish state. Israel responded by eliminating Hezbollah's top leaders, significantly damaging its force buildup, and a prospect for a de-Iranization of Lebanon by the local government.

- **Yemen's Houthis** fired hundreds of projectiles into Israel, supplied by Tehran, attacked the US Navy multiple times, took over ships navigating in international waters, and severely disrupted global maritime routes.

- **Syria's Assad regime collapsed** following the well-calculated attack by Ahmed al-Sharaa's HTS, partially funded and assisted to by Turkey's Erdogan, making al-Sharaa the Syrian President, and forcing Assad to flee the country and seek refuge in Moscow.

- **Outweighing all of the other factors is the Iranian regime, its military force buildup,**

and in particular the nuclear program and the ballistic missiles project. According to the IAEA, Iran refused to cooperate with the agency's inspectors and crossed a red line it had not crossed for two decades. US and Israeli intelligence indicated that Iran was dangerously close to acquiring sufficient fissile material for several nuclear bombs, potentially breaking out to 90% enrichment. Israeli sources claimed Iran was also making strides with the weaponization component of the nuclear program. In addition, Iran planned to manufacture over 20,000 ballistic missiles within three years, capable of covering the entire area of Israel.

During the "Am-Kalavi" War in June 2025, also known as the 12-Day War, Israel launched a surprise attack on Iran, significantly degrading its nuclear and ballistic programs, severely harming its top military echelons, nuclear scientists, and key elements of the programs. The Trump administration joined the attack, launching "Midnight Hammer", sending B-2 Stealth Bombers and Tomahawk missiles targeting the three major nuclear sites in the country. After 12 days, Iran's nuclear and ballistic programs were in tatters, its air defense systems were practically non-existent, and its leadership's weakness and vulnerability were exposed.

Today's unrest and popular uprising in Iran and among the Iranian diaspora communities may signal the fall of the regime, though there is still grave uncertainty surrounding the regime's next steps.

This war has transcended the conventional concept by spreading across multiple battlefields - the military one on the ground was joined by several others:

- **Diplomatic warfare** across the United Nations' institutions, embargoes by friendly countries to Israel in Europe, boycott across cultural events, military exhibitions and scientific events, and a recognition of a Palestinian state, widely condemned as prize to Hamas;

- **Lawfare** in international institutions, with the ICJ issuing a decree on the Rafah operation and discussing the Genocide convention, and the ICC issuing arrest warrants against Prime Minister Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Gallant;

- **Delegitimization and anti-Semitism** characterized by mass protests in the streets and university campuses across Europe, North America, and the Middle East, joined by a massive spike of anti-Semitic incidents, turning historically friendly countries increasingly into environments dominated by radical anti-Israeli and Islamist elements, and increasingly unlivable for their Jewish populations.

This war also resurfaced the grand global chessboard and the wider, international prism of this conflict as part of the great power competition. Russia and China rushed to the side of Iran and its proxies, even siding with Hamas, and signing strategic cooperation treaties with Iran; while the United States led a clear pro-Israeli diplomatic line. The Biden administration posed significant hurdles on Israel, as they demanded more humanitarian aid to Gaza that would empower Hamas, opposed the operation in Rafah and attempted to impose an unconditional cease-fire, yet they consistently backed Israel in international institutions and supplied it with invaluable economic and military aid. The Trump administration has been demonstrating clear and vocal support for Israel, characterizing the US-Israeli alliance as part of the struggle for Western global hegemony and the fight against the radical axis. The Trump administration considers Israel as a pro-American bastion, projecting raw power against Iran and its proxies, and by extension countering Russia and China's growing global impact.

The US-Israeli Security MoU, dubbed the "aid package", is expected to be renewed this year and morph into a "partnership", in light of the heavy domestic criticism in the US on the nature of aid to Israel. It is to be noted that the current mechanism allows American manufacturers to receive government "coupons" that are shipped to Israel, and includes multiple components of bilateral cooperation over military, intelligence, and technological projects, touting an unmatched added value by Israel to the US, not merely an aid package.

These global developments served as a litmus test for today's shifting global alliances, and reordered them per Cold War-like groups. The Ukraine War and the Israel-Iran war have been critical at forming tectonic shifts in global diplomacy, forcing countries to choose between the United States and China, between Russia and Ukraine, and by extension between Israel and Iran.

The Middle East's map of alliance is also expected to reshuffle following the results of this war, with the much-anticipated expansion of the Abraham Accords. Israel and the United States are committed to reaching normalization between Israel and the Arab World, chiefly between Israel and Saudi Arabia. While this objective is still not within reach, we assess that Riyadh remains interested in a deal with Israel once the Gaza War reaches a clear conclusion. As of today, the forming Board of Peace in Gaza is expected to spearhead Gaza reconstruction efforts. However, with the objective of destroying Hamas as a governing and militant entity in Gaza still far from sight, **it is expected that Israel will be forced to resume its military activity in Gaza in order to complete this mission.** It is unlikely that the International Stabilization Force - ISF will be able to take on this mission on its own.

Other alliances include Israeli-Syria normalization, possible Israeli-Lebanese deal that heavily depends on the dismantling of Hezbollah, and other deals with Muslim-majority countries worldwide. We assess that Indonesia, Oman, and Pakistan are among the most notable candidates to be next in line to normalize ties with Israel, depending on progress on the Gaza front.

Finally, **Israel's domestic front is expected to be front and center in the country's threat map in the coming years,** as illegal construction, the accumulation of army-grade illicit weapons, and trends of Palestinization and radicalization threaten to awaken radical elements within Israel's Arab and Bedouin

Source: IDF Spokesman

populations. Israel will have to dedicate much of its efforts to tackling this growing "state within a state" reality, boost its police and border guard, form a viable National Guard, and reroute force buildup efforts to security within its borders. That, while "preserving" the military achievements outside of its borders, and constantly attempting to translate them into political achievements - be it "humanitarian cities" in Gaza, Palestinian autonomies in Gaza and in Judea and Samaria as an alternative to the Palestinian Authority, potential normalization with Lebanon and Syria, and potential regime change in Iran that could completely overhaul Israel's threat and opportunity map.

We approach this Strategic Assessment with a clear sense of the **pyramid of national security: national ethos as the wide base,** with clear nourishment of national values and identity, the civil-soldier model and the elaborated conscription of various populations in Israel - in particular the Ultra-Orthodox society, and the support of the general public in understanding Zionism's next challenge within Israel's borders. This wide base serves as the basis for all other efforts in the domains of force buildup, diplomacy, and soft power.

IAF in an exercise with the Greek air force. Source: IDF Spokesperson

National Resilience – Implications of the War

Col. (res) Dr. Ronen Itsik

General Background

The War placed Israeli society under its most profound test since the establishment of the state, combining—on an unprecedented scale—a multi-theater military threat, a political crisis of confidence, and an election year. The strategic framework presented here, focusing on societal resilience in Israel, is grounded in our research on civil–military relations, reserve force resilience, education, and community resilience.

The overall picture points to the strength of an "armed nation", sustained by the reserve system, the family unit, and the community as key pillars of cohesion, alongside a deepening of internal fractures and growing threats to the legitimacy of the political and institutional system.

A Mobilized Nation Amid Political Turbulence

The conception of Israel as a "mobilized nation" has long served as a framework for understanding civil–military relations and the linkage between citizenship and security. The reserve force, the unique status of the Israeli family, and a normative code of collective responsibility together shape a form of resilience that combines willingness to sacrifice, functional adaptability, and a relatively rapid restoration of civilian life.

At the same time, our research indicates that alongside high levels of societal resilience, there is an accumulated erosion of trust in state institutions and a weakening sense of equality.

During the War, a clear paradox was exposed: a political and institutional system perceived by large segments of the public as dysfunctional, operated in the shadow of a civil society and reserve force that demonstrated exceptional commitment and an extraordinary level of mobilization. This paradox is intensified in an election year, in which political discourse sharpens, partisan narratives become dominant, and the tension between wartime unity and electoral polarization emerges as a risk factor.

Common Fate Versus Ideological Conflict

At the outset of the War, internal disputes appeared to fade. Religious and secular Israelis, traditionalists and national-religious communities, shared key positions on the battlefield, in hospitals, within logistical frameworks, and among civilian initiatives supporting the home front. On the ground, a sense of shared fate prevailed, in which military ethos, tradition, and a common civic culture coexisted within the same space.

However, our research findings indicate that polarization surrounding the obligation to serve in the IDF, the issue of equality in conscription, and the struggle over the judicial agenda are once again front and center in the public discourse shortly after the fighting subsided.

The central issue is not a gap in value-based perception between religious and secular communities, but rather society's ability to coalesce around new lines of consensus: mutual recognition that military

service, civilian service, and community volunteering are distinct expressions of a shared national commitment. In **the absence of such a framework, the election year is likely to leverage disputes over conscription, education budgets, and religion-state relations into partisan political arenas, potentially eroding societal resilience.**

Societal Resilience and the Challenge of Trust

On the political level, the War revealed a clash between the high social legitimacy enjoyed by the fighting force and sharp criticism of the political leadership. Large-scale reserve mobilization, a proliferation of civilian initiatives, and dramatic operational achievements generated a sense of national pride, while simultaneously underscoring the depth of the crisis of trust in the political system.

An election year amplifies this tension and elevates two competing approaches: one, an escalation of divisive political discourse centered on responsibility for the failures of October 7; the other, a "national realignment" based on the establishment of a national commission of inquiry. Strengthening political resilience requires translating societal resilience into institutional change, rather than confining it to electoral slogans.

A Mobilized Periphery and Economic Marginalization

A significant component of Israeli resilience stems from the gaps between the center and the periphery—geographic, ethnic, and socio-economic. During the War, particularly high levels of mobilization and motivation were again observed among peripheral populations, alongside extensive community mobilization to absorb evacuees and support combat units.

This pattern reinforces the image of the periphery as a backbone of resilience, while simultaneously highlighting persistent disparities in investment in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and employment between the center and the periphery.

The emotional dimension of this issue—often central to Israeli election campaigns—requires a fair and sober reassessment of conditions in the periphery, with particular emphasis on communities, some of which were left almost entirely depopulated. This reality constitutes a bleeding social fault line and necessitates a focused, sustained, and integrative effort in the coming years, especially in employment, education, and development.

The War constituted a multi-systemic disruption: large-scale civilian evacuations, damage to entire economic sectors (tourism, commerce, the self-employed, agriculture), and the prolonged absence of reservists from the labor market. Vulnerability was concentrated particularly among the self-employed, small businesses, and residents of the periphery—whose social networks are more limited—as well as among large families in lower socio-economic strata, who were required to cope simultaneously with psychological distress, employment uncertainty, and only partial assistance from state mechanisms.

The IDF as the "Tribal Bonfire"

The War, which began with an unprecedented crisis, a strategic surprise, and a severe blow, concluded with an impressive and inspiring multi-theater victory—despite Israel continuing to face challenges in the Gaza arena, the need to preserve achievements on the northern front, and additional challenges emanating from Iran.

At the heart of Israel's decision-making stood the reserve force—the true people's army—within which hundreds of thousands mobilized in an emergency, many without formal orders or explicit directives, but out of a clear understanding of the gravity of the moment.

Our research indicates that the high level of trust enjoyed by the IDF derives primarily from the trust placed in the reserve force by Israeli society. Societal cohesion around the IDF and its resilience provided the "wind in the sails" of reservists who served hundreds of days over the past two years, and enabled political leaders a high degree of strategic flexibility in decision-making. Societal resilience in this war rested on the IDF's achievements—and vice versa. Consequently, strengthening the IDF, enhancing the social standing of reservists, and ensuring a rapid return to operational readiness are essential components in the equation of national resilience.

Resilience and Political Leadership

Israel's socio-political crisis constitutes the most severe challenge to national resilience. Accordingly, an election year may represent both a major opportunity for consolidation around leadership and a risk of further partisan fragmentation.

The analysis demonstrates that societal resilience in Israel is anchored in the relationship between state, military, family, and community. The War proved that under existential threat, Israeli society is capable of an impressive process of cohesion, while also exposing fractures that may widen if not addressed through policy tools, legislation, and strategic planning. In an election year, the danger of turning resilience assets into short-term political instruments is high and demands a heightened sense of national responsibility.

**The Israeli Navy and Hellenic Navy in a joint exercise in Greek sovereign waters.
Source: IDF Spokesperson**

US-Israel relations

Executive Judgment

1. **The relationship remains structurally strong** – especially on security assistance and technology – but is experiencing visible tactical friction over Gaza's post-war governance architecture and "who gets a seat at the table." Generally speaking, Washington's expectations are shifting toward reciprocity, burden sharing, and coalition manageability.

2. **Iran is the strategic center of gravity.** It is the arena where U.S. and Israeli interests converge most clearly, and where miscalculation carries the highest cost.

3. **Gaza represents both a political and a coordinating test.** It can generate public friction and process breakdowns, but it does not replace Iran as the alliance's strategic backbone.

4. **The durability of U.S. domestic support is under significant strain among younger cohorts, including within the American political right.** These developments demand a clearer understanding of shifting American sensitivities, which should shape how Israel must adapt in order to sustain long-term support.

5. **Israel's move toward gradual military independence can strengthen national resilience if executed as "aid-to-contract," not as isolationism.** It must be structured to deepen, not dilute, U.S. defense-industrial incentives and further embolden Israel's public image in the US as a viable ally that bolsters American national security.

6. Israel is a "**model strategic ally**" for the U.S. under Trump's worldview.

The joint "Intrinsic Defender" exercise between the Israeli Navy and the @US5thFleet.
Source: IDF Spokesperson

Key Deltas Entering 2026

- **Process friction became visible:** U.S. efforts to shape Gaza governance and post-war arrangements have exposed some gaps in coordination, although cooperation levels remain extremely high.

- **Iran and global alliances regained primacy in escalation planning:** Washington's Iran posture, combined with regional proxy dynamics, keeps the alliance anchored in deterrence and escalation control rather than in diplomacy alone.

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- **Political base shifts accelerated:** U.S. public opinion and generational attitudes are becoming more skeptical of open-ended commitments and taxpayer-funded aid. The risk is not "support for Hamas." The risk is decreasing tolerance for entanglement, cost, and moral ambiguity.

- **Added value becomes more highlighted:** The increased military, technology, and geopolitical cooperation has underscored Israel's role as a valuable American ally.

Current happenings (January 2026 operating picture)

1) White House operating logic

The Trump administration's pattern is consistent: It rewards allies that deter adversaries, reduce U.S. burdens, and reinforce U.S. industrial strength. It is also sensitive to coalition fractures and prolonged conflict optics.

2) Iran and escalation management

Iran remains the shared strategic concern. Alignment is strongest when Israel is perceived as expanding deterrence without pulling the U.S. into an open-ended war while promoting common objectives. The policy challenge is to preserve operational freedom while offering Washington confidence that escalation pathways are understood, confined, managed – and, on the table.

3) Gaza governance

Gaza is the most likely channel for potential political friction, mainly through gaps in coordination, disputes about external actors, and sequencing disagreements. The most immediate example is Israel's public objection to the Trump administration's newly announced Gaza governance bodies/boards and their membership, although it is plausible that the parties will find a sensible way forward, primarily as the administration views Israel as the only capable power of taking on Hamas.

4) Israel is a "model strategic ally" for the U.S. under Trump's worldview

Trump's foreign-policy reflex is transactional: allies are valued when they (a) deter adversaries, (b) win, (c) buy American, (d) reduce U.S. burden, and (e) validate U.S. strength. Israel fits that template unusually well:

- **Deterrence demonstration:** Israel's posture vs Iran is legible, force-based, and aligns with "peace through strength."

- **Defense innovation:** Israel's layered air defense, drone/counter-drone experience, and rapid adaptation feed U.S. learning cycles (even when politics are tense)

- **Industrial reciprocity:** large-ticket U.S. platforms (e.g., F-15) reinforce the argument inside a Trump administration that security partnership also means American jobs and production.

Therefore, Israel is not merely viewed by the Trump Administration as a beneficiary, but as a regional capability node that can be contracted into U.S. strategy – especially against Iran, and as a partner in the battle over preserving and strengthening the American-led and Western-dominated world order..

5) Israel's independence signal

Israel's Prime Minister's stated ambition to reduce reliance on U.S. military aid is a strategic necessity given U.S. political volatility. It is not expected to be structured as disengagement, but as an interest-based partnership and burden sharing.

Decision Windows Anchored to 2026 – What Must Be Decided This Year

Decision Window 1: Alliance architecture (H1 2026) | Decide and implement a permanent bilateral mechanism for high-friction files (a.k.a, Iran escalation management; Gaza post-war arrangements).

Decision window 2: Independence roadmap design | Approve a 10-year "aid-to-contract" transition plan with measurable milestones and procurement continuity, especially due to the fact of the pending conclusion of the 10-year bilateral military aid memorandum of understanding FY2019 to FY2028.

Decision window 3: U.S. political resilience strategy | Adopt a cross-government plan to stabilize U.S. support over time by shifting the narrative from "aid" to "mutual utility, burden sharing, and U.S. benefit."

Recommendations

1) **Lock in a "Strategic Contracting Doctrine"** that highlights Israel's added value to the US and its national security, transitioning into a performance-backed partnership, also contributing to the support among the younger generation.

2) **Make Iran the primary shared language,** with explicit escalation governance.

3) **Treat Gaza as a coordination problem first, not a persuasion problem,** while placing clear red lines for Israel yet positive incentives that will advance regional peace efforts.

Russia and Israel

Sophie Kobzantsev

I. The Past Year: Russia's Strategic Position at the Start of 2026

As 2026 begins, the Russia-Ukraine war has surpassed the duration of the so-called "Great Patriotic War," evolving from a localized conflict into a catalyst for broader change in the international order. In 2025, Russia modestly increased its rate of advance through a revised operational template combining battlefield air interdiction, strikes on supply lines, infiltration tactics, and small-unit assaults, supported by expanded use of fiber-optic drones and other technological adaptations. Despite this, advances remained slow and costly, and Russia failed to achieve key objectives such as conquering Donetsk Oblast or establishing buffer zones in northern Ukraine. Moscow nevertheless intensified strategic strikes against Ukraine's energy and rail infrastructure. Ukraine struck targets deep inside Russia but was unable to halt Russian momentum, while 2025 became the deadliest year of the war for Ukrainian civilians.

II. Russian Strategic Direction: Interests and Constraints

Russia's relative momentum in 2025 was aided by Israel's prolonged war in the Middle East, which diverted international attention, and by U.S. efforts to end the Russia-Ukraine war, incentivizing Moscow to consolidate gains ahead of possible negotiations. Washington's mediation produced mixed results. On one hand, Russia experienced renewed engagement with the United States, including discussions of limited post-war cooperation and high-level meetings between Presidents Putin and Trump. On the other hand, tensions persisted, and the United States sought to reinforce its military presence in other regions, underscoring the continued strategic rivalry. In practice, core Russian demands- Ukraine's non-accession to NATO and continued control of occupied territories, have gained implicit acceptance, while disputes over territory and security guarantees persist.

These dynamics have heightened anxiety across Europe, where states increasingly recognize that reliance on the United States alone may no longer be sufficient. Drone incursions into the airspace of NATO members during 2025 reinforced perceptions of a growing Russian threat and accelerated debates over European strategic autonomy.

Beyond Europe, the war's ripple effects reshaped the Middle
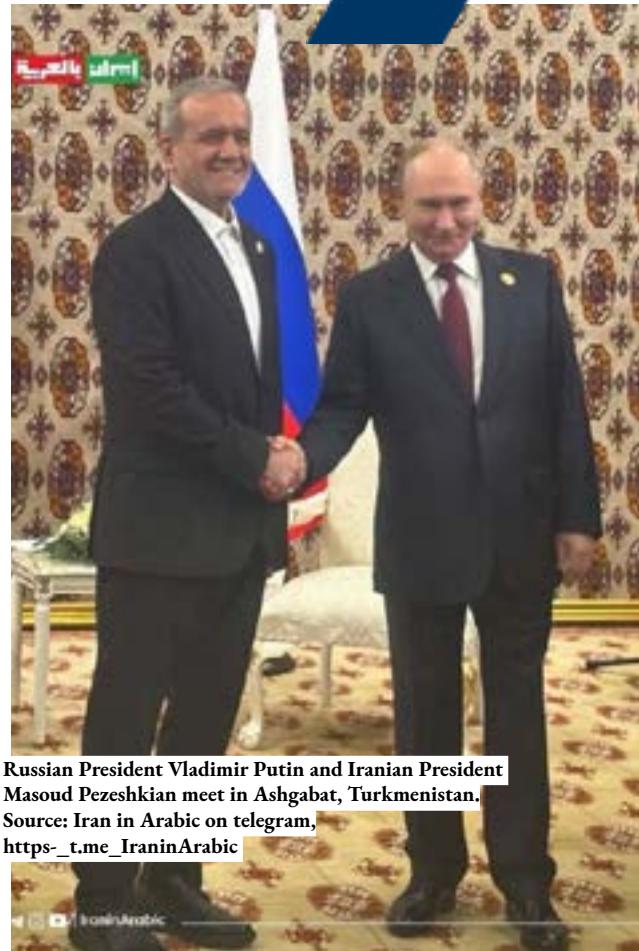
Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian meet in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, Source: Iran in Arabic on telegram, https-_t.me_IraninArabic

East. Russia's loss of influence in several strategic arenas, including Syria and its former mediation role between Azerbaijan and Armenia, has reinforced Moscow's determination to avoid concessions in Ukraine and to emerge from the war with a perception of strength, viewed as vital for both regional standing and domestic legitimacy.

A key development in this context was Israel's twelve-day war with Iran. Despite its strategic partnership with Tehran, Russia refrained from providing military assistance during the Israel strikes. Instead, Moscow condemned the attacks rhetorically while positioning itself as a legitimate mediator, maintaining dialogue with Israel and the United States alike. This approach reflects Russia's effort to preserve freedom of maneuver and regional relevance among its various actors.

This posture also aligns with Russia's long-standing approach to Iran's nuclear program. Despite extensive military and civilian nuclear cooperation, Moscow has historically sought to place certain limits on Iran's nuclear activities, remained involved in international oversight frameworks, and, prior to the twelve-day war, even proposed assuming responsibility for the removal of enriched uranium from Iran. The strategic partnership between Russia and Iran explicitly excludes mutual military intervention, reflecting both sides' desire to avoid entanglement in each other's wars - as opposed to a NATO-like partnership.

III. Implications and Recommendations for Israel

Recent months underscore Russia's continued relevance as a regional actor. Despite withholding military support from Iran, Moscow and Tehran renewed their partnership, driven by mutual dependence under sanctions. Reports of renewed nuclear-related contacts and potential Russian arms transfers to Iran heighten Israeli concerns amid indications that Iran has resumed uranium enrichment.

Israel has therefore sought leverage through the United States while maintaining direct and level-headed communication with Russia. Moscow has continued to function, at least partially, as a mediating channel aimed at preventing further escalation and managing risk.

Russia's role in Syria further illustrates the complexity Israel faces. Contrary to earlier expectations, Russia preserved its military presence and strategic bases while rebuilding ties with Syria's new leadership. For Damascus, relations with Moscow offer a counterbalance to growing Turkish influence, economic and humanitarian assistance, and a channel to manage tensions with Israel, particularly in southern Syria.

Israel should now navigate a rapidly shifting strategic environment. It faces persistent threats: Iran's nuclear ambitions, Hezbollah's missile and drone capabilities, Turkey's expanding regional role, and stalled normalization dynamics. This reality requires careful maneuvering between major powers, particularly the United States and Russia, while preserving diplomatic flexibility.

Israel's restrained approach toward Ukraine has allowed it to maintain working relations with both Kyiv and Moscow. At the same time, Israel should avoid overreliance on Russia's benevolence, especially regarding the Golan Heights, given Moscow's willingness to prioritize its own interests in Syria.

Finally, these developments reflect a deeper structural shift: the international order has changed significantly over the past four years. U.S. actions toward Venezuela and statements regarding Greenland, alongside geopolitical changes in the Middle East, signal that the global system Israel once knew may not

return in its previous form. In this environment, major powers, Russia, the United States, and China, as well as regional actors such as Turkey and Egypt, may increasingly test established norms. For Israel, this underscores the need for strategic adaptability, sustained deterrence, and careful navigation in an increasingly fluid world order.

Supporters of the al-Sharaa regime vandalized the statue of Sheikh Saleh al-Ali at the entrance to Tartous.
Source: Naya for Iraq on telegram, https-_t.me_nayaforiraq

2026

Israel's Strategic Assessment
IRAN

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■ Current status: Ceasefire

IRAN - INTERNAL

20,000
Current protester deaths far surpass the 550 from the 2019 Mahsa Amini protests.

+97%
Over 97% of Iran is currently suffering from some level of drought, a catastrophic environmental failure that has become a primary driver of civil unrest.

+52%
Iran's point-to-point inflation rate surged to 52.6% in late 2025, leaving millions unable to afford basic necessities like food and medicine

+1,500
According to U.S. Central Command, Iran maintains a strategic arsenal of over 1,500 ballistic missiles

12 DAY WAR

+30 Leadership Targeted & Killed

+45 Military Bases Hit in Iran

+9 Nuclear Facilities Targeted

3 Energy Sites Hit

+400 Total Israeli Strikes

The Iranian Front

Moran Alaluf

Absent regime overthrow, Iran remains one of the central powers in the Middle East, exerting influence on regional and global stability. Its capabilities are not confined to Iranian territory but extend transcontinentally, including the development of strategic assets in foreign states related to the ballistic missile domain and the nuclear project. Following the 12-Day War in June, when Israel - and later the US - successfully degraded much of Iran's nuclear and ballistic capabilities, fear persists that Iran is determined to resume these efforts and risk plunging the region, and the world, into further instability.

As an example to Iran's strategic assets, Iran consolidates its power through the presence of the Quds Force in Venezuela and, via Hezbollah, its proxy in Latin America, a region that provides the terrorist organization with an additional and significant source of income from drug trafficking.

The new approach led by U.S. President Donald Trump against drug cartels in Latin America is critical to dismantling the Shiite axis.

Against the backdrop of the War, despite the weakening of Iran's proxies—Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen, and militias in Iraq and Syria—the axis retains military capabilities and with a likely rehabilitative potential if a series of follow-on actions and sustained enforcement policies are not implemented.

The creation of a moderate Sunni axis as a prerequisite for containing the radical Shiite axis has failed the test of reality, particularly given the entrenchment of extremist actors in Syria under the auspices of the new leader, al-Shara'a (al-Julani), and Turkey. The inclusion of Turkey—and possibly Qatar—in governance arrangements in Gaza, combined with Turkey's growing presence north of Israel, could generate an updated version of the "ring of fire" encircling Israel from both south and north, precisely as envisioned by Qassem Soleimani.

The Space Program – A Force Multiplier

Iran's space program constitutes a force multiplier that must be taken seriously, particularly as it relates to the ballistic missile program and the nuclear project, including the prospect of warfare in space that threatens the modern world through the disruption of satellite systems and critical national infrastructure. Any agreement with Iran must include explicit limitations in this domain.

Iraq

Iraq serves as a forward base for Iran's ballistic missile program. Any military action against Iran's proxies must include the dismantling of ballistic infrastructure held by pro-Iranian militias in Iraq, which poses a medium- to long-range threat.

Global Impact

In the event of regime collapse, Iran would retain extensive global infrastructure capabilities. Western and Israeli interests, as well as Jewish communities worldwide, would remain under a very high threat level. To mitigate this risk, a strategic plan anchored in a multinational coalition is required. Preparations should be made for anticipated increased immigration from Jewish communities facing acute danger, alongside intelligence-driven security plans focused on the Shiite axis.

The Domestic Situation in Iran

The social protests that erupted in January 2026 against the regime triggered waves of demonstrations that were violently suppressed, involving the killing of at least thousands alongside electricity outages, shutdowns of communications and internet access, and restrictions on bank withdrawals. Concurrently, a credible threat by the United States of a second strike aimed at regime overthrow may signal the beginning of a fundamental change in Iran, though it still appears distant.

The previous U.S. strike on Iran in June 2025, targeting the nuclear project and ballistic missile program, was critical in strengthening the Israel–U.S. alliance, conveying compelling messages of deterrence to adversaries, exposing the regime's weakness, and positively shifting U.S. Middle East policy toward a combination of military force and diplomatic agreements. Nevertheless, the regime's deep-rooted religious ideology continues to drive it toward issuing concrete threats against the Israeli home front through ballistic missiles and potentially beyond, should it perceive itself as losing control and approaching the end of its rule.

Membership in the Anti-Western Axis

Crippling Iran would constitute a direct blow to the anti-Western axis that includes China, Russia, and North Korea. At the same time, this axis has forged strong long-term strategic agreements with the current Iranian regime, and intervention—particularly by China—aimed at preventing regime collapse is possible, either overtly or covertly.

Possible Scenarios – Iran

As of mid-January 2026, indications are increasing of Israeli–American preparations for the possibility of a direct strike against Iran.

Iran is at a point of strategic boiling, characterized by external military pressure that appears closer than ever, alongside internal pressure. Regime opponents are calling for external assistance; however, delays in such assistance—apparently due to operational considerations related to changes in strike plans and defensive preparations—could lead to a fading of protests. The current balance of power is asymmetrical: the regime is equipped with weapons, surveillance systems, and intelligence capabilities, while protesters take to the streets unarmed and struggle to generate an escalation sufficient to produce meaningful change or damage key regime assets and personnel.

Scenario 1: Broad Strike + Armed Internal Escalation

In this scenario, a broader strike targets not only military capabilities—such as a preemptive attack on the ballistic missile program and completion of strikes against the remaining elements of the nuclear project—but also regime symbols, command-and-control facilities, and senior Revolutionary Guard officials down to the mid-level, potentially mirroring the operational model applied against Hezbollah.

Simultaneously, existing protests expand into a multi-centered, cross-class, and cross-regional uprising. The regime struggles to maintain control, is forced to divide forces between internal and external fronts, and a tangible fracture emerges in its governing capacity.

Even in this scenario, immediate regime collapse is unlikely. Rather, a prolonged process is likely to unfold in which regime elements fight to preserve control inside and outside Iran, employing extreme force while accelerating regime-preserving dynamics. This scenario risks creating a vacuum into which other terrorist actors may enter, potentially leading to a broad civil war between regime opponents and extremist regime supporters.

Air strikes alone, even if extensive, can weaken the regime but not overthrow it. A broad uprising by organized armed militias within Iran, supporting an internal assault, could provide the missing ground-force component currently absent from the Western–Iranian conflict equation. Israel, as a small state with limited manpower, cannot afford prolonged cycles of confrontation with Iran akin to past campaigns in Gaza. Conversely, regime overthrow requires offensive actions that cannot necessarily be executed in a single phase. A limited, air-only strike risks creating a short-term illusion of success while intensifying the threat in the medium term.

Scenario 2: Regime Collapse / Overthrow

This is an extreme but not impossible scenario and is not limited to a single round of confrontation. If internal fragmentation within the regime and its armed forces leads to mass defections and internal opposition, the internal balance of power could shift toward a national coup.

However, while millions oppose the regime—particularly among younger, urban populations—millions also support it and reject a Western, secular alternative, perceived as no less oppressive than the Shah's regime overthrown during the revolution. The absence of consensus around the Shah's son, Reza Pahlavi, who lives in exile and supports his compatriots from abroad, is another evidence of that. Extremist elements would likely remain active even after regime collapse, seeking to reignite the Islamic Revolution.

Interim Assessment

The regime is weaker but not deterred, despite looming military threats. Internally, it retains significant coercive capacity and the ability to project regional and global terror.

Any decision, action, or failure to act decisively toward regime overthrow will shape not only Iran's future, but the stability of the Middle East and the global order as a whole. Iran in 2026 will likely continue to pose a multi-dimensional threat.

2026 **Israel's Strategic Assessment**
GAZA

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■ Current status: Ceasfire

TRUMP PEACE PLAN

15-member body

15-member National Committee for the Administration of the Gaza Strip (NCAG)

$50 Investment

$50 billion investment framework established in Trump's original "Peace to Prosperity" plan.

Demilitarization

The Peace Council's ultimatum demands Hamas's immediate demilitarization as a prerequisite for transitioning Gaza to a new technocratic government.

WAR GAINS

254	Hostages Returned out of 255
+260	Senior Hamas Officials Eliminated
+95%	Missiles and Rocket Supplies Destroyed
58%	Hamas Lost 58% of the Gaza Strip

Projections Regarding Gaza

Adv. Yifa Segal

After over two years of infighting in Gaza, following the October 7 massacre, the Trump administration has declared its intention to proceed with Phase Two of its Gaza plan. This phase currently includes the establishment of the Board of Peace and a transitional technocratic Palestinian governance committee.

Main issues:

Disarmament of Hamas

Unless Israel takes action in Gaza, the disarmament of Hamas is highly unlikely in the near term within this framework. Hamas will not relinquish its weapons voluntarily, and no international force has demonstrated a willingness to confront Hamas on the ground. The United States seems determined to preserve relative quiet on the Palestinian front, while using Gaza as a platform to promote broader international cooperation under American leadership. This approach prioritizes stability and coalition management over the decisive resolution of underlying security threats. At the same time, the current U.S. administration has shown that it advances American interests first, while also recognizing that Israeli security, economic stability, and regional integration are closely aligned with U.S. strategic interests. This alignment creates space to exert Israeli influence over a critical topic for its security.

Return of Ran Gvili

The return of the body of the last hostage, Ran Gvili remains a sticking point that Israel insists on fulfilling before moving to Phase B. At the moment, Hamas still refuses to secure his release. While the US and the BoP remain committed to the return of all hostages, and Hamas itself pledged to do so as part of the cease-fire agreement, Israel should demand the parties to fulfill this commitment before the next phase takes place.

Influence of Israel's Rivals

The power and influence of Israel's rivals—primarily Turkey and Qatar—within the Board of Peace and in shaping the future of Gaza are deeply concerning, particularly with regard to the future of Hamas and other jihadi groups. Discussions are reportedly underway about including additional problematic actors such as Belarus or even Russia. Such a composition raises serious concerns regarding effectiveness, impartiality, and alignment with Israeli security interests.

The Technocratic Government

The proposed technocratic government for Gaza is also troubling. It is largely populated by familiar figures, many of whom have ties to either the Palestinian Authority or Hamas. These

individuals represent continuity rather than change: the same ideological mindset that prioritizes the destruction of Israel, perpetuates corruption, and relies heavily on international aid rather than building a self-sufficient economy. This risks recreating the very conditions that have led to repeated cycles of violence.

Recommendations

It is crucial for Israel to maintain a strong and positive relationship with the United States. Israel should work within the existing framework while clearly demonstrating to American decision-makers how targeted tactical adjustments can help realize the broader vision they seek while integrating positive, rather than radical and destabilizing actors.

A central insight must be emphasized: governance by technocrats who are effectively "more of the same," or a return of control to the Palestinian Authority, will almost certainly produce the same outcomes—violence, corruption, lack of cooperation, and continued radicalization. If the stated vision of coexistence, a flourishing Gaza, international cooperation, and de-radicalization is to be fulfilled, a fundamentally new leadership model must be introduced.

U.S. envoy Thomas Barak meeting with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun

This new model can operate under the existing Board of Peace framework, but with substantially improved prospects for success. Since full disarmament of Hamas would require another intense military campaign—an undesirable option at this stage—a gradual strategy aimed at reducing Hamas's power and control should be adopted.

Population is key to success: As Hamas derives its strength from its ability to control the population by stealing humanitarian aid, smuggling weapons through aid mechanisms, exploiting civilians as human shields, and enforcing dependency - it is clear that the more civilians voluntarily move away from Hamas-controlled areas, the more humanitarian aid can be diverted directly to the population—and the weaker Hamas becomes.

Practically, this requires the establishment of humanitarian zones in Israeli-controlled areas along the "yellow line," where civilians can live safely and access aid without Hamas interference. These zones can also support the reconstruction vision outlined by President Trump. Reconstruction will require labor, and Gazans residing in these zones can be vetted by Israeli security and permitted to work, gradually reducing their dependence on Hamas and long-term aid.

Success in one zone can lead to the establishment of additional zones. Within these humanitarian cities, local leadership should be appointed—preferably tribal leaders who enjoy genuine legitimacy. Over time, and contingent upon proven cooperation and effectiveness, these leaders can evolve into the nucleus of a new Gazan leadership. Initially operating as local autonomies under the Board of Peace, this model offers a realistic path toward a de-radicalized society—free from terror indoctrination and less dependent on international aid.

Throughout this process, the IDF must maintain a high level of readiness in Gaza, particularly in protecting the yellow line from violations, as it has done in recent months. Israel must remain vigilant and prepared for the possibility of renewed intense hostilities.

The humanitarian cities should be spearheaded by Israel to ensure effective security control, robust vetting procedures, close monitoring of local leadership, and integration into employment-generating projects.

In conclusion, Israel should cooperate with the Trump plan while pressing for adjustments that improve its chances of success. While the disarmament of Hamas may take longer under this approach, it offers a viable path to achieving Israel's security objectives without another major war, while preserving both international and local legitimacy. At the same time, the return of the body of Ran Gvili must remain a top national priority. Israel should continue diplomatic pressure, offer financial incentives, and pursue all available channels to secure his return. In the end, Gaza should serve as a springboard to a larger normalization between Israel and the Arab world, led by the United States, to secure a more stable region and global security architecture.

2026 Israel's Strategic Assessment
LEBANON

■ Current status: Ceasefire

AFTERMATH

Hezbollah Isolated

Lebanon rejects resistance; fractured group stops retaliating against Israeli strikes.

Lifeline Severed

Iran prioritizes survival, cutting funds and forcing Hezbollah to ration

Invasion Capabilities

Despite losing many of the strategic assets required for an invasion of Israel, Hezbollah retains thousands of elite commando troops.

WAR GAINS

+3.5K Hezbollah Fighters Killed in Battle

+154 Senior Hezbollah Officials Eliminated

+80% Missiles and Rocket Supplies Destroyed

+13K Targets Hit Inside Lebanon

The Lebanese Front - The Fight Against Hezbollah

Moran Alaluf

Despite severe damage to its military capabilities, Hezbollah has demonstrated that a state-backed terrorist organization cannot be dismantled through military pressure alone. Although Hezbollah holds only five ministerial portfolios within the Lebanese government, it remains the most significant military-terrorist force in Lebanon. Its relations with Iran persist and are strategically integrated into the broader threat posed to Israel and the West. Despite the elimination of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah and the significant degradation of the Radwan Force during the pager operation, the organization is recovering at a rapid pace.

At present, the moderate Sunni axis is not fulfilling a meaningful role in constraining Hezbollah, and the organization's recovery is enabled by extensive international infrastructure operating outside Lebanon.

Despite daily IDF strikes against Hezbollah, and a ceasefire enforced under Israel's new policy framework—against the backdrop of repeated violations by the terrorist organization—the threat posed by Hezbollah remains substantial in the medium to long term. The IDF's presence on the ground, alongside sustained strikes, deters Hezbollah in the short term from invading Israel. Conversely, the IDF's capacity to maintain a security buffer zone and sustain multi-theater operations over an indefinite period is limited. At this stage, neither the Lebanese government nor the Lebanese Armed Forces have succeeded in restraining Hezbollah's activity or rehabilitation; in practice, this role is being carried out by the IDF. Accordingly, a large-scale operational campaign appears necessary to remove the threat. Its delay may stem from the growing likelihood of a near-term confrontation between Israel and Iran, and Israel's desire to preserve offensive and defensive capabilities for the primary flashpoint—Iran.

Hezbollah as a Test Case for Confrontation with Iran

At the outset of the War, Hezbollah operated as a structured and organized terror army, possessing advanced capabilities, including plans for incursions and the conquering of northern Israeli communities and potentially beyond.

The direct confrontation between Hezbollah and Israel, ongoing for more than two years, has weakened the organization; however, a near-term escalation appears increasingly likely—either as part of a broader conflict with Iran, to which Hezbollah would be compelled to join, or through an Israeli-initiated operation aimed at eliminating Hezbollah's remaining capabilities. Both scenarios underscore the inherent difficulty in dismantling a terror army.

A comparison between Hezbollah and Iran reveals the depth of the strategic challenge. Dismantling a state regime such as Iran, with a population of tens of millions, is exponentially

more complex. Iran, unlike Hezbollah, is not merely a terrorist organization but operates as a terror state, with resources far exceeding those available to Hezbollah.

The paradox is that if Hezbollah has not yet been dismantled despite sustained international effort, the lesson is that dismantling Iran requires a multi-layered strategy rather than a single, discrete military event.

Social Influence as a Tool of Recovery – Da'wa as a Strategic Component

Western policy has tended to underestimate the importance of "da'wa", or popular rapprochement, among terrorist organizations as a tool for penetrating communities, fundraising, recruiting supporters, and mobilizing operatives. Hezbollah's ministerial portfolios within the Lebanese government are indeed limited compared to the past, yet they are sufficient to preserve public influence and rehabilitate the organization's standing through institutionalized and ostensibly legal corruption.

Control over the ministries of finance, health, labor, administrative development, and environmental protection serves as a long-term catalyst for organizational recovery: influencing budgets and grants while favoring loyalists over opponents; control of hospitals and preferential treatment in referrals and care; employment assistance for supporters; allocation of public-sector jobs; control over reforms and public services; land control; and the use of NGOs as cover for terrorist activity.

Regional and International Threats

Hezbollah's activities are transcontinental in scope, operating terrorist and criminal networks worldwide. In Europe, Australia, and Africa, dormant terror cells are in place, awaiting a "day of command," posing a threat to Western and Israeli interests and, in particular, to Jewish communities.

Its global financing capabilities are expected to remain intact even if the regime collapses in Iran, as its funding sources are not limited to Iran and include extensive cooperation with drug cartels in Latin America.

Recommendations

- The Lebanese government should fulfill its pledge to disarm Hezbollah and lead a de-Iranization of Lebanon, as a linchpin for regional stability. Israel continues to hammer Hezbollah military infrastructure and use its prerogative as part of the cease-fire agreement. The United States, France, and regional Arab actors also offered help to Lebanon. However, with no sufficient and clear action on the part of the Lebanese government, Hezbollah will continue to attempt to grow and cast shadow over efforts to restabilize the region.

- Strengthening external funding sources beyond Lebanon, particularly in Latin America, Europe, and West Africa, primarily through drug-trafficking routes. Increased reliance on ties with drug cartels in Latin America and West Africa is expected, as well as a crackdown on illicit drug trafficking in the United States as part of the Trump administration's focus on homeland security.

- Crackdown on dormant terror cells in Europe, Australia, Africa, and elsewhere, awaiting an H-Hour, while strengthening Israeli intelligence cooperation with local authorities.

In any scenario in which the Iranian regime faces a genuine threat to its survival, Iran's proxies—the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and pro-Iranian militias in Syria and Iraq—are likely to launch coordinated multi-theater attacks against Israel. Israel must continue to act decisively to dismantle these terror proxies and prevent the emergence of a new ring of fire under the guise of Sunni states.
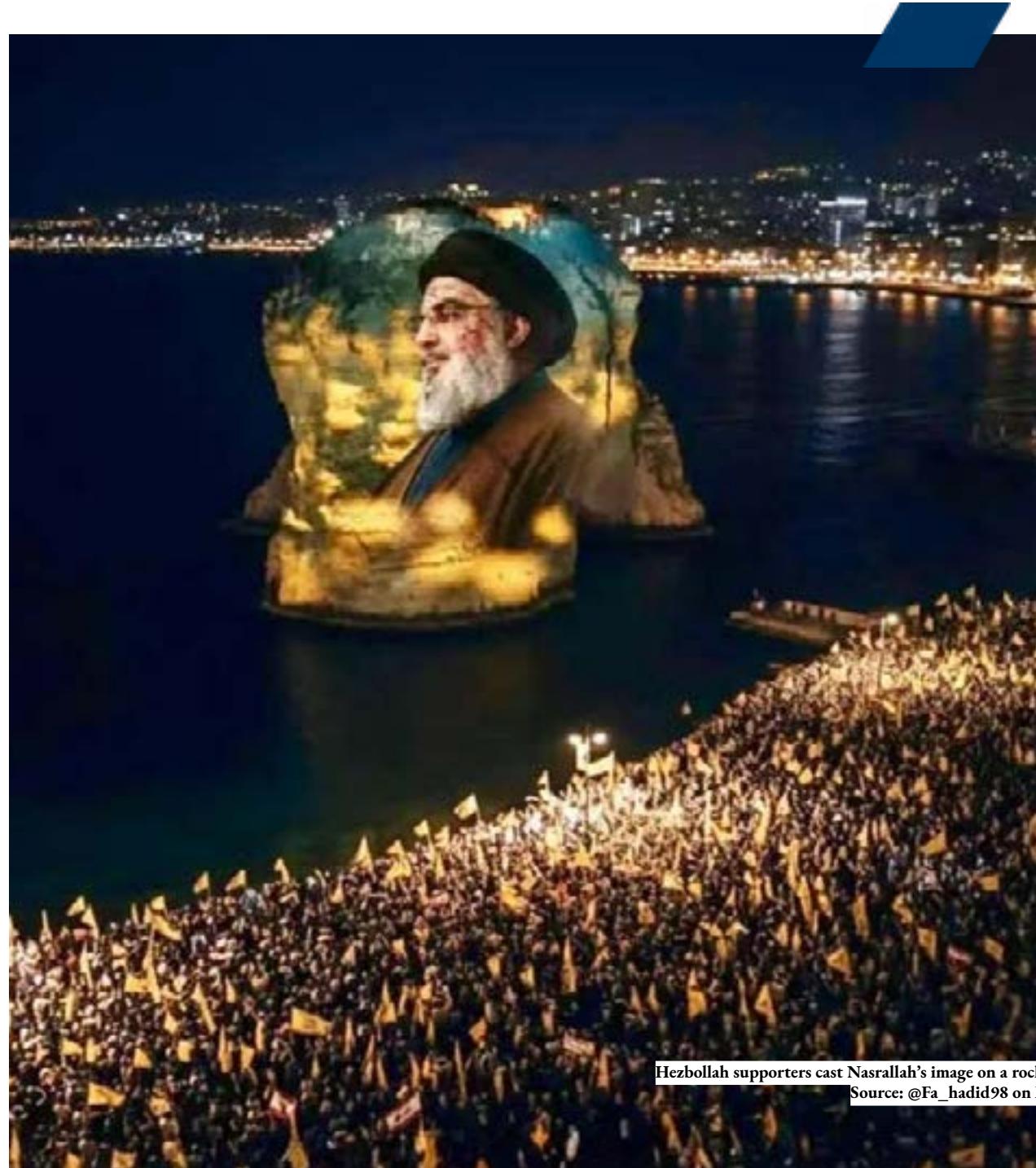
Hezbollah supporters cast Nasrallah's image on a rock.
Source: @Fa_hadid98 on X

2026
Israel's Strategic Assessment
SYRIA

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■ Current status: Negotiations

NEW REGIME

Ottoman Shadow

Turkey's growing dominance in Syria creates a hostile new threat on Israel's northern border

Western Legitimacy

Western powers legitimize Syria, lifting sanctions and ending terror status

Fusion Mechanism

Israel and Syria established a US-backed hotline to coordinate security and prevent accidental border escalation.

WAR GAINS 2024

+650 — Sq KM of Syrian Territory Conquered by Israel

+98% — Of the Syrian Navy was Destroyed

+90% — Military Equipment was Eliminated

Syria

Eran Lahav

A year after the coup that ousted Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Ahmad al-Shar'aa's administration controls roughly 60% of Syrian territory, with the remainder divided between eastern tribal elements, Kurdish-led SDF forces in the northeast, and a Druze enclave around Sweida in the south. The Kurds dominate most oil infrastructure, while Sweida functions as a semi-autonomous Druze stronghold under Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, creating overlapping spheres of influence rather than a coherent state. Erdogan's Turkey has been decisive in sustaining and elevating al-Shar'aa: providing weapons, funding, and an open border that facilitated the flow of foreign jihadist fighters who remain a disciplined backbone of his army. Chechen, Central Asian, and other foreign militants openly display jihadist symbols in exercises and parades, signaling ideological continuity beneath political rebranding.

Harming sectarian groups

The Syrian regime's failure to integrate minorities has merged with extreme sectarian violence. In March 2025, approximately 1,700 Alawites were massacred in western Syria. In July, large-scale killings of Druze near Damascus included attacks on religious figures, while Christian communities suffered assaults on churches and sacred sites. These atrocities reinforce perceptions that al-Shar'aa pursues a Sunni-Islamist project disguised as national reconstruction. They also led to open military interventions by Israel to halt these violent attacks, as the Israeli leadership openly pledged to defend the "blood covenant" between Israel and the Druze people. This factor also serves at the center of the talks over Israeli-Syrian normalization.

Violence has spilled over into Israel. After the Sweida atrocities, Druze citizens of Israel crossed into Syria in protest before being returned, underscoring the porous and emotionally charged Druze space between Israel, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Sweida was effectively under semi-siege, with local Druze forces, Assad-loyal Alawite militias, and other armed actors creating a high risk of renewed internal explosions near Israel's border.

Turkey and the Kurds

Erdogan's Turkey treats Syria as a client state, aiming to replace Russia and Iran as Damascus' main strategic sponsor. Ankara uses al-Shar'aa to contain the Kurds, rejecting YPG integration into the transitional government, and entrenching Turkish forces in northern Syria as a buffer against the SDF. Iraq's Kurdish leadership in Erbil, under Nechirvan Barzani, pursues its own track with Turkey, adding complexity to the Kurdish theater.

Simultaneously, Turkey and Syria's interests shift toward the Mediterranean. The city of Tartus has been leased for 30 years to Dubai's DP World for $800 million, while Latakia is operated by French shipping giant CMA CGM under a long-term revenue-sharing agreement. Ankara signals intentions for a maritime boundary deal with al-Shar'aa bypassing Cyprus, potentially

placing Turkish and Syrian vessels near Israeli waters - another potential friction zone in the eastern Mediterranean.

Alongside the growing Turkish, Gulf, and European commercial footprint in Latakia and Tartus, Russia's role has been sharply downgraded. Moscow still retains its permanent military facilities at Tartus and Khmeimim, but since Assad's fall it has lost effective control over port management and faces restrictions on access and operations. This reduced Russian presence reflects a broader shift in Syria's Mediterranean arena, where Moscow is no longer the dominant external actor and must compete with Turkey and Western-linked economic stakeholders for influence.

Israel has leveraged Assad's fall to deepen strategic depth around the Hermon and Sweida, keeping jihadist forces from the Golan. The November 2025 firefight at Beit Jann, 11 km from the border, in which six IDF personnel were wounded by Jamaa Islamiyya, linked to Hezbollah, highlights how close jihadist actors operate to Israeli lines. The Israeli government declared it intends to remain in the Syrian Golan for the foreseeable future.

As to normalization talks, the three-party talks in Paris between Israel, Syria, and the U.S. produced only a limited outcome: a coordination mechanism to prevent tactical friction, with U.S. involvement. The parties hope that a breakthrough can happen soon.

Syria insists on linking any security arrangement to Israeli withdrawal from the Hermon, a demand Jerusalem rejects, defining the Hermon as non-negotiable. Israel has also blocked Russian deployment initiatives in southern Syria, ensuring no foreign presence limits IDF freedom of action, while monitoring Syrian efforts to purchase strategic weapons from Russia or Turkey. The Druze factor remains a key element, with the Israeli demand to secure this minority's rights and freedoms. Israel also foresees an opportunity to secure a coalition of minorities in the Middle East, between Jews and others - starting from the Druze, and continuing to the Kurds, Christians, Yazidis, and others. Israelis also hope this foothold can secure safe passage from Israel all the way east along the Fertile Crescent.

Strategic recommendations for Israel:

Freedom of action

Israel must maintain Hermon deployments as a red line, rejecting attempts to link security arrangements to territorial withdrawal, and continue blocking Russian or other foreign deployments that could constrain IDF operations or create de facto guarantees for Damascus.

Prevent Syrian strategic rearmament

Israel should employ a layered approach: diplomatic pressure along with intelligence disruption, and where necessary, precise kinetic action, to block Syria's acquisition of advanced air-defense systems and other strategic capabilities from Russia or Turkey. These efforts must be embedded within a calibrated "campaign between wars," systematically degrading any jihadist, Iranian or Hezbollah military infrastructure operating from Syrian territory while preserving escalation control and strategic deniability.

Exploit internal fissures

Israel should discreetly deepen ties with minority groups in Syria such as the Druze, Kurds, and Christian actors as intelligence sources and local balancing forces, without overt sponsorship that could delegitimize them. Contingency planning is required to provide rapid humanitarian and defensive support to Israeli Druze communities if violence spills over from Sweida.

Shape maritime and Western arenas

Israel should coordinate with Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, and the U.S. to preempt Turkish-Syrian maritime initiatives that bypass EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) agreements and threaten Israeli waters. At the same time, Israel should warn Western partners on al-Shar'a's jihadist and sectarian practices, linking reconstruction funds and port deals to limit minority abuses, and threatening force build-ups near Israel's borders.

Israel's Strategic Assessment
JUDEA & SAMARIA

2026

Total Casualties	Total Injured	Foiled Attack
25	25	1372

● 2023 ● 2024 ● 2025

Terror Attacks
- 6,984
- 5,765
- 4,744

0 1K 2K 3K 4K 5K 6K 7K 8K 9K

Foiled Attacks
- 362
- 1,058
- 1,372

0 0.4K 0.8K 1.2K 1.6K

Casualties
- 52
- 45
- 25

0 10 20 30 40 50 60
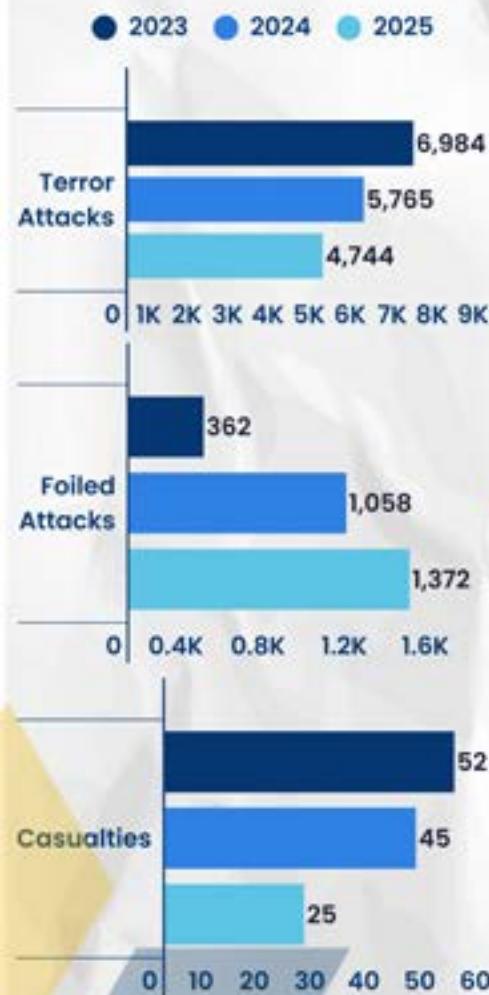
Terrorism 2023-25

2023

6,984 Total Terrorist Attacks
2,880 Stone Throwing
1,750 Molotov Cocktails
743 Improvised explosive device
114 Arson
289 Shootings
39 Stabbing
18 Car Ramming

2024

5,765 Total Terrorist Attacks
3,778 Stone Throwing
843 Molotov Cocktails
536 Improvised explosive device
364 Arson
179 Shootings
44 Stabbing
18 Car Ramming

2025

4,744 Total Te...
3,550 Stone T...
485 Moloto...
300 Improv... device
322 Arson
21 Shooti...
21 Stabbi...
20 Car Ram...

The Judea and Samaria Front in 2026: Challenges and Opportunities

Dr. Omer Dostri

Despite the significant improvement on the ground in Judea and Samaria since October 7, 2023 which resulted from a conceptual shift and Israel's transition to an offensive and proactive approach, the arena continues to be characterized by structural instability, a high potential for escalation, and a range of evolving strategic threats. Chief among them is the Palestinian Authority-led rhetorical campaign against Israel, its continued lawfare and Pay-for-Slay policy, and its inability to control key cities and areas. Hamas-inspired cells are constantly on the radar of Israeli authorities, preventing an October 7-like scenario from this front, including the thwarting of rocket units, tunnel building, and organized terrorism.

The Current Reality

The security situation in Judea and Samaria has improved significantly compared to previous years. A central factor in this improvement is the conceptual shift among decision-makers and within the security establishment following October 7, 2023 which led to a transition from a defensive and deterrence-based approach to one centered on offensive initiative and operational creativity.

In the years preceding October 7, Israel refrained from conducting extensive offensive operations in Judea and Samaria due to concerns that such actions could lead to a "unification of the arenas," including the opening of a front in the Gaza Strip. In addition, there were concerns that escalation in Judea and Samaria could evolve into a full-scale intifada.

This reality resulted in a significant thinning of IDF forces in many areas of Judea and Samaria over the years, the strengthening of terrorist organizations and infrastructure, and the outbreak of a deadly and widespread wave of terrorism beginning in 2021. Israel's most significant response was Operation "Home and Garden" in northern Samaria in the summer of 2023, which consisted of a series of limited military actions involving rapid IDF incursions into terrorist strongholds followed by swift withdrawals. As a result, the operation failed to produce a lasting change on the ground.

Since October 7, Israel and the IDF have adopted a new approach. Rather than entering areas briefly and withdrawing - thereby allowing terrorist organizations to hide and then re-emerge once forces have departed - the IDF established a permanent presence in two central refugee camps in Tulkarm and Jenin (northern Samaria). This effort led to a thorough dismantling of major terrorist hubs that had been neglected for decades. Accordingly, according to IDF data summarizing 2025, there was an overall 78% decrease in Palestinian terrorist incidents in Judea and Samaria.

Another policy shift occurred regarding so-called "popular terrorism" (stone-throwing and Molotov cocktails). IDF Central Command authorized soldiers to use lethal force immediately against any terrorist throwing stones at a major highway. According to IDF data, this policy led to a 17% decrease in incidents of "popular terrorism."

At the same time, Israel has yet to address other major threats. For example, according to IDF data, approximately 70,000 illegal entrants from Judea and Samaria are currently present inside Israel, having crossed through breaches in the barrier from Palestinian Authority controlled towns. These individuals undergo no security screening and are not assessed for past involvement or affiliation with terrorism. In the past, numerous attacks have been carried out by illegal entrants, making this a ticking time bomb that could explode at any moment.

Threat Map in Judea and Samaria – 2026

1. A Scenario of Hamas Takeover in Judea and Samaria

The possible death or incapacitation of the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, could create a significant political and security vacuum in Judea and Samaria. In light of the weakness of PA institutions, the erosion of public legitimacy, and the absence of an orderly succession mechanism, there is a tangible risk of an attempted Hamas takeover of Palestinian cities in Judea and Samaria. In the past, the PA's attempt to regain control over areas such as Jenin were met with fierce opposition by local organized terror cells and demonstrated the PA's inability to control its own population. The IDF keeps leading operations to crack down on these attempts by Hamas to form an organized front. Such a scenario could lead to the collapse of PA security forces, a sharp escalation in terrorism, and the need for broad and prolonged Israeli security involvement.

2. The Threat of Imitating the October 7 Attacks

The events of October 7, 2023 created a new operational model within the Palestinian terrorist arena. In 2026, there is concern over attempts to replicate this model in Judea and Samaria, including infiltrations into Israeli communities, coordinated attacks on transportation routes and security forces, kidnapping attempts, and multi-pronged operations. The proximity of PA controlled areas to Israeli population centers, combined with the dense rural-urban terrain, significantly increases the level of risk. "Friendly-fire" type incidents, in which PA police officers turn their weapons against their Israeli counterparts, illustrate the potential risk in having the PA and its forces joining the armed opposition to Israel.

3. Strengthening of Local Terrorist Infrastructure and Groups

Despite a marked improvement in the security situation due to Israel's offensive initiative in Judea and Samaria, there remains the possibility of renewed strengthening of terrorist organizations in areas where the IDF has not yet operated. This trend could undermine existing gains and generate new centers of terrorist activity.

4. Potential for a Renewed Wave of Terrorist Attacks

The potential for a renewed wave of terrorism remains high. A combination of ongoing incitement, daily friction, localized triggers in the political or religious arenas, and the weakening of the Palestinian Authority could ignite a widespread wave of attacks, both through organized terrorist frameworks and by lone perpetrators.

5. The Threat of Illegal Infiltration into Israeli Territory

The continued existence of breaches in the security barrier and partial enforcement enables large-scale infiltration of illegal entrants from Judea and Samaria into Israel. Beyond the civilian and criminal aspects, this constitutes a serious security threat, allowing concealment, intelligence gathering, and the execution of attacks from within Israel's interior. Without a rapid and systemic response, this threat is expected to continue undermining security stability throughout 2026.

Recommendations

In order to address the various threats in 2026 and to preserve the significant achievements of the past two years, Israel is required to take action on several levels.

First, Israel must immediately and rapidly repair breaches in the security barrier in northern Samaria and around Jerusalem in order to prevent continued infiltration of illegal entrants into its territory. This must be accompanied by increased patrol forces along the barrier and a policy change that includes the use of live fire to neutralize anyone identified as attempting to cross the barrier illegally.

Palestinian telegram channels praising the terrorist who tried to run over IDF soldiers. Source: al-mutared on telegram, https-_t.me_westmutared

Second, Israel must continue the positive trend of offensive initiative and operational creativity against terrorist strongholds in Judea and Samaria. This includes deepening the security hold in areas where the IDF is already present (Jenin and Tulkarm) and increasing pressure on villages in northern Samaria identified as significant terrorist hubs (Tamun, Tubas, Fara'a, and Aqaba). In addition, the IDF will need to address other major cities considered terrorist strongholds, such as Nablus, including taking control of the Balata refugee camp.

Next, to prevent attempts to replicate the October 7 attacks in Judea and Samaria, the IDF must deepen, expand, and strengthen coordination and cooperation with the Community Emergency Response Teams and civilian defense forces in Jewish communities throughout Judea and Samaria, alongside reinforcing IDF troop deployments in sensitive and complex areas.

But finally, and most crucially, Israel must lead a strategic process in Judea and Samaria rather than maintain a reactive and managerial line. With a sympathetic Trump administration that is comfortable with challenging long-held paradigms, Israel has an opportunity to find alternatives to the Palestinian Authority, including local autonomies ("clans" or "emirates") while enacting its sovereignty over the Jordan Valley and vast areas around the territories, including all Israeli towns. Palestinians should maintain their self-governance through local institutions, parliaments, courts, municipal services, and local police forces. Lacking strategic thinking, Israel will keep "emptying the ocean with a teaspoon", fight terrorism as the PA demonstrates inaptitude, and risk a possible Hamas overthrow a few miles from its cities. The new reality in Gaza therefore offers Israel a strategic experiment to test these assumptions on local leaderships, and if successful, implement them in Judea and Samaria as well - taking a Palestinian state off the table, and charting its own course for the future.
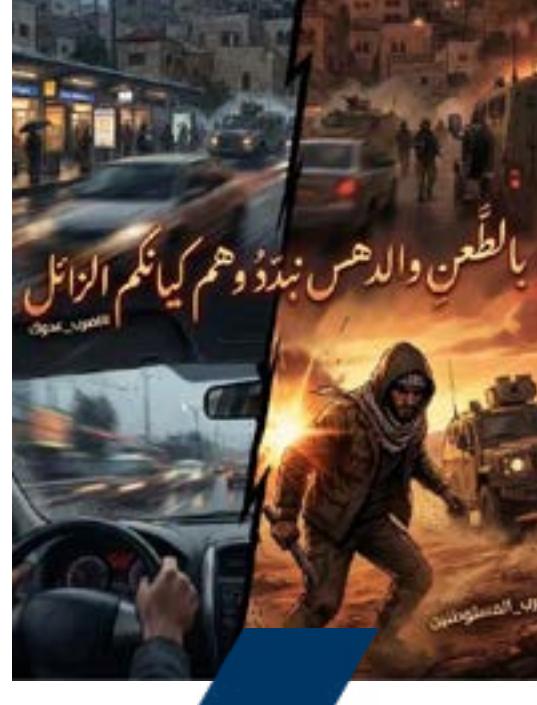
2026 Israel's Strategic Assessment
HOUTHIS

■ Current status: At War

WAR EFFECTS

Strategic Shift
Iran transformed the Houthis into a strategic proxy, making the Red Sea a central battlefront

Economic Damage
Phased attacks paralyzed Eilat and disrupted global shipping to impose severe long-term economic costs

Future Threat
Houthis gain power and revenue from conflict, forcing Israel to fortify the Red Sea front.

Southern Siege

+375 — Missiles and Drones Fired at Israel since October 2023

+$50M — Houthi threats Cuse $50M in losses bankrupting Eilat Port

+300 — 300 ships Attacks in the Read Sea damaging 100 and sinking 6

Yemen & The Red Sea: Threatening Global Maritime Routes

Eran Lahav

Yemen and the Red Sea have become a central arena in Iran's regional strategy, transforming the Houthis from a localized insurgent movement into a strategic lever within Tehran's multi-front pressure campaign against Israel and the West. The challenge is not limited to Houthi military capabilities alone, but to the consolidation of a Yemeni-based axis able to manipulate a global maritime chokepoint under Iranian guidance while gradually eroding Israeli and international deterrence.

Over the past decade, the Red Sea has shifted from a commercial corridor into a dense strategic arena shaped by regional conflict and great-power competition. Its geography, linking the Indian Ocean through Bab al-Mandab to the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean, makes it indispensable for global trade and energy flows. Even brief disruptions sharply increase shipping costs and supply-chain instability. For Israel, the Red Sea has shifted from a peripheral theater centered on Eilat into a core front following October 7, embedded within the broader confrontation with Iran and its proxy network.

Since the outbreak of the War, the Houthis have deliberately repositioned themselves as an operational arm of the resistance axis. Their involvement unfolded in phases:

1. The first phase began in October 2023 with missile and drone launches toward Eilat and southern Israel, framed as conditional attacks tied to developments in Gaza and labeled with symbolic names emphasizing Palestinian solidarity. The second phase opened in November 2023 with the seizure of the Galaxy Leader, marking the transition to sustained maritime operations against commercial shipping.

2. Subsequent phases expanded in both scope and ambition. The Houthis claimed responsibility for attacks on nearly two hundred commercial vessels, forcing many shipping companies to reroute around the Cape of Good Hope. In early 2024, operations broadened to include American and British shipping and naval assets, followed by intensified missile launches toward Israel's central region, Ben Gurion Airport, and ports. Nighttime launches emphasized psychological pressure, while claims regarding hypersonic capabilities, though disputed, served propaganda and deterrence objectives.

Throughout these phases, the Houthis invested heavily in building credibility. Their leadership consistently followed through on public threats, launching attacks at predictable intervals to establish themselves as a persistent and reliable actor within the axis. This consistency enhanced their prestige among Iran-aligned actors and facilitated accelerated armament during the conflict.

Israel has led unprecedented strikes against Houthi infrastructure, breaking previous thought records on the reach of the Israeli Air Force, and attacking the Hudeida Port, power stations, the airport and multiple other targets over 2,000km away. The US joined the strikes by means of its aircraft carriers and various assets around the region. Despite these successful efforts, the Houthis found ways to keep attacking Israel while posing a significant threat on global maritime routes.

The maritime threat rests on an expanding arsenal supported primarily by Iran, including anti-ship cruise and ballistic missiles, weaponized and reconnaissance drones, and coastal radar systems. Operational patterns evolved from symbolic attacks into sustained maritime harassment designed to normalize disruption. Semi-deniable strikes against commercial vessels, justified by minimal or indirect links to Israel, aimed to undermine freedom of navigation and impose long-term economic costs. The effective paralysis **of commercial activity at the city of Eilat became a symbolic achievement within the 'axis of resistance'.**

Beyond ideology, the Houthis derive tangible benefits from continued confrontation. Internally, external conflict diverts attention from economic collapse and governance failures, while legitimizing tighter domestic control and arrests of dissidents. Economically, the Houthis reportedly extract protection payments from shipping companies in exchange for safe passage, generating significant monthly revenue. Regionally, their campaign elevated their standing within the axis and constrained Arab states wary of appearing complicit in strikes on Yemen.

Internationally, the conflict accelerated the militarization of the Red Sea. The area already hosts numerous foreign bases, particularly in Djibouti, operated by the United States, China, France, Japan, and others. The war triggered additional deployments and reciprocal escalation. Indications of Russian and Chinese assistance to the Houthis, alongside tactical cooperation with Somali and jihadist groups, such as Al-Shabab Al-Mujahedin despite ideological differences, further destabilize the maritime environment and increase the risk of spillover.

The partial American-Houthi understandings brokered in 2024 produced only temporary calm. Renewed attacks in 2025, including the sinking of commercial vessels with civilian casualties, demonstrated the fragility of these arrangements and highlighted Washington's reluctance to reengage decisively unless American assets are directly targeted. This dynamic emboldens the Houthis and reinforces Iran's strategy of calibrated escalation below the threshold of full Western retaliation.

Recommendations

1. For Israel, the Red Sea is now a critical strategic axis. Military readiness requires strengthened naval and air defenses against missile and drone threats, with the capacity for precise, limited strikes.

2. Situational awareness must improve through maritime intelligence and early-warning systems to prevent surprise. International coordination with the U.S. and Red Sea partners is essential for legitimacy and burden-sharing.

3. On the rhetoric plane, strategic framing should present Houthi actions as attacks on global commons, not a bilateral dispute.

4. Economic resilience demands diversified trade routes and reduced reliance on vulnerable chokepoints, ensuring stability amid ongoing proxy and maritime threats.

Türkiye

Key judgments

1. Erdoğan is **positioning Türkiye as a strategic competitor to Israel** through incremental moves: delegitimization rhetoric, coercive economic and transport measures, and institutional insertion into Gaza-related governance frameworks.

2. The **Türkiye-Qatar axis and Ankara's protection of Muslim Brotherhood**-linked politics function as an influence platform that strengthens Türkiye's leverage in the Hamas-adjacent ecosystem and expands narrative power.

3. Syria is the highest-probability arena for unwanted Israel-Türkiye contact: Ankara prioritizes Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa (al-Julani), with ISIS ties while keeping a thin deconfliction channel with Israel to prevent incidents.

4. The Eastern Mediterranean continues and increases to be miscalculated-prone due to Blue Homeland doctrine signaling and repeated maritime zoning disputes with Greece, with escalation risk around energy corridors and air-maritime activity.

5. The Horn of Africa has become a friction line after Israel's recognition of Somaliland, which Erdoğan framed as destabilizing while deepening Türkiye-Somalia security and energy posture.

6. The Trump-Erdoğan leader-to-leader channel creates process risk for Israel: decisions can move quickly and personally, widening Turkish roles in U.S.-led mechanisms affecting Israeli equities.

What changed (late 2025 to January 2026)

- **Somaliland:** Israel recognized Somaliland; Erdoğan condemned it alongside Somalia's president and coupled it with Türkiye's plan to drill offshore Somalia in 2026.

- **Syria Under ISIS Risk:** Damascus expanded control after Kurdish pullbacks; ISIS detainees escaped from Shaddadi amid clashes.

- **Gaza Forum Risk:** Trump's "Board of Peace" invitations are active; Türkiye has been invited as a founding member.

- **Eastern Med Signaling:** Greece signaled possible territorial waters extension; zoning disputes persist.

Drivers

- **Ideological Leadership:** Erdoğan uses neo-Ottoman and civilizational framing on Gaza, including calls for an "Islamic alliance" against Israel.

- **Transactional Autonomy:** Ankara compartmentalizes, keeping deconfliction where it benefits Türkiye (Syria) while competing elsewhere (Gaza, Horn of Africa).

- **Influence Rails:** Partnership with Qatar and defense of Brotherhood-aligned politics expand reach; U.S. officials have raised concerns about antisemitic depictions in Qatar-based media.

- **Maritime Doctrine:** Blue Homeland supplies a justification architecture for maximalist claims and coercive signaling.

- **Defense-Industrial Leverage: Drones and Expeditionary Reach:** Turkey is now a first-tier drone power, combining operational experience, scalable manufacturing, and aggressive export strategy. Baykar, the flagship firm, is a major global exporter with customers in dozens of countries and export-led revenues, while accelerating next-generation systems (TB3 and Kizilelma) and deeper component independence. In parallel, Turkey converted TCG Anadolu into a drone-centric platform and publicly framed it as a first-of-its-kind "drone carrier" concept, designed to operate a deck optimized primarily for armed drones rather than traditional fast jets.

Current Posture (as of January 2026)

Türkiye's policy is managed hostility with selective risk management. Ankara sustains extreme rhetoric and escalating trade and transport restrictions, yet keeps technical deconfliction talks with Israel (via Azerbaijan) to prevent incidents in Syria. Simultaneously, Türkiye is converting Gaza diplomacy into leverage with Washington through new forums, while building pressure nodes in the Horn of Africa via Somalia security cooperation and 2026 energy intentions.

Implications for Israel

- **Incremental Constraint Risk:** Small Turkish steps can easily cumulate into strategic limits without a single obvious trigger.

- **Syria:** Kurdish rollback plus brittle custody arrangements increase ISIS resurgence risk and raise miscalculation probability.

- **Gaza:** Türkiye is aiming to gain durable influence over postwar arrangements while maintaining maximal hostility.

- **Maritime-Energy:** Escalation dynamics can threaten energy infrastructure resilience and complicate regional defense alignment.

- **Horn of Africa:** Türkiye may contest Israel's Somaliland node via Somalia-linked security and diplomatic levers.

- **U.S. Process:** Leader-driven channels can bypass institutional brakes and produce unfavorable forum design outcomes.

Objectives and red lines (Israel)

- Preserve freedom of action in Syria; prevent Turkish deployments or enabling systems that materially constrain emergency action.

- Prevent the shift of Syria from an Iran-dominated zone into a Turkish-dominated zone.

- Block any shift of Turkish Gaza involvement from humanitarian logistics into security authority or permanent governance leverage.

- Protect Eastern Mediterranean energy infrastructure while avoiding symbolic moves that strengthen Ankara's encirclement narrative.

- Anchor Somaliland engagement as defensive and maritime-security oriented; reduce Ankara's ability to frame it as destabilization.

Recommendations

1. Insist on leaving Türkiye out of the future of Gaza and the Board of Peace, realizing its soft power potential and the risk of creating a Turkish-Islamist front right on Israel's borders.

2. Addressing the raising of concerns accordingly within the intelligence community, as well as bolstering cooperation with Western agencies.

3. Eastern Med: Deepen operational resilience and cooperation with Greece and Cyprus focused on energy infrastructure protection, maritime borders, counter-UAS, and freedom of movement and civilian research, while keeping messaging disciplined.

4. Horn of Africa: build redundancy in maritime partnerships and logistics; align Somaliland cooperation with Red Sea security priorities and low-visibility implementation.

5. Contingent (triggered) – If Türkiye seeks sensitive basing or deploys constraining systems in Syria, activate a pre-planned response package with relevant partners.

Footage shared on an anonymous Telegram account showed a protest in Bandar-e Anzali, northern Iran, on Thursday, January 8, 2026. TELEGRAM

Time horizon and decision window

- 2026 Primary Outlook: Strategic competition with bounded tactical overlap; highest operational risk in Syria and in Gaza forum design.

- 2027-2029 Trajectory Box: Türkiye's maritime doctrine, Africa footprint, and influence rails (Qatar partnership, political Islam networks) are durable and likely to expand even if bilateral trade stays frozen.

- 2026 Decision Window: Lock in Syria risk-reduction, prevent Turkish institutional capture of Gaza mechanisms, and secure resilient Eastern Med and Red Sea architectures before incremental constraints harden and spiraling escalation.

Domestic Security: The Next Major Challenge

Or Yissachar

Israel has been placing most of its security-related attention outside of its borders, but after over two years of successfully grappling with Iran and its proxies, Israel will have to refocus its efforts within its borders. Trends of radicalization and Palestinization among its Arab and Bedouin societies, comprising some 20% of its population, threaten to create a **domestic front** against the country and its institutions. This is coupled with dangerously unprecedented disregard to the law with massive illegal construction, and the accumulation of foreign-originated weapons in these communities.

Over 100,000 illegal structures were reported in the northern Negev that the Bedouin population has been constructing over the past two decades. Thousands more are reported among the significant Arab and Bedouin population in the Galilee, and along the "Triangle," Wadi Ara communities in central Israel. This threat can create a de-facto Palestinian state bottom-up, as these individual structures gradually and deliberately create a sequence from the Gaza Strip, through the Negev (south), on to the Jerusalem envelope, Ramallah, the rest of Judea and Samaria, the "Triangle", and the Galilee. If left unchecked, Israel may find itself unable to access major parts of its already small country, as it did during the 2021 Guardian of the Walls riots.

An unprecedented quantity of illicit weapons were also reported, contributing to a significant increase in crime and causing fear in both Arab and Jewish communities. This surge in illegal weaponry has lead to an increase in crime in the Arab society that broke records this year with an unprecedented number of shooting fatalities in Arab villages. It is estimated that criminal organizations and individuals in the Arab society have accumulated hundreds of thousands of illicit weapons. As the smuggling enterprise increases along Israel's borders, authorities have documented drones carrying up to 100kg each are smuggling weapons into the Negev's Bedouin communities.

It is possible that Iran and other rogue actors are deliberately arming Israel's Arab population in the hope that radical elements within it, identifying as Palestinians, will turn these weapons against Israel in the future.

During the 2021 Guardian of the Walls riots, Israel had a taste of what a major, uncontrolled popular uprising among its Arab society can look like. For long days, rioters set apartments, cars, and property on fire, lynching their Jewish neighbors and bystanders, and blocking major routes that are a strategic necessity to access the country's Air Force and other military bases. Since then, Israel has vowed to establish the National Guard that will boost the Border Guard's efforts to control and prevent these domestic threats.

Recommendations

1. Israel must embrace a much tougher policy when it comes to the threat within, and allocate more resources to domestic security. This means prioritizing new recruits, new divisions, new budgets and a new strategy that will boost the thin resources the Israel Police and other domestic security agencies have. Israel should declare these trends as directly threatening its national security, and act appropriately.

2. Policing in the Arab society, in cooperation with local residents, should be top priority.

3. The National Guard must take form, draw new recruits, and possibly serve as a significant alternative for the Orthodox society as well rather than service in the IDF. The National Guard should lead the national effort to regain control over vast areas in Israel that risk posing a significant security threat.

President Trump arrives to the Knesset Source Government Press Office

Technology, R&D, Cyber, AI and Disruptive Technologies

Key judgments

- Israel's edge is real but no longer automatic; in 2026, superiority depends on sovereign AI foundations, civilian cyber continuity, and faster fielding cycles.

- AI is the master capability across intelligence, cyber defense, logistics and autonomy; infrastructure and assurance decide who can deploy at scale in 2026.

- **Cyber superiority is shifting from "startup excellence" to "national resilience at scale".** Cyber pressure and attacks will concentrate on civilian continuity; resilience must extend to municipalities, hospitals, critical infrastructures, SMEs and other critical suppliers, mainly in the supply chains.

- **Autonomous systems, especially drones and maritime autonomy, are now a geopolitical export battlefield as much as technology arms race.** Turkey's momentum for example, reflects learning loops and industrial scale, not only better technology.

- **Technology sanctions, export controls, and procurement restrictions are creating a "trusted supplier premium".** Western states are increasingly restricting exposure to Chinese-origin technologies in sensitive categories, including drones. De-risking from Chinese-origin drones and sensitive components is both a security requirement and a market opportunity – Israel can and should compete as a trusted alternative for U.S. and NATO-aligned markets.

- The next vulnerability is **"access fragility" to global cloud and AI platforms**. Microsoft's decision for example to disable a set of cloud/AI services to a unit within Israel's Ministry of Defense, after a review, illustrates how access to critical commercial infrastructure can become contingent and politically sensitive, and highlight the need for further sovereignty over critical national assets rather than dependence.

- **A national industrial strategy that anchors growth in the periphery can deliver security and social dividends simultaneously**. Placing advanced autonomous manufacturing, learning and excellence centers and maintenance hubs in the periphery can expand employment, strengthen reserve-based technological capacity, and improve the civil-military innovation cycle.

Israel's posture

Israel's strengths are well understood: high innovation density, strong commercial execution, and a long-standing dual-use spillover between defense needs and civilian entrepreneurship. However, the next phase is shaped by constraints that sit above the level of individual firms: dependence on foreign cloud and compute ecosystems, exposure to supply chain manipulation, and slower-than-required pathways from prototype to procurement and industrial production.

A further strategic risk is "access fragility." When technology platforms, components, or cloud services are controlled by foreign governments or commercial entities, continuity can become contingent on external terms, reputational pressures, or shifting political contexts. This is not a theoretical risk. It is a governance problem that requires sovereign options and redundancy, not only technical excellence.

Priority arenas for superiority

AI foundations and trusted deployment

Israel should treat AI as national infrastructure. That means prioritizing the inputs that create durable advantages: compute capacity, regulated access to high-quality datasets in strategic domains, and a national capability for model evaluation, security testing, and assurance. The objective is not to centralize innovation, but to ensure that Israeli researchers, startups, and established firms can compete at the frontier without being structurally dependent on external gatekeepers.

Cyber resilience as national continuity

Israel's cyber leadership must be expressed through whole-of-nation resilience, not only elite excellence. The priority is to harden the civilian backbone through practical, scalable security coverage: managed protection services, incident readiness, supply chain integrity, and recovery capability. National continuity requires that municipalities, hospitals, and critical operators can withstand and recover from disruption with minimal decision burden during crises.

Autonomous systems and industrial scale

To preserve superiority in drones and maritime autonomy, Israel must pair R&D with industrialization. Competitive advantage now depends on production readiness, certification, maintenance capacity, software update governance, and export sustainment. Buyers increasingly purchase a long-term capability bundle, not a platform. Israel should compete accordingly, with integrated offerings that include training, doctrine support, lifecycle upgrades, and transparent security provenance.

Disruptive technology portfolio

Beyond AI, cyber, and autonomy, Israel should maintain a coherent portfolio in enabling layers that reduce dependency and increase deterrence: semiconductors and advanced systems engineering, space and ISR analytics, energy resilience technologies, and selective bioconvergence capabilities relevant to national resilience. The goal is not breadth for its own sake, but strategic redundancy in domains that adversaries can exploit and allies increasingly scrutinize.

Social and industrial dividend

A national technology strategy should be designed to strengthen social cohesion, not unintentionally widen geographic and economic gaps. Locating advanced autonomy manufacturing, testing, maintenance,

President Trump ratifies Board of Peace Source The White House

and cyber operations hubs in the periphery can create high-skill employment, expand participation in strategic industries, and deepen civil-military integration through reserve-compatible career pathways. This is a security dividend: a broader, geographically distributed technological base improves national endurance, decreases social gaps, increases employment opportunities and contributes to the equality of opportunities across the country.

Primary outlook: 2026

2026 is defined by techno-nationalism and conditional access. Export controls, sanctions compliance and "trusted supplier" procurement rules increasingly determine who can build, deploy and export advanced systems. For Israel, the strategic risk is friction: dependence on foreign compute and cloud platforms, exposure to supply-chain compromise, and slow paths from prototype to certified, maintainable production.

Compute and cloud dependency becomes a crisis lever. Availability can be constrained by external policy decisions, corporate enforcement, or disruption of connectivity and power. If priority national workloads cannot run under stress, superiority becomes theoretical. Israel must ensure redundancy for priority AI and cyber workloads and reduce single points of failure in data pipelines and deployment environments.

The threat model also shifts toward coercion by disruption. Iran and its network will target civilian services and logistics to impose political and economic cost; Russia and China will continue IP extraction, supply-

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chain compromise and standards influence. Autonomy markets, meanwhile, reward deliverability: buyers purchase capability bundles with certification, training, maintenance, secure updates and sustainment. Turkey's gains in drones show how quickly exporters convert battlefield feedback and iterative upgrades into contracts, training dependencies and political influence.

Finally, Chinese-origin drones and sensitive components are increasingly treated as high-risk in allied procurement. If Israel offers autonomy systems with verifiable provenance and secure update chains, it reduces espionage exposure at home while positioning Israel as a credible alternative supplier for U.S. and NATO-aligned buyers.

Recommendations

1. **Establish a national "Sovereign AI Foundations" doctrine** that secures compute access, strategic data environments, and trusted AI assurance as critical infrastructure, with a clear priority on national resilience and allied-market competitiveness. The message to the system should be simple: without sovereign foundations, Israel's edge becomes rented, not owned.

2. **Launch an autonomy industrialization drive** focused on drones and maritime autonomy, defined by delivery and sustainment capacity rather than prototypes. Prioritize secure supply chains, certification, and lifecycle support. Frame this as strategic self-reliance and allied interoperability, not only as defense exports.

3. **Close the civilian cyber resilience gap at scale** through a national coverage model for critical services and local government, emphasizing recovery capability and supply chain integrity. The public narrative should be continuity: keeping hospitals, municipalities, utilities and logistics functioning under pressure.

4. **Position Israel as the trusted alternative in allied procurement** by aligning products with strict provenance, auditability, and compliance expectations, while reducing reliance on high-risk foreign-origin components. The strategic framing should be opportunity and defense together: safer systems, stronger exports.

5. **Anchor strategic industries in the periphery** through dedicated corridors for manufacturing, testing, and workforce development in autonomy and cyber. Frame this as national strengthening: security, jobs, and cohesion in one policy line.

Economic Resilience: The Big Opportunity

Col. (res) Dr. Ronen Itsik

Israel's Economic Resilience – The Great Opportunity

The Impact of the War

In the aftermath of the War, it has become evident that Israel's economic resilience is relatively high compared to countries that have experienced prolonged warfare, and to a large extent reflects underlying stability with clear growth potential. At the same time, Israel relies heavily on elements that may prove fragile: a growing budget deficit, the cost of the war, and excessive dependence on a limited number of employment sectors. Particular attention should be paid to the gap between strong macroeconomic performance and the erosion of resilience at the level of households, the reserve force, and the middle class.

Alongside the heavy costs, Israel's victory in the War has created a unique window of opportunity. The image of military, technological, and societal strength reinforces deterrence vis-à-vis adversaries and enhances Israel's ability to attract economic, technological, and security cooperation with democracies worldwide as well as regional countries. Building on the demonstrated resilience - namely, the capacity to sustain prolonged warfare, preserve systemic stability, and continue generating innovation—the Israeli economy can accelerate growth through renewed investment in high-tech, energy, infrastructure, and advanced manufacturing, and position itself as a regional anchor of stability.

The expansion of the Abraham Accords to additional countries in the Gulf, Africa, and Asia creates potential for new markets, regional trade routes, and energy and cyber alliances. Within this context, the close strategic alliance with the United States under the leadership of Donald Trump—reflected in diplomatic backing and the opening of economic channels—can serve as a force multiplier. This is particularly relevant for strengthening deterrence, expanding U.S. investment, and deepening cooperation among Israel, the United States, and regional partners, thereby positioning Israel as a central actor in shaping the emerging regional order.

The Economic Dimension of the War

From a security perspective, economic resilience does not rest solely on GDP growth, but on the state's ability to manage prolonged warfare without the collapse of society, public systems, or civic trust. Throughout the War, a clear linkage emerged among three dimensions: macroeconomic stability (particularly growth and inflation), financing of war expenditures, and the economy's capacity to absorb prolonged reserve mobilization.

At the outbreak of the War, Israel entered a state of crisis, albeit against a backdrop of economic strength—low public debt and a highly developed high-tech sector—which enabled it to absorb the initial shock and the decline in growth. Nevertheless, the cost of the War is estimated at tens of billions of shekels, with implications that will extend throughout the coming decade. It should be emphasized that the burden on reservists and the decline in private consumption are directly linked to household resilience, including the closure of tens of thousands of businesses.

The Current Economic Picture

Israel succeeded in avoiding economic collapse and even demonstrated recovery, reflected in forecasts of a return to very high growth relative to Western economies (an estimated 5 percent in the coming year), provided that the level of fighting declines and the security environment stabilizes.

The strengths of the Israeli economy stem from a stable financial system, prudent monetary policy, and a central growth engine in high-tech. Assessments suggest that relatively high growth will be maintained in the coming years. At the same time, the Bank of Israel warns that the deficit and the rise in public debt necessitate tax increases, which place pressure on the cost of living and erode public trust.

Key Vulnerabilities

As long as the middle class and reserve soldiers—particularly the self-employed and small business owners—are mobilized at current levels, there is a significant risk of income loss, combined with exposure to higher taxes and a rising cost of living. These dynamics undermine the public's sense of fairness.

At the same time, deep productivity and employment gaps within the ultra-Orthodox and Arab communities limit growth potential and deepen perceptions of injustice between different groups. This is compounded by excessive reliance on high-tech and concentrated technology exports, which render the economy vulnerable to geo-strategic shocks, potentially expressed in investor withdrawal and the emigration of high-productivity workers.

In addition, given political uncertainty associated with an election year and fractures in consensus on issues of security, politics, and the judiciary, there is an elevated risk regarding the inflow of foreign investment.

Looking Ahead

A very significant opportunity now presents itself. Israel can and should leverage the window of opportunity created by its image of strength, the expansion of the Abraham Accords, and cooperation with the United States to move from a survival mindset to a strategy of regional advancement. This requires capitalizing on the image of victory, improved deterrence, and stability to promote normalization processes and deepen the Abraham Accords—particularly with Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, and countries in Asia.

Priority should be given to infrastructure, energy, food, water, and cyber projects, in which Israel contributes knowledge and technology, while Arab partners provide capital, markets, and geographic gateways to Africa and Asia.

The strategic alliance with the United States under the leadership of Donald Trump—which defines Israel's security as a central pillar of regional strategy and promotes the expansion of the Abraham Accords—can serve as an international enabling engine: providing diplomatic backing for deepening regional agreements, anchoring long-term security and technological assistance, and positioning Israel as a central node in a pro-American security-economic network in the Middle East.

At the same time, the outcomes of the War and the nature of Israeli society require shifting the focus from the pace of growth to the construction of long-term resilience capable of supporting national security and social solidarity. This necessitates a recalibration of the defense budget and government economic

policy: clearly defining a debt ceiling and a responsible path for deficit reduction without undermining the defense budget or the IDF's force-building requirements. In our assessment, the security component is the single most influential factor in Israel's economic resilience and its ability to sustain high real growth— a strong and stable Israel is a prerequisite for economic growth.

Given the pronounced effects of socio-political instability, economic action backed by a high degree of transparency is required in order to restore public trust and thereby strengthen socio-political stability. This, in turn, will significantly enhance Israel's image of stability for foreign investors. In parallel, households—particularly reserve-serving families—must be proactively strengthened through permanent compensation mechanisms as part of a comprehensive policy. This requires a holistic national security concept that recognizes the family and the serving community as strategic assets, not merely social ones.

On the social plane, the central challenge is closing gaps that weaken both the economy and social cohesion: increasing labor-market participation among ultra-Orthodox and Arab populations through investment in education, vocational training, and employment incentives, alongside massive investment in transportation infrastructure, housing, and competition in highly concentrated markets in order to break the cycle of the cost of living.

Finally, growth engines must be diversified: deepening investment in advanced manufacturing, energy, smart agriculture, and security-related tourism, while expanding trade agreements and areas of economic activity with lower risk exposure. In this context, the expansion of the Abraham Accords represents a major opportunity for the Israeli economy.

Returned hostage Eitan Mor with his parents
Source: Government Press Office

Delegitimization: The Eighth Front

Atar Porat

One of the most pivotal domains in contemporary conflict, which has unequivocally demonstrated its efficacy over the past two years amid the Gaza War, is the realm of propaganda - or the war of information. Israel's regional adversaries possess markedly inferior kinetic military capabilities compared to Israel; nevertheless, they maintain a distinct competitive advantage in the sphere of information warfare. By disseminating mendacious narratives that portray Israel as a genocidal, aggressive, and destabilizing entity in the Middle East, these foes endeavor to erode Israel's international legitimacy. **This erosion, in turn, compels Israel to yield to mounting global pressure, thereby extracting strategic concessions that undermine its sovereignty and security.**

The contemporary media ecosystem—encompassing a proliferation of new media, podcasts, online broadcasts, platforms such as X, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube—facilitates an unprecedented form of information warfare targeted at Western audiences. Hostile state actors use bots to hack social media algorithms and elevate fringe voices that perpetuate virulent destabilizing propaganda. These efforts are **primarily aimed at fragmenting and demoralizing the West, with Israel serving as a tool to attain this objective, and online users - in particular the younger generation - serving as pawns in these efforts.** This propaganda successfully managed to spark outrage, violent protests, and the proliferation of anti-Semitic and conspiratorial narratives that in some cases have become mainstream. Such capabilities would have been the envy of the Soviet Union and other authoritarian regimes during the Cold War.

Israel's antagonists, alongside their Western sympathizers, have adeptly exploited these channels to propagate demoralizing narratives, framing Israel not as an ally to the United States and the West, but as an adversary. This constitutes a profound strategic peril for both Israel and the West, particularly given that Gen Z is the primary targeted demographic. By indoctrinating younger generations with anti-Israel sentiments, this campaign poses a long-term existential threat: **the historically bipartisan support Israel has enjoyed in the United States could transmute into bipartisan animosity within a single generation.** Israel's national security is inextricably linked to its diplomatic and economic ties with the West, especially the United States. **Absent robust economic interconnections with Europe and America—where Israel's export-oriented economy derives the preponderance of its capital from foreign investment—it cannot sustain its prosperity or finance its defense imperatives.**

The potency of this propaganda has propelled anti-Israel sentiment and anti-Semitism to levels unparalleled since World War II, transforming the global arena into a ubiquitous battlefield for Israelis and Jews alike. Consequently, terrorists now assail Jewish and Israeli targets in distant locales such as Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and across Europe.

The Leftist Front: The Red-Green Alliance

In the West, a perilous coalition has coalesced between the far left and Islamist elements, unified by their mutual antipathy toward Western paradigms. Israel has been vilified as the epitome of every vice repudiated by the left: colonialist, racist, jingoistic, belligerent, and chauvinistic. Within the simplistic Manichean worldview of the far left—and increasingly segments of the mainstream left—the sole salient political dichotomy is that between oppressor and oppressed. Israel is invariably cast as the oppressor, thereby legitimizing any adversarial actions against it as ostensibly justifiable resistance.

The insidious infiltration of Islamist ideologies into far-left politics has **enabled the appropriation of Western human rights rhetoric to sanitize and rationalize the most abhorrent Islamist doctrines**. For instance, the term "resistance"—employed by Islamists and Palestinian nationalists to euphemize acts of terrorism—has been rehabilitated in leftist discourse as the valiant struggle of freedom fighters against subjugation.

The Rightist Front

On the American right, influential figures such as podcasters Tucker Carlson, Candace Owens, and Nick Fuentes peddle virulent antisemitic conspiracy theories and tropes concerning Jews and Israel. They promulgate the notion that Israel deploys clandestine operatives to orchestrate assassinations within the United States, manipulate American foreign policy, and dominate media outlets **to advance agendas that serve Israeli interests at the expense of American ones.** Subnarratives include the alleged rotten roots of Israel's foundation, its alleged deliberate attacks on US forces, or its alleged goal to drag the US into foreign wars to expand to further territory. Under this distorted prism, every U.S. intervention in the Middle East—or indeed globally—is attributed to Israel and its purported Jewish agents, who purportedly exploit American military might exclusively for Israel's benefit - even if in many cases (such as the Iraq War) Israel led an opposition to US military intervention. This fallacy leads to **the erroneous conclusion that U.S. strategic interests are diametrically opposed to those of Israel**, rendering Israel's adversaries as non-threats to America despite their overt anti-American ideologies. To reconcile these inconsistencies, adherents concoct increasingly elaborate antisemitic conspiracies, thereby mainstreaming fringe elements into the political center.

The overarching narrative posits that an "America First" doctrine inexorably entails an isolationist foreign policy, wherein **alliances are construed as zero-sum games detrimental to American interests.** This perspective stems from profound ignorance regarding the intricacies of the American alliance system and the interdependent nature of global economies.

In summation, a pincer-like encirclement of anti-Israel sentiment is unfolding in the West, particularly within the United States, imperiling Israel's alliance network. **This assault not only undermines support for Israel through international institutions like the United Nations, military aid, and economic collaboration but also serves as a proxy for a broader onslaught on Western civilization and its foundational values**. By targeting Israel as the vanguard, this information warfare seeks to dismantle the edifice of liberal democracy itself.