



The Way Forward

A comprehensive roadmap for the ‘day after’:
Suggested Principles for Israel’s strategy and policy

April 2024

The strategic objective

To launch a diplomatic process, based on the achievements of the military campaign in the Swords of Iron War, aimed at ensuring the State of Israel’s security for generations to come, with Israeli society emerging from the crisis stronger, better protected, healthier, more united and democratic, and with the rehabilitation and enhancement of the Israel's international standing.

Background

War aims.

Israel has four overarching strategic objectives in the war (Note 1):

1. To gain the release of the hostages and abductees.
2. To demolish Hamas’ military capabilities and ability to govern.
3. To create conditions that enable displaced Israeli citizens to safely return to the communities they evacuated.



4. To initiate, promote, and become an integral part of a regional strategic security axis, under American leadership, as a response to the threat of the Iranian-led so called “resistance axis.”

Release of the hostages is a top-priority mission, reflecting a core commitment of the state to its citizens, justifying a supreme effort and readiness to pay a steep price.

The geo-political reality

1. **The war against Hamas** will not end with its complete elimination (Note 2).
2. **Israel is engaged in a multi-front conflict** with an Iranian-led axis that includes Hamas, Hezbollah, pro-Iranian militias in Syria and Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, and Palestinian elements seeking to escalate conflict in the West Bank.
3. **Iran and its proxies as a combined enemy:** the war and the direct Iranian assault on Israel on the night of April 14, 2024 reinforced the understanding in the West and in the pragmatic states in the region that Iran and its proxies pose a threat that should be addressed with a joint, resolute effort.
4. **Western identification and support:** since the massacre of October 7, support for Israel has eroded significantly. At the same time, the American administration and other states are committed to Israel’s security and have acted accordingly, including against the Iranian missile and drone attack.
5. **The Palestinian Authority (PA) and its standing:** the PA is the entity that represents the Palestinian people. It is recognized by UN institutions (as a non-member state), as well as by some Western and moderate Arab countries. Israel has maintained crucial security cooperation with the PA for years. In addition, the PA is dependent on Israel in many respects.

Insights from the war

The war has clarified several critical insights for Israel (Note 3):

1. **Basic conceptions regarding the Palestinian issue.** Five basic conceptions underlying Israel’s strategy of the past decade have collapsed:



- a. that it is possible to separate peace accords with Arab states from a permanent solution of the Palestinian question.
 - b. that it is possible to ensure stability by separating the Gaza Strip from the West Bank by consolidating Hamas' rule in Gaza thus weakening the PA.
 - c. that it is possible to ensure quiet while ignoring the political-social dimension and Palestinian national aspirations.
 - d. **that it is possible to *manage* the conflict instead of *resolving* it.**
 - e. that the status quo can be perpetuated. If Israel does not initiate and make decisions, others will lead and dictate. "Nature abhors a vacuum" and the foot-dragging in making decisions and taking initiative on such questions as "the day after" and humanitarian aid undermine Israel's military achievements, hinder realization of Israel's war aims, and harm its overall security, legal, and diplomatic interests, both long-term and short-term.
2. **The outcome of the war in Gaza will be resolved through a diplomatic process.** On the military dimension, the IDF has achieved control and freedom of action in most of the Gaza Strip, but the war will be won only when Hamas loses its ability to govern, and an alternative is put in place. This alternative can be a Palestinian entity supported by states in the region, with American leadership. Such a process could also contribute toward the release of the hostages and the rebuilding of Gaza.
 3. The civilian home front is central, and not secondary as previously conceptualized.

Policy principles (note 4)

Against the background of this geo-political reality and these insights, we propose the following policy guidelines for achieving Israel's strategic objective:

- The hostages: freeing the hostages is a supreme mission, a core commitment of the State of Israel toward its citizens. As the most urgent mission, it should be accorded the highest priority, superseding any other security mission, with readiness to pay a very steep and painful price.
- International support: it is essential to preserve strong relations and responsiveness in the international arena, **with an emphasis on American diplomatic and security support, including ongoing and uncompromising support and backing in international institutions.**



- **Humanitarian assistance:** preventing a humanitarian crisis by ensuring the flow of humanitarian aid constitutes a clear security and diplomatic interest of the State of Israel, serves the war effort, and enhances Israel's continued freedom of action.

The peace axis coalition (Note 5)

- **Israel should join President Biden's initiative and act in a way that encourages the U.S. and other states to forge a peace coalition – to include Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Bahrain, and the UAE, as well as Saudi Arabia and other states in the region, as well as the Palestinian Authority – and help formulate components of the initiative that would also take Israel's security needs into consideration.**
- This type of coalition would maximize the chances of achieving Israel's strategic objective, mobilize effective opposition to Iran, and facilitate various security arrangements – for example, enforcing the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006) in Lebanon, inter alia distancing the Hezbollah terror organization from Israel's northern border.

The Gaza Strip on 'the day after'

- **Neither Israel nor Hamas will govern the Gaza Strip.**
- The Gaza Strip will be demilitarized with the exception as required for internal policing.
- An apolitical mechanism (a technocratic government) will be established as an interim measure, accompanied, and supported by international/Arab forces.
- At the end of the process, a Palestinian government linked to the West Bank and the PA will govern the Gaza Strip (Note 6).
- **Withdrawal of IDF troops from the Gaza Strip will be gradual,** in a manner commensurate with security needs and in coordination with Egypt and the U.S.
- Israel should encourage the prompt initiation of a multinational effort to rebuild and develop the Gaza Strip, in parallel to an efficient effort to rehabilitate Israel's "Gaza Envelope" communities.



The northern front

- **The objective:** reduce the threat from Hezbollah, strengthen the north, and create conditions for the confident return of northern residents to their homes as soon as possible where they can live normal, peaceful, and safe lives.
- **The preferred path** for realizing this objective is to participate in a diplomatic process led by the U.S. and France to strengthen the peace axis, with the aim of fully implementing Security Council Resolution 1701 and pushing Hezbollah north of the Litani River.
- **In parallel to the diplomatic effort, Israel should prepare a military alternative.** If military action is needed and so decided, Israel would wage battle at the appropriate time, when it is militarily ready, with diplomatic backing, and with the civilian front well-prepared (see below).

The civilian front

- The ability to conduct civil routines and economic activity have a dramatic impact on national security, during routine times and in emergency situations.
- The Israeli system for home front management is not currently ready to function in emergency situations, is not aware of what this requires, and is not prepared accordingly.
- Ministry of Home Front Defense. We recommend urgently the reestablishment of the Home Front Defense Ministry, with a senior minister assigned to head it and resources allocated directly to the ministry for emergency preparedness. The ministry should be empowered to advise and guide the preparedness of all ministries and systems for emergencies of all types.

Foundation stones to strengthen Israeli security

In order to facilitate change in its strategic situation, Israel must act according to the following principles and demonstrate:

1. A commitment to an incremental diplomatic process ultimately leading to an agreed-upon two-state solution that addresses Israel's security challenges.



2. Readiness to promote cooperation and a regional alliance in the spirit of the Biden plan and to become an integral part of it and influence its various components.
3. Readiness to support measures to bolster the PA against extreme Islamic elements and to encourage positive change in the Palestinian public's outlook for the future, encouraging it to abandon the path of jihad and live in peace alongside Israel.
4. Practical steps to separate from the Palestinians, creating conditions for civil separation and effective Palestinian control; creating territorial and transportation contiguity in order to enable the PA's control in the areas under its responsibility, and allowing for the development and fulfillment of its economic potential.
5. Continued security control and freedom of action between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, until security arrangements are established in a future permanent accord.
6. A return to the status quo on the Temple Mount in coordination with Jordan, curbing trends to transform the national conflict with the Palestinians into a religious war; formulating understandings on the status quo, which is today subject to different interpretations, so that it becomes a solid arrangement that is strictly enforced.
7. A halt of creeping annexation in the West Bank, while preventing legal and organizational changes aimed to enable annexation and the application of Israeli law and civil administration.
8. Reestablishment of governance and law enforcement on the ground, applying effective and determined measures against extremists – Palestinians and Jewish Israelis alike.



In Conclusion

The State of Israel experienced an event of historic proportions on October 7, 2023, exposing and intensifying significant strategic national security challenges. Even if the October 7 attack did not pose an existential threat to Israel, it certainly threatened its character and undermined basic conceptions that had prevailed in public life and in Israeli security assessments for many years.

Looking ahead, the colossal failure of October 7 also presents an opportunity for change! Israel can and must rise up from the crisis as a more rational, secure, strong, well-defended, healthy, egalitarian, and democratic society and state. It's completely in our hands!

Notes

1. **Israel faces three challenges in realizing its war aims:**
 - a. **Finding an alternative to Hamas rule:** along with the efforts to strike at Hamas, it is essential to terminate its control over civilian life in Gaza, even as warfare continues, and to prevent Hamas or any other jihadist/terror organization from regaining control of the Gaza Strip, and to accomplish this without creating a situation of chaos.
 - b. **Minimizing Israel's military presence and control on the ground** and avoiding getting mired in a defensive quagmire in Gaza, but without relinquishing freedom of offensive operational action.
 - c. **Preventing escalation in other conflict fronts** – Iran, Lebanon, the West Bank – and preventing the creation of a threat to the regimes of Jordan, Egypt, and other moderate states in the region.
2. **The war against Hamas will not end in “absolute victory.”** Hamas has deep social roots and a strong presence in Palestinian politics. It is not a “local” terror organization – its leadership sits overseas, and its supporters-sponsors Iran, Turkey, and Qatar will not allow it to die. In addition, international pressure (especially



American) will likely prevent Israel from fully carrying out its military designs. Israel must prepare for a reality in which Hamas is present on the ground (perhaps under another name) and seeks to keep its place on the Palestinian map, hoping to later seize control of the PA.

3. **Additional insights from the war:**

a. **It will be impossible to defeat the enemies we face in the various arenas without a combination of strong military power and diplomatic action.**

b. Overestimation of military power. The image of Israel's power and standing as a deterrent in the eyes of its friends and rivals, and even in the eyes of Israelis themselves, was damaged after Israel was taken by surprise and failed to respond effectively on the morning of October 7, and by its inability to win the war after long months of fighting, despite its absolute military superiority. The latter can be attributed to the multi-arena character of the threats, the complexity of fighting against non-state terror organizations in densely populated areas, against an enemy that cynically uses its own people as human shields for its fighters and is ready to sacrifice many of them and even leverage this as a political and propaganda weapon against us.

c. Underestimation of the capabilities of Iran and its proxies. It became apparent that Iran is able to orchestrate an axis of states and organizations to create a "ring of fire" around Israel, with the various arenas interconnected. This has transformed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a regional conflict with global repercussions.

d. Israel cannot "go by it alone." Israel has no reasonable chance of meeting all of the challenges it faces on its own. A suitable response for the multi-front challenge requires that Israel deliver a powerful retaliatory blow to Hamas' military and governance capabilities, while simultaneously cultivating a broad coalition of states with shared interests in the region and beyond, led by the U.S. At the same time, Israel must adapt the size of its army to the scope of its expected missions, for a long run of extended confrontations.

4. Civilians were the ones attacked (and the ones who defended themselves) on that Black Saturday; civilians are the target of missile fire by Hamas and Hezbollah; and about 150,000 displaced Israeli civilians became refugees in their own country during the current war. At the same time, on the other side of the hill, civilians are



fully involved on the battlefield, serving as human shields and/or as “weapons” for Hamas.

5. **Israel’s participation in mobilizing the coalition depends on its readiness to advance and adopt diplomatic processes** – and, specifically, to accept President Biden’s plan in principle. Acceptance of the plan would immediately improve Israel’s standing and its ability to influence the geo-strategic processes in the region and the final form of the plan, and thus help reach an optimal conclusion of the war.
6. **Strengthening the PA is critical for the deconstruction of the Hamas** and is hence an Israeli national interest. Israel is in a position to wield positive or negative impacts with respect to this imperative, as it plays an essential role with respect to the civil, social and security realms.