

The Israel– Hamas war one year on

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One year into the conflict, IISS experts assess the impact of the war on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and its regional and international reverberations.

Israel's tactical ground campaign in Gaza

Sascha Bruchmann and Sir Tom Beckett

Shortly after the unprecedented Hamas-led attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023 and while Tel Aviv weighed its response, the IISS [assessed](#) that Israel would have to either garrison Gaza or reinstate a blockade of it. One year later, Israel has chosen to do both.

Israel has proceeded methodically, isolating large areas and moving from one to the other. Gaza City came first, Rafah last. As of September 2024, three Israel Defense Forces (IDF) divisions were engaged in Gaza. The 98th (now resubordinated to the Northern Command) conducted raids in Gaza to destroy Hamas units. The 252nd currently holds the Netzarim Corridor, and the 162nd secures Rafah and the Philadelphi Corridor. In pursuit of Israel's strategic goal to [eliminate](#) Hamas, the IDF appears intent on controlling these two corridors and presenting a continuous threat of destructive raids. Israeli control of the corridors threatens Hamas's continuing existence as an effective military force and Gaza's governing body, and will thus strengthen Israel's negotiating position.

The Netzarim Corridor separates the former main population centre, Gaza City, from the al-Mawasi humanitarian zone, where many Gazans are currently sheltering. By controlling this corridor, Israel seeks to separate Hamas from returning civilians, a crucial aim in counter-insurgency campaigns, and prevent it from reintroducing weapons and fighters into northern Gaza. The fact that the IDF [has found](#) tunnels under the Netzarim Corridor suggests that Hamas has successfully sent fighters into Gaza City. While this remains the case, the IDF is likely to continue to conduct raids before allowing civilians to return.

The Philadelphi Corridor, along the Gaza–Egypt border, was Hamas's key [supply](#) line. Control over the corridor is thus important to disrupt Hamas's external

resupply or stockpiling for another conflict. Sources [state](#) that Hamas produces some of its missiles with repurposed material and assembles rocket-propelled grenades inside Gaza, but much of its weaponry is too complicated for local production. The importance of the corridors for war fighting was underlined by Hamas's insistence that the IDF vacate them as a condition of a hostage deal.

Hamas's fighting force is weakened. Though it can reconstitute some units, doing so will become increasingly difficult as the war drags on. According to Arab sources, Hamas desperately [wants](#) a ceasefire, if only to preserve itself as an entity that will still have influence the 'day after'.

In the past year, the IDF has eliminated key members of the Hamas military command chain and large numbers of fighters while keeping its combat losses low, averaging one soldier a day. But it has failed to secure the release of the remaining hostages (around 100, with two-thirds thought to be alive), and it remains unclear how the goals set by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (i.e., to destroy Hamas, demilitarise Gaza and de-radicalise Palestinian society) can be met. To the frustration of the IDF leadership, no 'day after' plan has been set and the potential for further radicalisation of Palestinians is high.

As winter approaches, the IDF will continue to garrison and blockade Gaza and may transition to counter-insurgency, which could allow for the gradual withdrawal of some of its more versatile units to support the ground war against Hizbullah in Lebanon. One year on, tactics are preferred over strategy, and this will continue absent either an Israeli plan for the 'day after' or a broader Arab peace plan.

Despite war, continuity in Palestinian politics

Laith Alajlouni and Emile Hokayem

Despite the human cost and the scale of the destruction in Gaza, intra-Palestinian politics has remained largely unchanged in the past year. In July, the main

Palestinian factions met in Beijing for talks to forge national unity and agree on post-war governance of Gaza. Their final declaration signalled Hamas's

willingness to compromise with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Hamas, then led by Ismail Haniyeh, who was killed in an Israeli strike soon after, agreed to accept the two-state solution it had previously opposed and to form a unity government with 13 other Palestinian factions to resume peace negotiations with Israel. However, the deal does not outline any steps to break Fatah's control over the Palestinian Authority (PA), except for [holding](#) general national elections. Moreover, the implementation of the agreement will face three issues. Firstly, Yahya Sinwar, Hamas's new hardline leader, has a different agenda to Haniyeh, a relative pragmatist. Secondly, the continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza makes it impossible to hold elections without Israel's approval, which in any case is highly unlikely at present. Thirdly, PA leader Mahmoud Abbas lacks commitment to cede authority to others.

In the West Bank, the reputation of the PA is in tatters because of its inability to stop mounting Israeli military and settler violence. A total of 6,277 confrontations between the IDF and Palestinians, and 1,334 incidents of settler violence, were [recorded](#) in the first six months of 2024. Israeli forces and settlers have [killed](#) 158 children and the IDF has conducted raids against Palestinian factions in several West Bank cities. Nevertheless, the PA remains the most convenient and legitimate vehicle for

post-war governance scenarios, and the only one that Arab and Western states are willing to invest in.

Much will depend on Hamas's standing and capabilities when the fighting in Gaza ends and whether Sinwar himself survives. Even if it endures as a mere insurgency, Hamas will retain political support and the ability to shape, or at least obstruct, Palestinian politics. It remains the most popular faction in the West Bank and Gaza. As of September 2024, according to the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 36.0% of Palestinians support Hamas, while 21.0% support Fatah and 7.0% the other factions (35.0% of Palestinians are uncommitted to any party or do not know who they support). Hamas is much less popular in Gaza than in the West Bank; only 36.0% of Gazans say they prefer that Hamas returns to rule Gaza, compared with 73.0% in the West Bank. The same poll shows that 84.0% of Palestinians [demand](#) the resignation of Abbas. In the event of a presidential election, Fatah's Marwan Barghouti (currently detained in an Israeli prison) would take 32.0% of the vote, followed by Sinwar at 31.0%, with only 6.0% of Palestinians supporting Abbas.

However, bereft of economic resources, cut off from its supply lines and unable to jumpstart any reconstruction or recovery plan, Hamas will struggle to meet the immense needs of the Gazan population when the fighting ends and may become more vulnerable to criticism.

Israel's increasing war costs

Fenella McGerty

Israel's current war is its longest and most complex since its creation in 1948. This has come at a significant economic cost.

The costs of Israel's campaign in Gaza have steadily increased over time, with the Bank of Israel (BoI) revising its estimate of the direct costs of the war over the 2023–25 period from USD54 billion in November 2023 to USD69bn in May 2024. In January, the BoI governor, Amir Yaron, put these costs at 10.0% of GDP, with an additional 2.0% of GDP in lost revenue. Over time, he estimated that increased defence spending combined with higher costs of debt and the 'revitalisation' of the south would [cost](#) a further 1.0% of GDP. Israel's war costs include large increases in defence spending,

compensation for direct and indirect damage, civilian expenses including state-backed loan schemes to support households, businesses and reservists, interest on debt and loss of government revenue.

To mitigate against some of the longer-term costs, Israel undertook fiscal consolidation measures when the 2024 budget was adjusted in January to include a USD19bn boost to public spending. The uplift, largely allocated to the defence budget, was partially offset by making savings across all other government ministries and by raising state revenues via taxing bank profits. The revised defence budget came to USD34bn, up from USD19.2bn, not including the annual USD3.3bn in Foreign Military Financing assistance from the United States.

The Ministry of Finance projected that the deficit would jump to 6.6% of GDP as a result of the budget adjustments, compared to the 5.7% projected by the Bofl at the beginning of 2024. Further upward adjustments to defence and security funding over the course of 2024 will likely extend the deficit further. Indeed, Fitch Ratings [estimated](#) in August that the deficit would be much higher, closer to 7.8%.

In pulling together the 2025 budget, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich [stated](#) in early September 2024 that other measures of fiscal convergence would be pursued, including salary freezes, tax-rate adjustments and a series of savings and efficiency measures in government ministries and the public sector totalling USD9.5bn. As a result of such measures, the Ministry of Finance now has a deficit target of below 4.0% of GDP for 2025.

In a July 2024 forecast, the Bofl's research department downgraded the economic outlook for Israel. The central bank at that point [projected](#) real GDP growth of just 1.5% in 2024 and 4.2% in 2025, a decrease from its April 2024 [projections](#) of 2.0% and 5.0% respectively. As the war has

progressed and intensified, the Bofl has had to adjust underlying assumptions, primarily increasing the probability of more serious security scenarios, not least on Israel's northern front. Similarly, the IMF downgraded Israel's economic outlook to 1.6% growth in 2024 in their April 2024 World Economic Outlook (WEO), compared to 3.0% growth in the October 2023 WEO. Moody's already [downgraded](#) Israel's credit rating in February 2024, and Fitch Ratings did so in August 2024.

Yaron has been keen to [point out](#) that the Israeli economy has returned to strong economic growth following past military operations, while Smotrich has sought to reassure markets and investors by [highlighting](#) the strength of the shekel, the stability of Israel's stock market, revenues from tax, strong access to borrowing and debt, and the 'rapid recovery of high-tech'.

Such moves and projections were made even before the recent escalation in Lebanon. If hostilities between Israel and Hizbullah further intensify, or if the conflict spreads across the Middle East, the costs will clearly increase, and underlying assumptions will again need adjustment.

Hizbullah's rout leaves Lebanon uncertain

Emile Hokayem

Hizbullah was not involved in the 7 October attacks. It joined the fight out of solidarity with Hamas, hoping for a short war and a political success earned by standing with the Palestinians. Hizbullah linked its rocket-firing to an explicit goal of forcing Israel to agree to a ceasefire in Gaza before implementing one in Lebanon. In doing so, Hassan Nasrallah, Hizbullah's late leader, deeply misread Israel's mood and risk appetite post-7 October. By establishing a linkage between the conflict in Lebanon and a ceasefire in Gaza that he expected, but which never came, he effectively cornered himself. He also discovered that Iran was not willing to stay the course or up the ante because it could not risk a slide toward a direct confrontation with the US.

This was not the war Nasrallah wanted, nor was it one Hizbullah was designed to fight. The group was supposed to be a strategic force to deter Israel and to mentor other Iranian-backed militias in the region. Its warfighting concept in Lebanon and Israel assumed a rapid and violent

conflict that started with a massive exchange of missiles, rockets and drones to overwhelm Israeli air defences, followed by intense ground operations. Its displays of technological prowess, such as the flight of a drone over the port of Haifa and other critical facilities, gave a taste of what the movement hoped to achieve. The goal was to stun Israel's society, which Nasrallah described as weaker than a spider's web, and force a climbdown that would have inevitably been interpreted as a success.

Instead, for 11 months, an Israeli-dictated campaign of attrition based on superior intelligence and air power trapped Hizbullah and imposed high costs on its leadership structure and weapons stockpiles. This was the war Israel had been preparing to fight since 2006, and Hizbullah had no answer to its military superiority.

In his last speech on 19 September, a tired-looking Nasrallah seemed to finally understand that his attempt to maintain deterrence against Israel was not working.

But he still claimed as a success his ability to deny Israel its stated objective: the return of Israeli residents to northern Israel. Israel, however, was in no mood to accept a permanent internal displacement that amounted to a no-go zone inside its territory.

The incredible penetration of Hizbullah's security apparatus and the elimination of nearly its entire command structure, including Nasrallah himself, suggest internal betrayals, terrible security protocols and communications weaknesses. Losing its image of competence leaves the movement vulnerable to internal criticism but also to scorn from its foes.

Nasrallah's death has pushed Lebanon into the unknown. The hope in Western countries and among some Lebanese citizens that their government and military could sweep in and stabilise the fractured country is laudable, but both are in their worst shape ever. The country lacks a president, its economy has been in disarray since the 2019 financial collapse and the army's readiness and cohesion are eroded by low morale, bad pay and a sense of drift. A badly designed, uninvited international effort to push the Lebanese government to take control of its territory and fate may well be interpreted as perfidy by a large swathe of the Lebanese population, and certainly by Hizbullah's constituency.

In the immediate term, Hizbullah may be debilitated but it is not dead. Nasrallah's likely successor, Hashem Safi al-Dine, is a hardline cleric who will

seek to consolidate the remnants of his movement. If Nasrallah's standing grew because of his victories, Safi al-Dine will be measured by how he rebuilds after a tremendous rout. He will try to revive the spirit of the *muqawama* (resistance), invoke Nasrallah's ghost to mobilise his constituency and look for support in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Iran, much-criticised within Hizbullah for failing to protect and meaningfully support its allies, will be asked to provide any support short of a direct intervention.

Surviving commanders may pressure the new leadership to relinquish their predecessors' caution and argue that whatever is left in their arsenal should be fired at Israel. They now have to defend against a ground campaign with diminished capabilities, hoping that their advance preparations, knowledge of the field and agile structure can withstand the Israeli advance.

Whatever Hizbullah decides to do in the coming days will be constrained by the tone and tempo Israel is setting for the war's new phase. Israel may smell an opportunity to destroy the movement and thus continue its air campaign and conduct limited raids or even a large-scale ground operation.

The myth of the *muqawama* has dominated Lebanon since the end of the Israeli occupation in 2000 and came at the cost of state-building. Nasrallah's exit from the scene may allow that hard task to finally begin, but this will depend on Israel's military choices.

The Houthis: a new regional actor in the Red Sea

Wolf-Christian Paes

Prior to the Hamas-led 7 October attacks against Israel, Ansarullah (also known as the Houthis) in Yemen was at most peripheral to Israeli and Western security considerations, despite belonging to Iran's 'Axis of Resistance'. With the Houthis' sights set on the consolidation of power within Yemen, the group was primarily seen as a national, rather than a regional actor, and did not present a military threat to Western interests.

The Houthis' declaration of war on Israel in late October 2023, ostensibly in solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza, therefore came as a surprise to many. The Houthis have since launched more than 220 aerial attacks on Israel using missiles and uninhabited

aerial vehicles (UAVs), most of which the latter's air defences intercepted. More successful, at least politically, were Houthi attacks against commercial ships in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, beginning in November 2023. Using a combination of ballistic and cruise missiles, as well as UAVs, uninhabited surface vehicles, and skiffs carrying armed men, the Houthis have carried out more than 300 attacks on merchant ships allegedly linked to Israel and its Western allies. While most attacks either missed their target or did little damage, the Houthis successfully captured one ship and sank two more in a campaign during which four sailors lost their lives. Despite the deployment of several international naval missions

to the region, most major shipping lines have rerouted their vessels around the Cape of Good Hope. The economic impact of the Houthi campaign is felt most acutely in Egypt – where revenue from Suez Canal shipping has halved compared to the first quarter of 2023 – and in Israel, because of the reduction of port calls in Eilat, as well as other Red Sea ports.

In response, the US and the United Kingdom have conducted airstrikes against Houthi positions, while

Israel dominates the air domain

Fabian Hinz

Israel has maintained near-total air superiority over its regional adversaries, leveraging this advantage in both full-scale aerial campaigns and more limited escalations. In Gaza and Lebanon, Israel's massive use of air power has consistently degraded the military capabilities of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hizbullah, while minimising the exposure of Israeli ground forces. Coupled with advanced intelligence gathering, Israel has demonstrated its ability to use precision strikes to neutralise high-value targets, including high-ranking adversary commanders and key capabilities. Despite this, its aerial campaign in Gaza has caused extensive collateral damage and resulted in high civilian casualty numbers, generating criticism of its targeting procedures by legal experts and international non-governmental organisations.

Against Iran and the Houthis, Israel has eschewed large-scale operations in favour of surgical and symbolic strikes. Israel's strategy of calibrated, tit-for-tat escalation signals its ability and willingness to strike back without provoking a full-scale conflict.

For Iran and the various non-state actors fighting Israel, rockets, missiles and UAVs have been central to their asymmetric strategy. In theory, these capabilities enable the so-called Axis of Resistance to target

Iran's proxy challenges

John Raine

The past year has been tumultuous for Iran. Despite receiving no forewarning of Hamas's 7 October attacks, the regime found itself drawn into a wider conflict with

Israel has launched two air operations against oil and port installations on the Red Sea coast to stop Iranian arms deliveries. Although the number of strikes against commercial ships has declined, the past 11 months have shown that neither response was sufficient to deter the Houthis. Politically, the movement has gained popularity in much of the Arab world, allowing it to gain regional status at a time when most Arab governments have remained outwardly neutral.

Israeli interests and strike deep within Israeli territory, despite lacking capable air forces. By amassing large arsenals of missiles and UAVs, these actors have attempted to establish deterrence vis-à-vis Israel's conventional superiority and acquire escalation parity in more limited conflicts.

In practice, however, the effectiveness of this strategy has been mixed. Against vulnerable and risk-averse actors, UAVs and missiles have proven to be highly effective, as seen in the Houthis' campaign in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, which has caused significant geo-economic disruption and has proven resilient to limited Western intervention. However, when employed against a well-equipped adversary with a higher risk tolerance, such as Israel, missile and UAV capabilities have been much less effective. Hizbullah's and Iran's attacks against Israel have failed to uphold deterrence and have been insufficient to break or blunt Israel's escalation dominance. Hizbullah, in particular, has faced additional challenges due to Israel's success in intelligence collection, which, when combined with aerial supremacy, has allowed Israel to neutralise missile and UAV assets before launch. While Hizbullah has seen moderate success in downing slow-flying drones, it has been unable to challenge Israel's air superiority.

Israel, struggling to align its risk appetite with the need to respond to escalating Israeli attacks. It has paid a heavy price, with the IDF systematically eliminating

several Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Hamas and Hizbullah leaders. As a result, its credibility in the eyes of its rivals and – more importantly – its regional partners has suffered.

In response to a lethal attack on senior members of the IRGC leadership in Iranian diplomatic premises in Damascus, Tehran launched on 13–14 April an unprecedented large-scale missile and UAV attack on Israel. Israel's air defences, bolstered by its allies, held, and the damage was minimal. Iran was keen to stress it was retaliation, not a new level of conflict. Another key moment was the dramatic assassination by the Israelis of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in an IRGC facility in Tehran. Despite the outrage expressed by the leadership, Tehran's retaliation was even more muted. But on 1 October Iran launched an attack similar to the one in April on Israel in response to Israel's campaign against Hizbullah, taking tensions to a new height on the eve of the anniversary of the 7 October attacks.

Iran's central challenge has been to fine-tune the activities of the so-called Axis of Resistance, which has mobilised in support of Gaza. Its three most prominent and powerful members – Hamas, Hizbullah and the Houthis – have local imperatives and agendas that shape strategy and operations more immediately and decisively than advice from Tehran. This has complicated Tehran's desire to avoid a state-on-state conflict with Israel. The April attack has awkwardly re-set expectations for Iran's allies of what help they might receive.

Despite these setbacks, Iran has maintained regional relations (its deal with Saudi Arabia has not

unravelling). Domestically, it has not faced a significant resurgence in discontent and was able to elect a reformist president without major tensions. New President Masoud Pezeshkian appears to want to revive nuclear diplomacy, putting the ball in the United States' court but also appearing to be at odds with other factions in government. The hardline IRGC undoubtedly influenced the decision over the level of attack against Israel on 1 October, as they had done on 13–14 April, but it is unclear if Pezeshkian was even consulted.

Next year may be more difficult. The damage Israel has inflicted on Hamas has, for Iran, been politically bearable. Similar damage to Hizbullah – against whom Israel is now escalating materially – would not be as manageable, and may oblige Iran to protect its key regional partner in a sustained campaign.

Iran will struggle to balance its external commitments against its domestic priority, which remains the preservation of the ageing revolution. As ever, the trick will be to separate overseas tensions from internal dynamics even as Iran's strategic partners in the region are all likely to require more, not less, support. As Tehran repeats its direct attacks on Israel it must brace for retaliation, possibly outside of existing parameters. Netanyahu's direct appeal to the Iranian people indicated his intent permanently to damage the Iranian leadership's influence both at home and regionally. The next year may see that intent, in which the US and the Arab Gulf states will have an interest, become a strategy.

Jordan feels the effects of war

Laith Alajlouni

Jordan has been hit hard on several fronts by the war in Gaza. It has been at the forefront of Arab criticism of Israel since October 2023, calling for a ceasefire and violently denouncing the Israeli government's actions in Gaza but also in the neighbouring West Bank.

Domestically, opposition parties, led by the Muslim Brotherhood, have taken to the streets and mobilised protesters to express their anger at Israel's campaign in Gaza and to demonstrate their popularity to the government. Indeed, the opposition group increased its influence and

gained 31 out of 138 seats in the most recent parliamentary elections, [representing](#) their largest electoral victory since 1989. However, the Islamists' increased influence and sympathy with Hamas are fuelling polarisation in Jordan, where many Jordanians see sympathy with Hamas as a threat to Jordanian identity and to sovereignty. The economy is struggling to cope with both the decline of touristic activity due to regional instability and the increased cost of imports due to maritime disruption in the Red Sea, exacerbating popular disgruntlement.

Jordan has also had to deal with multiple security threats associated with the ongoing escalation between Israel and Iran. Jordan joined France, the UK and the US in intercepting Iran's drone and missile strike against Israel in April 2024. Jordan argued that Iran's attacks violated its airspace and posed a risk to its population, [stating](#) that it refused to be turned into a 'battlefield for Iran or Israel' to play out their differences. It has also faced UAV penetration from Syria, where militias antagonistic to the Jordanian monarchy operate.

Similarly, Jordan remains concerned about the escalation in the West Bank, [fearing](#) new arrivals of

Palestinian refugees that would be highly destabilising for its society and economy. A new wave of refugees would flip the demographic balance in the country and transform Jordan into a de-facto Palestinian state, which could lead to Palestinian resistance activity from Jordan or even civil unrest. However, the Jordanian government has made it clear that it will resist such outcomes, including by [terminating](#) its peace treaty with Israel if necessary. The escalation in the West Bank also poses a threat to border security, as many Iran-backed militias have attempted to [smuggle](#) weapons into the West Bank through Jordan.

Western naval deployments: successes and challenges

Nick Childs

The regional maritime domain has witnessed more intense activity and sustained challenges than in any other recent Middle East conflict.

The Middle East crisis has led the US twice to surge dual aircraft-carrier strike groups into the Eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the waters in and around the Gulf. These moves were designed to rein in the risk of escalation, but they came at the expense of the US force posture elsewhere – and perhaps most critically in the Indo-Pacific – and led to a further overstretch of US naval forces. The deployments off Israel and Lebanon were meant to deter Iran and its partners, but also to prepare for contingencies such as an evacuation of citizens during a conflict. Deployed US warships also played an effective role in defending Israel against the Iranian barrages of missiles and UAVs in April and the beginning of October.

The international response to the Houthi anti-shipping campaign was also significant by recent standards. Even so, the political cross-currents at play led to suboptimal and in some cases slow responses, with separate US- and European-led missions. Only a few nations provided vessels, reflecting both limited capacity and political reluctance.

The assembled naval forces achieved considerable tactical successes in countering a complex set of Houthi threats, with some lessons quickly learned, particularly among certain European navies over shortfalls in a number of their systems. However, the forces have been spread thin and have not prevented some attacks from

getting through. Moreover, strikes carried out by US and UK forces may have degraded Houthi capabilities but have not deterred the group – perhaps unsurprisingly, given the significant political impact the Houthis have achieved compared to the level of physical damage they have inflicted at sea. Overall tanker- and cargo-traffic volumes through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait were down almost 80.0% in the first half of 2024 compared to 2023.

Furthermore, the Houthis have been posing challenges to some of the world's most capable navies using Iranian-supplied weapons technologies that have proliferated around the region, raising concerns that regional escalation could lead to the naval threat also spreading. The deployed navies have been expending precious advanced missiles and depleting their warships' magazines and strategic stockpiles, fuelling pressure to find more cost-effective approaches and technologies to defeat these threats in the future.

The assembled navies must balance whether and how they can sustain what could become a long-standing mission – the UK Royal Navy has already had to gap its presence in the Red Sea due to a shortage of suitable replacement warships – against the price of not doing so. Despite the rerouting of much merchant traffic, the feared global economic recession has not ensued. The calculus for the future involves whether a steady-state 'new normal' is acceptable, the risks of further escalation and the potential ripple effects for other critical waterways and flashpoints around the world.

The air-defence coalition: a one-off success?

Martin Sampson

Following a barrage of over 300 Iranian UAVs and cruise and ballistic missiles launched at Israel overnight on 13–14 April, the IDF claimed that a rapidly assembled coalition of aircraft and air defences from France, Israel, Jordan, the UK, the US and other regional actors had prevented 99% of Iranian weapons from reaching their intended targets.

The reasons for the coalition's remarkable success were threefold. Firstly, almost ten years' involvement in counter-terrorism operations against the Islamic State (ISIS) meant that participating nations' air and air-defence assets were readily available, and that the US was practised at overcoming and integrating disparate rules of engagement, capabilities, political authorities and political sensitivities. Secondly, in September 2021, the US moved Israel from its European Command (EUCOM) to its Central Command (CENTCOM), cohering the practical issues of coordination, intelligence fusion and operational command-and-control (C2) across a broad Israel–Iran/Iranian proxy air, land and maritime threat axis. Thirdly, the US-led Middle East Air Defence (MEAD) alliance formed in 2022 provided Israel and Western and Arab nations the political cover to offer military capabilities for broad defensive mutual benefit.

The strategic communications of France, Israel, the UK and the US, and, to a lesser extent, Jordan, amplified the strong tactical-level performance. Importantly, the broad

coalition messaging was aligned and emphasised superior operational capability, operational security and strategic solidarity with Israel. Iran portrayed the requirement for the coalition as Israeli weakness and an indication of Israel's reliance upon its Western and regional partners for its defence. The strength of the commitment to maintain this coalition also came under scrutiny: would the coalition come together under different circumstances, or is the defence of Israel an absolute commitment?

In the future, managing overt but also informal support and more discrete contributions will be a challenge as nations carefully weigh up their internal and external equities and calibrate their level of commitment. The coalition will have relied as much upon intelligence and transfer of data, as well as access, basing and overflight authorities from regional partners such as Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and others, as on the exquisite military hardware that downed the drones and missiles.

At their core, coalitions are ad hoc, discretionary and formed for tactical action. This one was no different. While the tactical tools, US C2 structures and MEAD will endure, the political cost–benefit calculus of utilising them under a coalition banner may shift. It remains to be seen whether proven operational success is enough to maintain or reconstitute this coalition effort in the future.

On Palestine, US and Israeli goals diverge

Dana H. Allin

Israel has often fought wars against a clock set by the US. Israel's leaders have generally known that there would come a point when Washington would press them to stop.

Within days of the 7 October attacks, President Joe Biden flew to Tel Aviv, where he physically hugged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and figuratively embraced the Israeli people. But he also carried a kind of clock in his warning not to succumb to vengeance and repeat the kinds of mistakes that he said America made after 9/11. Over the ensuing year

the US, represented by CIA Director Bill Burns, has tried tirelessly to negotiate a ceasefire that would see the return of hostages and, the Americans hoped, a longer-term end to the war. The Biden administration has repeatedly claimed that negotiations were on the verge of success. But it is by now abundantly clear that Israel's government could not care less about the American clock.

Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected or reneged on agreements negotiated by US diplomats, who at times had to pretend that he endorsed them. When the US

announced the suspension of one kind of weapons sale, Netanyahu denounced it as ‘unconscionable’. He later flew to Washington in July to give a speech in front of the US Congress and to meet Donald Trump. The US vetoed several United Nations Security Council resolutions and protested against the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court cases against Israel. The net cost to US diplomatic credibility has been significant at a time when it is trying to rally international support for Ukraine.

Jerusalem can spurn Washington for a number of reasons. First is the reasonable assumption that American support for Israel is, practically speaking, unconditional. It is not clear when, exactly, it became *de rigueur* for US presidents, or aspiring presidents, to express extravagant devotion to Israel. This was not the way presidents spoke in the Richard Nixon era. There is irony in this fealty insofar as the respective goals and worldviews of the two allies have never been further apart. Netanyahu and his far-right coalition partners have zero intention of doing anything to satisfy the United States’ hopes that the Gaza disaster will occasion a moral reckoning leading to Palestinian non-Hamas governance in Gaza and then a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank. On the contrary, they have done everything possible to make a Palestinian state impossible. The project of ensuring this impossibility, which started well before the current war, continues apace with expanded settlements and the physical infrastructure of annexation in the West Bank.

The Arab Gulf States’ stances on the war

Hasan Alhasan

Qatar’s longstanding relations with Hamas and Israel have allowed it to play a mediating role in the conflict along with Egypt and the US. As the prospect of a permanent ceasefire in Gaza has remained elusive, Qatar has expressed its frustration with the warring parties’ unyielding stances and Netanyahu’s [calls](#) for pressure to be applied on Doha to help bring Hamas to yield, [warning](#) it was reconsidering its role as a mediator. The other Arab Gulf states have remained on the margins of the conflict, lending their support to Egypt and Jordan against [proposed](#) Israeli war plans.

If this creates a long-term American problem, Netanyahu’s short-term solution is Trump’s return to the White House. While it is not obvious whether a Kamala Harris administration would be willing or able to bend Israel more effectively to the American will, it is perfectly clear that a Trump administration would not even try. Or, to be more precise, its view of the Palestinians would be easily compatible with the views of Netanyahu and his two Greater Israel coalition partners Bezael Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir.

Approaching the one-year anniversary of 7 October, Israel attacked Hezbollah in Lebanon, opening the fully expanded war that Washington had feared and tried to avert. As I write, Iran has launched its second major missile attack against Israel; the inevitable Israeli retaliation could draw the United States into the war with Iran that successive US administrations have devoted diplomacy to prevent. This is different from the Gaza war, however, insofar as Israel’s ultimate aims are more in line with what the Biden administration would also like to see – a significantly degraded Axis of Resistance, and with it, diminished Iranian power. As one US official [put it](#) to Barak Ravid of Axios, ‘The Israelis really are playing with fire here ... [but] what if it works?’ This indicates something essential about the American role in these wars: for all their military capabilities, connections to Israel and diplomatic energy, the Americans are effectively bystanders to what comes next.

The Arab Gulf states have remained neutral in the confrontation between Israel and the Iran-led Axis of Resistance. They have adopted a defensive posture, intercepting Houthi missiles and drones that violated their airspace and [facilitating](#) US-led efforts to intercept Iran’s drone and missile attacks against Israel in April 2024. With the exception of Bahrain, however, they have avoided sending offensive signals to Iran by staying out of US-led *Operation Prosperity Guardian* in the Red Sea and *Operation Poseidon Archer* against the Houthis in Yemen, and [restricting](#) the United States’

use of their territories to launch attacks against Iran. Not only have the 2020 Abraham Accords signed by the UAE and Bahrain held, but the other Arab Gulf states' de-escalation with Iran has also endured. Even Bahrain, typically the most hawkish of the Arab Gulf states on Iran, [aims](#) to improve relations with Tehran.

Meanwhile, the conflict has stalled progress on a Saudi Arabia–Israel normalisation agreement, as Saudi Arabia has explicitly preconditioned normalisation on achieving tangible progress toward a Palestinian state. Although the Kingdom has deliberately not specified

the progress required (partly to allow for greater input from the Palestinians), Israel has been explicit in rejecting a Palestinian state.

Israel's explicit rejection of Palestinian statehood complicates the Arab Gulf states' involvement in Gaza's post-conflict governance. Although the UAE – the Arab Gulf state with the closest ties to Israel – has expressed support for a 'temporary international mission' in Gaza once the conflict subsides, it has nevertheless [ruled out](#) its involvement without a Palestinian state or under a permanent Israeli occupation of Gaza.

Russian opportunism and tricky diplomacy

Nigel Gould-Davies

Russia has used the Hamas-led attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the regional conflict they triggered to spread a series of anti-Western narratives.

The scale of civilian suffering, and the West's failure to deliver a ceasefire or criticise Israel, have provided an easy opportunity to amplify anti-Western narratives in the Global South. Russia has portrayed these events as a fundamental failure of US policy in the Middle East that reflects the decline of the Western-led international order.

At the extraordinary G20 summit in November 2023 President Vladimir Putin [criticised](#) the double standard of condemning civilian suffering in Ukraine but not in Gaza. Other Russian voices have depicted Western support for Israel as a form of colonialism. Russia has portrayed itself, by contrast, as a constructive mediator that can engage all parties in the region, including by hosting a conference of Palestinian factions in February. Russia has also tried to use such messages to exploit divisions in the West and so undermine direct support for Ukraine.

But despite its claim to play a uniquely constructive role in the Middle East, the Israel–Hamas war has

complicated Russia's diplomacy. Relations with Israel have sharply deteriorated, and Arab Gulf states are alarmed by the prospect of a wider war that draws in Iran – whose relationship with Russia, driven by the latter's war needs in Ukraine, has deepened. Russian mediation between the Palestinian factions failed to create unity among them, demonstrating Moscow's limited influence. Moscow has also had to worry about Syria, where it maintains a military presence and protects Bashar al-Assad's government: it has not tried to obstruct or complicate Israeli air operations there and has quietly helped Assad remain out of harm's way. Russia has also made little headway in persuading global opinion that it offers an attractive alternative approach to the international order.

Russia's relations with Israel are worsening, despite Israel's large Russian-origin population, partly due to Moscow's defence cooperation with Tehran. Should Russia help Iran acquire sensitive technologies or provide it political cover for its nuclear programme or other activities, Israel will have to decide whether or not to treat Russia as a foe.

China capitalises on the crisis

Meia Nouwens

China's position since the Hamas-led 7 October attacks on Israel has been characterised by continuity. China quickly expressed support for a two-state solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Beijing has

criticised Israel's military response in Gaza, which Chinese Foreign Minister and State Councillor Wang Yi [said](#) went beyond the scope of self-defence. Beijing has stopped short of condemning Hamas's attacks against Israeli civilians.

China has used the war and regional instability as an opportunity to promote two narratives. Firstly, it used the United States' support of Israel to undermine US influence in the region by portraying the US and the wider West as hypocritical global actors – reserving their support for Ukraine but failing to criticise Israel. Secondly, Beijing sought to promote itself as a neutral actor and peacemaker – as unrealistic as the latter is – including by hosting in July the Palestinian factions in Beijing for reconciliation talks. Both these narratives also serve to boost Beijing's status amongst countries of the Global South. Moreover, Chinese strategists see an opening to assert China's dominance in Asia while the United States' and the West's attention shifts from the Indo-Pacific theatre to the Middle East.

However, the regionalisation of the conflict since the start of Israel's ground war in Lebanon and the latest

missile exchange with Iran poses significant risks to Chinese interests. Chinese investments in regional infrastructure, its bilateral trade and its plans for a potential second base in the region could all be hampered by heightened instability. An all-out war that leads to the destruction of oil facilities in Iran and the Arab Gulf states or the disruption of trade through the Strait of Hormuz – causing high oil prices – is another matter of concern for Beijing. Perhaps the biggest risk for China is that Middle Eastern countries start to expect it to play a more hands-on role in stabilising the region. Thus far, Beijing has benefitted from the US-backed regional security architecture, which has allowed China to expand its investments in the region. Any change to regional countries' expectations of Chinese involvement, however, might challenge Beijing to step away from its comfortable position of neutrality and non-intervention.



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