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Israel's Defense & Security Forum

IDSF Exclusive Analysis: Iron Swords At 40

Israel-Hamas War: A Battle for Middle East Freedom

What Should Europe Do?



Right: President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen during a visit to southern Israel | © European Union, 2023, Photographer: Bea Bar Kallos, Europa.eu; Left: IDF troops in Gaza, Photo: IDF Spokesperson

While the world's eyes are focused on the Gaza Strip, underlying currents are shaping the Middle East's regional spheres of influence and alliances. This war, imposed on Israel following the atrocities of the October 7 massacre by Hamas where a record number of 1,200 Israelis lost their lives, some 7,000 were wounded and around 240 were kidnapped into Gaza, marks a decisive moment in regional and global history. In the way that the wars in Ukraine and Syria were not limited to the delineated borders of these countries but sent ripple

effects around the region and the world, so is the Gaza war shaping global alliances, and thus **requires the attention of all relevant global actors, including the European Union.**

On October 7, Israel declared a **state of war** for the first time in 50 years to the exact date since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, following the largest massacre of Jewish people in a single day since the Holocaust. Massive reserve forces were called up and the nation is now

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entirely mobilized to the war efforts, including at the political level, where the newly-formed unity government is solely focusing on matters relevant to the war. Over 100,000 Israelis were evacuated from border areas in northern and southern Israel. Daily funerals and war updates are concurrent with heroic stories from the battlefield and volunteer initiatives.

On the Gaza front, the IDF has mobilized a massive number of troops in order to obtain the stated objectives of the war, **eliminate Hamas as a military and governing entity, and liberate the hostages.** Over the past month, the Israeli Air Force later joined by ground troops and armoured engineering vehicles have attacked over 14,000 terrorist targets, took over Hamas intelligence centers and military bases, including those housed in civilian settings such as mosques, playgrounds and classrooms where materials such as ISIS flags, rockets and copies of Mein Kampf were found, all while **safeguarding, with armed troops and tanks, the safe passage of the Gazan civilian population through pre-declared humanitarian corridors.** An estimated 900,000 have already successfully evacuated into safe zones, while **dozens of trucks carrying humanitarian aid enter into Gaza on a daily basis through Egypt's Rafah crossing.**

Several principles must now guide all responsible global actors with respect to this war:

1. **Reject calls for cease-fire:** Supporting Israel's right to defend itself, as rightly recognized by the European Parliament on October 18,¹ includes **clear moral and diplomatic support for the IDF to complete its war objectives – the eradication of Hamas, without calling for a cease-fire.** The idea of a cease-fire might appeal politically, since it represents the rejection of hostilities and striving for a diplomatic solution; but its immediate impact is **to halt the fighting and create leeway for Hamas to reorganize and rearm.** Much like the 2014 Gaza operation ("Protective Edge"), cease-fires will also very likely be violated by Hamas and be used to attack

IDF soldiers by surprise, like the incident that claimed the lives of soldiers and led to the kidnapping of two soldiers in that operation.

A cease-fire will provide Hamas with a particularly helpful lifeline to use this card from time to time to buy time, and eventually have leverage over Israel it currently does not hold. **A cease-fire would practically mean an international support for Hamas to have claims in this fight.**

This does not contradict the already-conservative approach by the IDF, that **exceeds internationally-required standard of armed conflict, to minimize civilian casualties²** by sending millions of SMS messages, dropped pamphlets and pre-recorded calls alongside real-time phone calls warning civilians of imminent danger. These alongside the humanitarian corridors and local, tactical truces enable Gazans to evacuate safely.

However, **pressure must not be put on Israel, but on Hamas and its major sources of support, Iran and Qatar, to stop targeting Gazan civilians and preventing them from evacuating.³** Hamas understands well that calls for cease-fire harm Israel's global image and perceived as **"dictating terms" to Israel,** all while it abuses civilians as human shields. If civilians evacuate, Hamas will be totally exposed to attack. To that end, Hamas militants threaten civilians at gunpoint not to evacuate; attack civilians with sniper fire and IEDs; and order them to remain in place. One example is Hamas' Ministry of Communication press release, that called Gazans to ignore the "psychological warfare" by the IDF and ordered them not to evacuate.⁴

Israel must achieve its war goals in Gaza undeterred and undisturbed, with no cease-fire and no "stopwatch", until all hostages are returned and Hamas is eliminated, while respecting as it does the laws of armed conflict.

2. **Pressure on Egypt to allow safe evacuation of Gazan civilians into the Sinai Peninsula:** At the

¹ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2023-0436_EN.html

² <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/the-hamas-terrorist-organization/how-is-the-idf-minimizing-harm-to-civilians-in-gaza/>

³ <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/idf-press-releases-regarding-the-hamas-israel-war/hamas-terrorists-continue-to-prevent-civilian-evacuation/>

⁴ <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/hymo9cuzt>

moment, Israel is allowing safe humanitarian corridors for Gazans to evacuate southward, mostly into the Mawasi and Rafah areas. However, the next stage of the war will require fighting all around the Gaza Strip, including in the south.

To that end, Egypt must be pressured to welcome Gaza civilian refugees and host them in the Sinai Peninsula, with international aid organizations assisting in a systemic and proper manner the facilitation of humanitarian assistance. Egypt's blocking of the border is unacceptable and unprecedented, and dooms civilians into finding themselves in harm's way. In no other international crisis, be it the 6 million Ukrainian refugees or the 5 million Syrian refugees, were refugees blocked from escaping war zones.

Those who wish to leave the Gaza Strip must be allowed to safely evacuate into Egypt. Unless Egypt welcomes them, mass immigration waves can hit Europe once again, with the breaking of the border and the flow of people through Rafah into Egypt.

3. **Suspend funding to the Palestinian Authority:** While perceived as a responsible actor, the past month has proven beyond doubt the **irresponsibility of the Palestinian Authority and the danger it poses to Israel's security.**

- **No condemnation:** Avoiding the clear condemnation of the October 7 massacre, Chairman Mahmoud Abbas preferred to focus solely on Israel's actions in Gaza.
- **Active encouragement by Fatah and PA officials:** Senior PA officials Abbas Zaki and Jamal Al Hawail praised Hamas' massacre while calling to follow Hamas' example and copycat the attack around Judea and Samaria

(“West Bank”);⁵ Abbas' advisor Mahmoud al-Habbash called it “legitimate self-defence” against the “temporary” State of Israel;⁶ in another instance, he propagated misinformation by claiming it was a “satanic Israeli plan supported by the United States” in order to deport Palestinians.⁷

- **The Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Religious Affairs called to murder Jews:** On October 18, in its weekly instruction sheet for all mosque preachers for their Friday sermons, it said, “The Hour [of Resurrection] will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews and kill them until the Jews hide behind rocks and trees.”⁸
- **Payments to all participants of the massacre:** As part of its official state law dubbed “Pay for Slay”, that stipulates all Palestinians who committed attacks against Israel are entitled to lifelong state payments and lavish financial benefits, whether affiliated with Hamas, Fatah, or “lone wolves”, the PA is expected to pay the perpetrators of the massacre **\$2.7 million USD this month alone.**^{9 10}
- **Fatah's Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades participated in the massacre:** Fatah's spokesperson bragged that his organization members also participated in the massacre. In an official video, he thanked the perpetrators for “humiliating and defeating the Zionists”.¹¹

European tax money should not finance the Palestinian Authority until it cancels its laws that stipulate state payment for convicted and killed terrorists; removes all anti-Semitic content from its school curriculum;¹² and

⁵ <https://www.memri.org/tv/jamal-huwail-fatah-revolution-council-member-calls-fatah-pa-security-forces-settlers-west-bank-like-gaza-envelope>

⁶ <https://palwatch.org/page/34662>

⁷ <https://palwatch.org/page/34739>

⁸ <https://palwatch.org/page/34677>

⁹ Learn more about the Palestinian Authority's official policy of financial reward to terrorists in IDSF, “Terrorists in the Civil Service”, <https://idsf.org.il/en/papers/terrorists-in-the-civil-service/>

¹⁰ <https://palwatch.org/page/34650>

¹¹ <https://palwatch.org/page/34668>

¹² https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/PA-Reports_-Updated-Selected-Examples_May-2021.pdf

ceases the incitement against Israel in its official state media.

4. **Pressure on Hezbollah:** The terrorist organization Hezbollah has been intensifying its efforts to harm Israeli soldiers and civilians since the beginning of the war, after having increased the audacity and frequency of its attacks on the border since the beginning of the year.¹³ Since the beginning of the war its anti-tank missiles, shooting attacks, rocket attacks and launching of attack drones have killed 7 Israeli soldiers and 2 civilians, including soldiers who were killed by anti-tank missiles that hit their military vehicle, and a civilian worker of the Israeli Electric Corporation who was working by the border.

Guided by Iran, Hezbollah is operating **under the threshold of launching a full-scale war** and is currently keeping a low-intensity pace of hostilities, while waiting for further instructions from his patron in Tehran. **Both Lebanon and Iran must be pressured to hold Hezbollah back and stop these hostilities immediately.** All Israeli senior leadership warned Hezbollah and the State of Lebanon from the continuation of these attacks, underscoring they will not be tolerated. Lebanon will likely see its main cities and state infrastructure acutely damaged if Hezbollah makes a wrong move, given the intensity of the expected Israeli retaliation. Israel views Lebanon as responsible for Hezbollah, with the terrorist organization forming an integral part of its government, cabinet, and parliament, and constitutes the largest combat force in the country. The international community, including the EU with its leverage on both Lebanon and Iran, must prevent that from ever happening. **In that scenario, mass inflow of Lebanese immigration could reach Europe, and renew the grave refugee crisis that has struck the continent in recent years.**

The only way to avoid war is **demand the full implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1701, that stipulates that Hezbollah must be pushed away from the Israeli border.** Israeli residents will not go back to their homes in

northern Israel if the threat persists, and in case Hezbollah continues its belligerent actions, Israel will be forced to act decisively to remove this threat on its border and its citizens. **Enforce anti-racism laws against cases of anti-Semitism in Europe:** Since the beginning of the war, we have seen an unprecedented spike in anti-Semitic incidents and hatred around Europe on the part of some minorities, immigrant communities, and extremist activists, as well as university associations and other social factions. This uptick was expected, given the pattern of anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic sentiments traditionally triggered by any spike of violence in Israel. However, this time the scale and scope of these attacks and incitement broke records.

Around London, Paris, Barcelona, and other cities, hundreds of thousands of protesters expressed clear support for Hamas, the destruction of Israel, and the killing of Jewish people. France and Germany rightfully banned these protests and arrested hundreds, yet around Europe these protests are still allowed, and in some cases permitted by local courts.

All European countries must **lead the world in the fight against anti-Semitism and protect their Jewish communities** by enforcing laws against racism and incitement to violence; and apply the full extent of the law against people who call for violence against Jews and Israelis, incite against Israel's right to exist, burn Israeli flags, wave Hamas flags, and intimidate or even attack local Jewish communities. **The blood will be on the hands of decision-makers who fail to act in view of these atrocious actions.**

5. **Pressure on Qatar to release hostages:** As Hamas' main sources of income, with \$30 million USD transferred to the terrorist group monthly, Qatar holds an invaluable leverage over Hamas. Qatar also hosts Hamas' senior leadership in its luxury hotels, effectively providing war criminals with safe haven. **Qatar must be heavily pressured to apply the leverage it has on Hamas to free all hostages held in Gaza.**

¹³ To learn more see IDSF, Hezbollah: On the brink of eruption?, <https://idsf.org.il/en/papers/hezbollah-eruption-eruption/>

Subsequently, Qatar should be pressured to **extradite Hamas' senior leadership to stand for trial in Israel for crimes against humanity**, much like the 1961 Adolf Eichmann trial, and the 1945 Nuremberg Trials against the former senior leadership of the Nazi regime.

6. **Holding Iran accountable:** On October 18, the European Parliament rightfully called out the Iranian regime's sponsorship and fuelling of its proxy Hamas and stated Iran should be held accountable for the October 7 atrocities. Iran not only **invests billions of euros annually** in the IRGC – the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps that **operates, leads, finances, and equips regional terrorism** through proxies such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis and the Iraqi militias through its Qods Force, but also **develops nuclear weapons** as part of its quest to obtain regional dominance.

The 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) was an insufficient cover-up to Iran's military nuclear program, enabling it to enrich weapon-grade uranium in sites outside the scope of the IAEA and avoid snap-back sanctions or accountability even as Israeli intelligence revealed at least 4 clandestine and unsupervised nuclear sites, and the IAEA accused Iran of enriching far beyond civilian level. Iran currently holds over 121kg of 60% enriched uranium and over 535kg of 20% enriched uranium, and is currently **at 2-3 weeks' breakout time from the moment of decision until it acquires sufficient material for a first nuclear device.**

In addition, Iran has become an **integral part of the Russian-Chinese alliance** and has been a staunch supporter of the Putin government's invasion of Ukraine. It is providing Russia with armament such as attack drones and ground-to-ground missiles, and signed a \$1 billion USD deal with Russia to supply it with 6,000 attack drones over the next two years, to serve Russia in its war in Ukraine.

The Iranian top leadership, including its Leader Khamenei, President Raisi and senior military leadership are constantly calling for Israel's destruction as part of their quest for regional and global domination. Khamenei has repeatedly

called Israel a "cancer that should be rooted out from the region" and says that "the meaning of the 'final solution' is the destruction of the Zionist regime." Following the October 7 attack, Khamenei shared a video from the atrocities in Israel and said, "the Zionist regime is dying", applauded Hamas for its actions ("we should kiss Hamas' hands") and warned the United States it could be next in line in the Iranian crosshairs should it continue to support Israel.

Europe should hold Iran accountable in action, not only in statements. Iran should provide full disclosure of its clandestine nuclear activity by a specified date, and international and European sanctions should be immediately snapped back. Europe should also support credible military threat by Israel, the United States and regional countries against Iran's destabilizing efforts in the region. European countries should follow Germany's example and expand their air defence collaboration with Israel, much like the Arrow 3 deal between Israel and Germany, to protect European soil and citizens against Iranian long-range ballistic missiles that are already covering the entire State of Israel and reaching as far as Europe.

7. **The Day After:** Europe should prepare for the day after the war both at the political and the conceptual levels. Several steps will have to be taken in order to **promote true and lasting peace in the Middle East including the strengthening peaceful actors such as Israel, pragmatic actors such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and partners such as Jordan and Egypt against the extremist Shi'ite axis led by Iran and supported by Russia and China.**

To that end, Europe will have to **leave behind previous misconceptions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the way it views the Middle East peace process.**

- **Recognition of Israel's right for self-defence:** In the day after the war, as confirmed by Israeli senior leadership and advocated for by the IDSF movement for years, **the IDF must restore full freedom of operation around the Gaza Strip** unhindered, in order to prevent the Hamas threat from

ever resurfacing again. Not only did the Palestinian Authority prove itself useless in countering terror attacks, it has been actively cheering them on. Additionally, **Israel must keep control of the *Philadelphi Route* separating Gaza and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula** in order to prevent weapon smuggling into the Gaza Strip, an enterprise that allowed Hamas to arm itself undisturbed for years.

Europe will also have to give Israel the diplomatic leeway to respond with force to any attempt to get near the border fence and to act in order to prevent any security threat something that Israel was pressured not to do in the weeks and days leading up to October 7.

Throughout the years, and increasingly since the 1994 Oslo Accords with the Palestinian Authority and the 2005 disengagement from Gaza, Israel has made significant sacrifices for peace, including steps that compromised its own security. When essential security needs arose, Israel preferred to rely on its assumed partner, the Palestinian Authority, to arrest ticking time bombs plotting deadly attacks against Israeli citizens. Unfortunately, the PA has proven almost useless in tackling these threats. Whether the PA has been unwilling or unable to assist Israel in providing meaningful security, Israel has had to defend its citizens by providing the IDF the freedom of movement all around the territory of Judea and Samaria (sometimes referred to as the "West Bank"), arresting terrorists daily with great risk to its soldiers.

Since the 2002 *Operation Defensive Shield*, and more recently in *Operation Break the Wave* and the 2023 *Operation House and Garden* in Jenin, **these precision counterterrorism raids have proven invaluable in keeping Israeli citizens safe.** Between early 2023 and the war, Israeli security forces have arrested over 1,400 terrorists and prevented more than 470

murderous attacks throughout the Judea and Samaria territory, including shooting attacks, suicide bombings, and kidnappings. Since October 7, Israeli security forces have arrested over 1,400 additional terrorists, including Hamas operatives plotting similar attacks.

However, these just and proportionate measures were the subject of heavy criticism on the part of the international community, including harsh condemnations by the UN General Assembly, issuing in some cases 22 condemnations of Israel in a single year, mistruths about "excessive use of force" and "possible extrajudicial killings" voiced by the EU special envoy to the Palestinian arena, and others.

No such arrests were possible in Gaza since 2005, allowing a deadly terror hub to flourish. The result, unfolded in full display in the October 7 massacre, has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that **there is no alternative to IDF activity on the ground in order to prevent terrorism from germinating.**

- **Due to this reason, the Palestinian Authority cannot be reinstated in the Gaza Strip as a governing entity.** The PA experiment, that began in the 1994 Gaza and Jericho agreement as part of the Oslo Accords and completed in the 2005 Disengagement, has failed miserably. The PA has neither the domestic legitimacy nor the capacity to successfully take over Gaza, yet much more importantly, its track record of an integral part of the armed struggle against Israel and incitement to anti-Semitic hatred as detailed above, rules out the PA as a relevant actor that can form a part of Gaza's future. Alternative creative solutions must be found and will be integrated with the Israel's military freedom of operation around Gaza.
- **Normalization between Israeli and Saudi Arabia as key to ending the Israeli-Arab**

conflict: The Abraham Accords between Israel and four pragmatic Sunni states (UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan), with the blessing of Saudi Arabia, were only possible due to the **intersection of interests between the most unlikely of partners:** Israel and the Arab world found themselves on the same page **facing a common threat from Iran.** This was also possible thanks to **Israel's military might, in a region where the projection of hard power counts more than soft power.**

To that end, **the more Israel wins decisively in Gaza, the more likely to have a normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and in turn, with most of the Middle East and the Muslim world.** Involvement by Arab parties in the future of the Gaza Strip should also be considered in that respect.

This will also be an **invaluable opportune moment to rally the Middle East around the West in a regional coalition led by the**

United States and the European Union, against Iran's tyranny and extremism. The West must tackle the "head of the snake" head-on and target the Iranian regime's malign destabilization efforts in the region, that will undoubtedly spillover to the rest of the world, as manifested today by Iran's attempts to carry out terrorist attacks on European and American soil, and operate a vast network of narcoterrorism and human smuggling.

This will also **moderate Russia and China's influence** in the region and push the Middle East into the West's hands and away from the Russia-China axis, and user in an era of **regional prosperity based on free trade routes that strengthen the global supply chain through the Indian-Persian Gulf-Saudi Arabia-Israel corridor** and contribute to regional peace and stability.