

October 2024

# country report

Foundation Office Israel



## One war, multiple fronts

---

### Israel one year after the Hamas terror attack

*Michael Rimmel and Johannes Sosada*

October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024 marks the first anniversary of Hamas' terrorist attack on Israel and the war the country has been forced to fight on several fronts ever since. There are still 101 Israelis hostages held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The security situation in the country has repeatedly changed and intensified over the past year. In particular in the north, the conflict with Hezbollah has escalated further and further over the summer months. Israel has already deployed significant forces to the north in recent months. Following the killing of Hezbollah leader Nasrallah, Israel began a ground offensive in southern Lebanon. However, the front with Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the one with Hezbollah in the north are not the only ones Israel had to deal with in the last year. On October 1<sup>st</sup>, Israel was (once again) directly attacked by Iran with a large number of ballistic missiles. An Israeli response to this attack is still pending but is to be expected. One year after the Hamas terror attack, the (security) situation in Israel and the current escalation can be analyzed and understood along the various fronts and conflict hotspots.

### Hamas in the Gaza Strip

One of the war aims declared by the Israeli government immediately after October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023 was the complete surrender and destruction of Hamas in the Gaza Strip. One year later, this goal has still not been achieved. Even though large parts of the Hamas units have now been defeated, some terrorists regroup as soon as the IDF withdraws from certain areas. From time to time Hamas also still manages to fire rockets into Israeli territory. In the meantime, over 350 Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza. On the Palestinian side, the situation in the Gaza Strip has developed into a humanitarian crisis. Palestinian figures speak of more than 41,000 deaths (including Hamas terrorists) and hundreds of thousands internally displaced persons. Since the start of the war, large parts of Gaza's infrastructure have been destroyed and diseases are spreading. At the same time, Hamas is using the civilian population as human shields and is repeatedly firing from humanitarian zones or civilian facilities such as schools, kindergartens or hospitals. The main issue on the Israeli side remains the liberation of the Israeli hostages abducted by Hamas. Even though some hostages have been freed in spectacular rescue operations, 101 people are still being held by Hamas and the IDF assumes that some of them are already dead. In November 2023, some of the hostages were freed in exchange for Palestinian terrorists and a short-term ceasefire. Renewed negotiations and possible deals subsequently failed since then. At present, it doesn't look like an agreement of any kind will be reached. Many within the Israeli government are also skeptical of a possible deal, as they fear that Hamas would survive, and the declared war goal of its destruction would not be achieved. In particular, Netanyahu's ultra-right coalition partners have repeatedly threatened to leave the government if an agreement with Hamas is concluded. At the same time, the fate of the hostages led to strong protests in the country, with the government being accused of inaction. Further, one year after the outbreak of the war, it is still unclear what will happen to the Gaza Strip after a victory over Hamas. Israel has no interest in a long-term occupation of the Gaza Strip. However, due to a lack of alternatives and the Israeli premise that the Gaza Strip must never again pose a threat, Israel could be forced to control the area militarily in the long term. Furthermore, there is no existing plan of how Hamas can be permanently defeated after a possible military victory.

## Hezbollah

Since October 8<sup>th</sup>, Hezbollah has been firing thousands of rockets at northern Israel, many of which the IDF was able to intercept with its advanced defense systems. Until the summer months of 2024, Hezbollah's shelling was mainly limited to the immediate north of Israel, from where over 60,000 Israelis were evacuated. The IDF usually responded to the rocket fire with targeted airstrikes. The ongoing rocket fire has made the situation in the north of the country unbearable for months. Many voices from the population, politics and the military have been calling on the Israeli government to finally take (military) action in order to ensure the safe return of the evacuees. The situation peaked after 12 children were killed in a Hezbollah rocket attack on a Druze village on the Golan Heights to which Israel responded by killing a senior Hezbollah commander in Beirut. Following the pager and radio explosions, as well as the massive airstrikes on southern Lebanon since mid-September, the IDF has now taken the initiative in the north, with the aim of countering the threat from Hezbollah in the longer term. To this end, units that have been released from the Gaza Strip for some time and additional reservists have been transferred to the north. With the killing of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, the terrorist organization was dealt a decisive blow. Large and central parts of Hezbollah's leadership have been eliminated, leaving the organization currently without leadership. The IDF, on the other hand, has not only managed to rebuild its reputation among the Israeli population but also to restore Israel's deterrent capability after the massive failure on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The ground offensive that has now begun is intended to permanently destroy Hezbollah's terrorist structures so that the residents of northern Israel can safely return to their homes and are not exposed to any long-term threat from Lebanon. The safe and permanent return of the citizens evacuated from the north has also been officially announced by the Israeli government as an additional war goal. With the ground offensive the IDF attempts to push Hezbollah beyond the Litani River, which runs around 25 kilometers behind the Israeli-Lebanese border. The (renewed) attack by Iran on October 1<sup>st</sup> can also be seen as a reaction to the start of the ground offensive in Lebanon: With the massive weakening of Hezbollah, Iran is threatened with the loss of another very important proxy (following the destruction of Hamas in the Gaza Strip).

## Iran and its other proxies

In addition to Hamas and Hezbollah, the Houthi from Yemen and Iranian militias from Syria and Iraq are repeatedly attacking Israel. The rockets and drones of these proxies have not only reached the port city of Eilat in the south of Israel, but also Tel Aviv and other places in the center of the country. In July, an Israeli was killed in a drone attack on Tel Aviv - in response, Israel destroyed important port facilities in Hodeida. Despite an international military operation, Houthi attacks on cargo ships in the Red Sea or the Gulf of Aden continue to occur, which is why major shipping companies are now avoiding the region. In the meantime, Israel has also attacked strategic Houthi targets in Yemen for the second time - more than 1,800 kilometers from the Israeli border. What the Iranian militias, Houthis and Hezbollah have in common is that, as proxies of Iran, they are not only ideologically but also financially and materially equipped by the latter. Over the years, Iran has continuously succeeded in creating a ring of well-equipped terrorist organizations around Israel, which are now constantly attacking the country from various directions. The first direct attack by Iran on Israel in April 2024 set a drastic precedent. The announced attack followed a targeted Israeli air strike on an Iranian consulate building in Damascus, in which high-ranking commanders of both Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards were killed. With support of its allies the IDF was able to prove the efficiency of its defense systems by intercepting 99% of all projectiles fired by Iran. The attack can be described as a turning point as it signaled Iran's willingness to become a combatant not only indirectly through its proxies, but also directly. Iran has renewed this willingness with its repeated direct attack.

This time, Iran did not use drones, but only ballistic missiles, which meant that the remaining warning time was much shorter. As well in this attack, the majority of the missiles were intercepted, and Israeli casualties were avoided - but there were also hits on Israeli military bases. The attack can be read as a long-announced reaction to the killing of Hamas leader Haniyya in Tehran at the end of July, as well as to the ground offensive that had begun in Lebanon. Iran was faced with the dilemma that an affront, such as the killing of Haniyya in Tehran or the Israeli action against Hezbollah, could not be left unanswered. Otherwise, there was a risk of losing credibility with its own population and proxies. With this attack, however, Iran is provoking a massive counterattack. Israel already announced in advance that it would strike back extensively in the event of an Iranian attack. From Iran's point of view, this retaliation could above all endanger its nuclear program, which has been progressing for years. On the Israeli side, the willingness to actively oppose Iran's nuclear armament has increased significantly as a result of last year's events. However, it also depends on the extent to which the USA - shortly before the upcoming presidential elections - will support Israel in such a reaction. In any case, there are increasingly voices in Israeli politics, even outside the current government, calling for a more aggressive approach - similar to the current action against Hezbollah.

### **Threat of escalation in the Middle East conflict**

Immediately after October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, there were fears of a violent escalation in the Palestinian territories. This fear did not initially materialize to the extent feared; however, the situation has continued to deteriorate as the war in Gaza continues. Palestinian terrorist attacks with fatalities occur on a regular basis. The IDF is forced to carry out more complex military operations, most recently with air strikes and drones. According to the UN, over 700 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, including civilians. There has also been an increase in violence by radical settlers against Palestinian residents. Israel has been severely criticized by international partners in this regard - countries such as the USA and the EU have imposed sanctions against some radical settlers. The worsening security situation is tying up more and more Israeli security forces, which are urgently needed in other parts of the country. On the Israeli side, the main fear is that there could be a large-scale attack on one or more Israeli settlements in the West Bank, or a coordinated attack on Israeli residences directly on the border by breaching the border fortifications - similar to the attack on October 7, 2023. Not only against this backdrop, the Israeli government rejected the establishment of a possible Palestinian state in a resolution (68 for, nine against), which was also supported by parts of the opposition. The situation in the West Bank therefore remains extremely fragile and further escalation seems possible at any time.

### **Israel's internal constitution**

After October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Israel initially experienced a moment of national unity in view of the existentially threatening situation. Existing differences and polarizing discussions, such as the controversial judicial reform, were initially suspended. Among other things, one of the largest opposition parties - the National Unity Party - joined Netanyahu's government and its leader Benny Gantz became a member of the newly formed war cabinet. As the war progressed, Gantz resigned from the government in June 2024 due to various differences. One of the main contentious issues polarizing large sections of Israeli society is the introduction of compulsory military service for the ultra-Orthodox. The ultra-Orthodox have so far been exempt from compulsory military service in Israel. At the same time their share of the population is increasing rapidly due to the high birth rate. This circumstance is seen as extremely unfair by the decreasing percentage of Israel's secular population, which is also bearing the greatest burden of the current war situation through military service. In June 2024, the Israeli Supreme Court unanimously ruled that there is no legal framework for the

decades-long practice of not drafting the ultra-Orthodox. As expected, attempts to draft the ultra-Orthodox triggered massive protests. Ultra-Orthodox parties involved in the current government announced that they will leave the government if the efforts make any progress. In the summer, the IDF began sending first call-up notices to ultra-Orthodox conscripts; however, only a fraction of them showed up. As well the conflict-line between more secular and more religious-nationalist Jews is still very present in the country. This is particularly reflected in the dispute over the controversial judicial reform. After the reform was paused with the outbreak of the war, there are now repeated (tentative) attempts by various governing parties to put the issue back on the agenda. Gideon Saar's recent announcement that he and his "New Hope" party will join the government has also reshuffled some cards in the current political debate. After Netanyahu was sent down for the count several times by many commentators after October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, he has so far not only managed to keep his government together, but also to win back critics such as Saar. As a result, some governing parties are once again receiving better approval ratings in current polls. Even if the current government still wouldn't have a majority in elections, according to a recent survey (September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024), Likud would once again be the strongest party in the Knesset, gaining 25 seats. How this trend develops in the coming months depends on whether the trauma of October 7<sup>th</sup> can be overcome within the country. This is linked to the most important conflict-line within Israeli society: how to deal with the fate of the Israeli hostages abducted to the Gaza Strip. Relatives and friends of the hostages founded vocal and effective initiatives that demonstrate daily for their release. They accuse the government of not doing enough and of not being interested in a possible agreement that would lead to their liberation. As the war continues, the protests have intensified. If the Israeli government doesn't succeed in freeing more hostages (or worse, if a large proportion of the remaining hostages are dead) despite the military progress against Hamas in Gaza, these protests are likely to intensify again, especially around the first anniversary.

## Conclusion

In the course of the current war, Israel has been able to show that it is capable of countering existential threats on several fronts simultaneously. Especially "external" fronts and threats, as dangerous as they were or still are, appear manageable and defeatable thanks to the strong resilience and cohesion of the Israeli population. Israel has also been able to deal with challenges such as vociferous international criticism of Israel's actions, anti-Semitic riots in numerous countries (including in friendly European countries and the USA) and announcements that the supply of essential weapons systems would be restricted. The fighting and the precarious situation in the region have ultimately not led to Arab countries of the Abraham Accords (or others that have long maintained diplomatic relations with Israel) to resign from them. After a year of war and the national trauma of October 7<sup>th</sup>, which has still not been overcome, the unresolved fracture and conflict lines within Israeli society are therefore the greatest threat to the future of the Israeli state. In order to overcome this existential threat, the country does not need external support, but rather a political and social self-confession that further internal social discord will weaken the country and pose an essential danger - especially in a security situation as precarious as the current one. With a direct military conflict with Iran already underway and an ongoing war on several other fronts, it is therefore of central importance for Israel to overcome its internal divisions. After a year of war, it would therefore be time to finally put this most important front to one side internally.

*The text was completed on the evening of October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024.*

**Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.**

Michael Rimmel and Johannes Sosada  
Foundation Office Israel  
European and International Cooperation Department  
[www.kas.de/country](http://www.kas.de/country)

michael.rimmel@kas.de and johannes.sosada@kas.de



The text of this publication is published under a Creative Commons license: "Creative Commons Attribution- Share Alike 4.0 international" (CC BY-SA 4.0), <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>