

The Struggle for Stability: Arab Reactions to the Hamas–Israel War

Joshua Krasna, Editor



Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Israel

Active in Israel since 1982, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) in cooperation with local partner organizations is striving to preserve and deepen the relationship between Germany and Israel and between Israel and the EU. Together with its Israeli partners it promotes democratic resilience and strengthens liberal democracy. The KAS is moreover implementing regional dialogue formats to foster a peaceful coexistence between Israel and its neighbors while also taking into account regional power shifts and external threats.

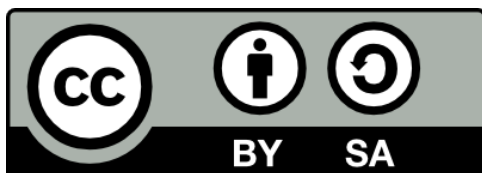
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
Israel Office Director
Dr. Thomas Volk

Publication Editor
Dr. Joshua Krasna
The Moshe Dayan Center (MDC) for Middle East and African Studies, Tel Aviv University

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
Israel Office Project Manager
Keren Adatto

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
Israel Office
Rabbi Akiva Street 8
PO Box 7968
Jerusalem 9107901
Israel

Contact
Email: office.israel@kas.de
Phone: +972-2-567-1830



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>

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	6
<i>Joshua Krasna</i>	
2. Jordan's Reaction to the Gaza War: Caught Between the Public and the 'Big Bad World'	8
<i>Jonathan Franco</i>	
3. Egypt's Perspective on Israel's War against Hamas in Gaza	14
<i>Michael Barak</i>	
4. Qatar's Need for Adaptation: Shifting Foreign Policy in the Middle East	20
<i>Moran Zaga</i>	
5. The Palestinian Authority and the West Bank in the "Iron Swords" Operation	23
<i>Michael Milshtein</i>	
6. Arab-Israeli Society's Discourse on the War Between Israel and Hamas	26
<i>Arik Rudnitzky</i>	
7. Morocco and the Israel-Gaza War: Riding Out the Storm	30
<i>Daniel Zisenwine</i>	
8. The Arab Media Discourse Following the October 7 Attacks	33
<i>Tom Sharon</i>	

Introduction

Joshua Krasna, The Moshe Dayan Center (MDC), Tel Aviv University

[Editor's Note: The papers in this collection, it is important to note, were written before the most recent developments regarding Iran and Israel.]

In early autumn 2023, there seemed to be much reason for optimism about the future of the Middle East. Of the two dominant geopolitical vectors in the region – that of regional integration and conflict reduction, encompassing the Arab monarchies, Egypt and Israel, and that of the violent “Resistance”, comprising Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis and the pro-Iranian Shi'i Iraqi militias – the first seemed to have the upper hand. Plans and projects for regional integration and “mini-lateralism” were progressing.¹ A broader process of conflict resolution and management – encompassing *détentes* between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Iran, Qatar, and Turkey; as well as between Turkey and Egypt and even Israel – was moving forward in the region. Saudi - Israeli normalization seemed to be in the cards.²

The surprise attack and outrages of October 7th, and the war in Gaza in its aftermath, have derailed these trends; disrupting them may in fact have been part of Hamas' aims. While it seems that Hamas acted mostly alone in the timing of its invasion, it has embroiled its allies in escalated conflict. Some Resistance partners, the Houthis most successfully, have also sought to internationalize the Gaza conflict (perhaps in an effort to further isolate Israel and force the international community to press it to end its campaign with Hamas intact), by extending it to the Red Sea and Iraq, as well as to use it to further degrade U.S. prestige and position in the region.

None of the countries which have signed peace treaties and other agreements with Israel – Egypt, Jordan, UAE, Bahrain, Morocco – have broken relations with Jerusalem (neither has Turkey), though most Israeli diplomatic offices in the region (with the notable exception of UAE) have been evacuated for security reasons. Jordan has loudly suspended a planned trilateral energy and water deal with

Israel and UAE.³ The Arab partners strive to balance between condemnation of Israel's actions, and aversion to its incumbent government, and the continued importance of their broader interests that relations with Israel serve; Saudi Arabia's position is similar.”

While none of these states is a supporter of Hamas (or of the Muslim Brotherhood), they all support – and, despite their lack of democracy, feel pressured by their publics and by the greater Muslim public to support – the population of Gaza (providing humanitarian aid, including through highly publicized use of military assets), Palestinian statehood, and, in the absence of a better alternative, the Palestinian Authority. The crisis has ignited long-lasting fears in Jordan and Egypt that Israel might use such a crisis to permanently expel Palestinians into their territories; some Israeli statements, including by government ministers, fan the flames of these concerns. All these Arab states are striving to lower the profile of relations with Israel so as not to draw more domestic and Muslim condemnation. On the other hand, some of them are trying to use their relations (in cooperation with the U.S.) as diplomatic leverage with Israel to use the current crisis as a springboard towards Palestinian statehood, dangling the prospect of expansion of normalization as a lure.

The Palestinian issue, largely quiescent in the past two decades and therefore largely absent in the dynamics which drove the Abraham Accords (though always less so than Israel and Israelis presumed), is now firmly back in the center of the regional agenda. Israeli involvement in further normalization and regional integration will be dependent on how this war ends and, and least in the short to medium term, on the nature of Israel's future commitment to a political settlement with the Palestinians. The re-assertion of the Palestinian issue in the center of the regional and international agenda has hardened the anti-Israeli trends in the Arab publics. This will have an impact on future economic relations, on Israel's integration

into upcoming long-term regional infrastructure and connectivity projects—which could “bake in” limitations on Israel’s place in the region in the future—and on the prospects for “people-to-people” relations.⁴

What does the war mean for the conservative actors in the Arab World? How do they, and their publics, view the current crisis, and how does this

effect their views and policies on regional dynamics, and especially regarding Israel? This collection of papers seeks to shed light on these questions. It examines trends in actors who maintain relations with Israel— Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Morocco, and Israel’s Arab citizens, and in Qatar, a close U.S. ally and indispensable interlocutor in the current crisis – as well as the discourse in the Arabic media.⁵

- 1 See e.g. Memorandum of Understanding on the Principles of an India – Middle East – Europe Economic Corridor, *The White House*, 9 September 2023.
- 2 Dion Nissenbaum, “[Saudis Agree With U.S. on Path to Normalize Kingdom's Ties With Israel: Officials are negotiating details of agreement they hope to cement within nine-to-12 months, though obstacles remain](#)”, *Wall Street Journal*, August 9, 2023, and “[Saudi crown prince says in rare interview ‘every day we get closer’ to normalization with Israel](#)”, *AP*, 21 September, 2023.

- 3 “[Jordan will not sign water-for-energy deal with Israel — Safadi](#)”, *Jordan Times*, 17 November, 2023.
- 4 Joshua Krasna, [The October 7 Massacre and the War in Gaza: Impact on Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates](#), *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 5 January, 2024.
- 5 A more in-depth analysis of the “day after” and the roles of the Gulf states, will follow in a separate publication forthcoming later in 2024.

Jordan's Reaction to the Gaza War: Caught Between the Public and the 'Big Bad World'

Jonathan Franco – London School of Economics

Amman has made no secret of its aims vis-à-vis the current Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza. As stated by official government spokesman and Minister of Government Communications Muhannad al-Mubaidin, Jordan set three goals in light of the current crisis: stopping the war, providing aid to the population in Gaza, and renewing the political process towards a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.¹ This policy is driven by the Hashemite Kingdom's fear that Israel will attempt to negatively alter the status of the Palestinian territories and/or the Holy Places in Jerusalem, for example through their internationalization.²

But beyond this general outline, what considerations guide the Jordanian position, and what practical steps does Amman take to promote its interests as the war rages on? The Hashemite Kingdom is forced to balance three different considerations: local politics, international politics, and a potential refugee problem. To account for all three, Jordan has adopted a controlled pro-Palestinian stance, that expresses solidarity with the Palestinian cause without overly endangering its foreign relations and demographic composition.

Balancing Three Considerations

Starting with the national consideration: the Gaza conflict has unleashed a wave of pro-Palestinian demonstrations across Jordan, occurring daily or weekly all across the country and bringing together thousands of people of both Palestinian and East Bank origin.³ The protesters adopted a militant stance in support of Hamas and against Israel and the United States. Among their slogans were "Wadi Araba [The Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement] is not peace, but surrender", "They say Hamas is terrorist, all of Jordan is Hamas", "Go, go

Hamas", "Resistance is our choice", and "America is the head of the snake". Their demands from the regime have included shutting down the Israeli and American embassies; adopting a more proactive stance against Israel's policy in Gaza; and revoking all Jordanian-Israeli agreements, including the 1994 peace treaty.⁴ Apart from the protests, other powerful manifestations of the pro-Palestinian sentiments in Jordan were the 11 December 2023 private-sector strike in solidarity with Gaza and a popular boycott of Israeli goods.⁵ This bottom-up outcry also found parliamentary backing: Islamist MPs threatened to resign unless Amman assumed a more active stance against Israel, and the House of Representatives unanimously agreed to instruct its Legal Committee to review all agreements with Israel, attaching the recommendation to condition their validity with a ceasefire in Gaza.⁶ Even if this decision is mainly symbolic without tangible backing from the King, Government, or Senate, it certainly serves to add to the pressure on political leaders to take action.

The overwhelming solidarity with Palestine is hardly surprising in Jordan, where most of the citizens are of at least part-Palestinian descent and surveys reveal that anti-Israeli sentiments are commonplace.⁷ However, many observers were surprised at the extent of the public dissent and the open challenge it posed to Amman's official policy. The Jordanian leadership, still bruised with the 2021 upheavals that peaked with Prince Hamzeh's alleged attempt to overthrow King Abdullah II,⁸ is forced to adopt some pro-Palestinian stance, lest the popular rage will be turned against it and lead to a loss of Crown/government legitimacy, or even to riots and open violence.

On the other hand, the Kingdom cannot afford to fully take the Palestinian side due to international considerations, which encourage it to assume a

more pro-Israeli and anti-Islamist stance. First, while Amman generally aims to support the Palestinians, its particular relations with Hamas are strained. Since 1999 the Islamist faction is banned in Jordan for illegitimate activity against the Kingdom, and arrest warrants were issued against senior Hamas officials.⁹ Even during the current conflict the King saw fit to remind that only Fatah could serve as the Palestinian representative in a two-state solution with Israel, and Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi emphasized that Jordan advocates Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, as opposed to Hamas's armed struggle approach.¹⁰

Amman also has unfriendly relations with Hamas's umbrella organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, and its Jordanian branch. The Kingdom cracked down on the Brotherhood in recent years, a process that culminated in the official dissolution of the Brotherhood in 2020 by the Jordanian Court of Cessation, under the charge of illegal conduct. Nevertheless, some parts of the Brotherhood continue to operate legally in the country, including in the parliamentary sphere through the Islamic Action Party. It has played a key role in organizing the pro-Palestinian protests, in the hope to outflank the regime on Palestine and garner support at its expense.¹¹ This behavior prompted Prime Minister Bisher al-Khasawneh to hint that Brotherhood supporters in Jordan were a "fifth column".¹²

Jordan also cannot afford to excessively compromise its relations with Israel, with which it still has important security cooperation and on which it is dependent for water and especially for natural gas. Too strong an action against Israel might also endanger the Kingdom's relations with the United States, which at least initially offered the Israelis military and diplomatic support for their Gaza operation and provides much-needed economic and military aid to Jordan.¹³ Security collaboration with Israel and the United States is especially important in a time when Iran and Syria reportedly attempt to exploit the Gaza war to destabilize Jordan, deepen their local influence, and turn the Kingdom into a smuggling hub of drugs and weapons. This tension even culminated in Jordanian airstrikes in Syria in January.¹⁴ These threats are among the reasons that prompted Amman to make its 2024 security budget the biggest one yet.¹⁵

The refugee consideration is Amman's fear that waves of displaced Palestinians would make their way into the Hashemite Kingdom. Al-Safadi warned that an Israeli uprooting of Palestinians in the West Bank would be considered a declaration of war against Jordan; other high-ranking officials, including the King, also repeatedly warned against banishment of Palestinians.¹⁶ Furthermore the King initially stated that his country would not receive refugees from Gaza and that this was a "red line", although his stance later moderated, announcing that Jordan would accept Palestinians if necessary but still preferred to help them within their territories.¹⁷

Amman fears that an influx of refugees could burden it with additional economic strain, while it is still recovering from the financial ramifications of Covid and is already grappling with a large group of Syrian refugees in its territory.¹⁸ According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 30 November 2023 there were approximately 730,000 registered refugees in Jordan, which made the Kingdom the country hosting the second-highest number of refugees per capita worldwide.¹⁹ Amman complained in the past that it was not helped enough in handling the Syrians, and again finds itself dependent on American aid, in the form of large contributions through UNHCR.²⁰ Apart from the economic consideration, a mass entry of Palestinians to Jordan might present an opportunity for hostile elements like Hamas or Iran to further infiltrate the country, and/or inflame the already-delicate demographic equilibrium between Palestinians and East Bankers. The fear of a refugee spillover means that, despite its sympathy to the Palestinian plight, Amman is reluctant to host Palestinians in Jordan itself.

The Policy: A Controlled Pro-Palestinian Stance

In response to these considerations, Amman formulated a strategy in which the Jordanian state unequivocally expresses its support for the Palestinians but does so through relatively mild and consensual steps that do not overly destabilize its foreign relations or demography.

The first pillar of this policy is diplomatic and declarative steps, designed to condemn Israel's actions in Gaza and express Amman's dedication to the Palestinians. This began with the Jordanian statement released after the Hamas terror offensive on 7 October: the Kingdom's announcement refrained from addressing Hamas's actions and even accused Israel of escalating the situation through "Israeli attacks and violations on the Palestinian people and the Muslim and Christian Holy Places" in the West Bank, as well as by "depriving the Palestinian people of their rights". The statement called to "stop all provocative measures that perpetuate the [Israeli] occupation, violate the rights of the Palestinian people, and push toward escalation".²¹ Al-Safadi would later insist that this statement did contain a censure of Hamas's onslaught, because "We condemned the killing of all civilians from both sides".²²

As Israel prolonged and deepened its war in Gaza, Amman responded with a flurry of diplomatic maneuvers. The Jordanian ambassador to Israel was recalled, and the Israeli ambassador who was outside the Kingdom at the time was asked not to return.²³ Amman also promoted United Nations resolutions to enforce a ceasefire as well as to reiterate the sovereignty of the Palestinian territories. Additionally, it offered to back the South African file accusing Israel of a genocide in the International Court of Justice, emphasizing here too that the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine must end.²⁴ The Kingdom cancelled an American-Jordanian-Egyptian-Palestinian summit with American President Joe Biden on his way from Israel due on late October 2023. It further retracted an earlier agreement to sign a new energy-for-water agreement with its neighbor, brokered by the United Arab Emirates as part of the Israeli-UAE Abraham Accords.²⁵

Apart from formal diplomatic actions, Jordanian officials harshly condemn Israel's actions in Gaza. To give a few examples, King Abdullah described them as a "collective punishment" and a "war crime";²⁶ Queen Rania questioned the reported scale of the 7 October terrorist attack perpetrated by Hamas and said that Israel was administering a land-occupying apartheid regime and a "slow-motion mass murder of children";²⁷ and al-Safadi accused Israel of a genocide, called for a Western

arms embargo against it, and claimed that it was violating the peace agreement by failing to progress into a two-state solution with the Palestinians and thus "the [Jordanian-Israeli] peace deal will have to remain on the back burner gathering dust for now".²⁸

Despite the institutional censure of Israel, Jordan by no means gave a carte blanche for anti-Israeli activity in the Kingdom. In fact, while sounding the "right opinion", Amman also works to suppress what it considers to be overly extreme anti-Israeli sentiments. For example, when protesters attempted to gather at the Israeli border or storm the Israeli embassy they were blocked and removed by the security forces.²⁹ The Jordanian Public Security Directorate announced it would not allow any kind of protest around the border, and emphasized the prohibition on "all gathering at any site or places that could disrupt aspects of life or endanger citizens".³⁰ Human rights organizations claim that at least 1,000 pro-Palestine activists have been arrested or harassed for criticizing the Jordanian agreements with Israel or for supporting strikes and protests.³¹ On other occasions, the government's response was not force, but discouragement. For example, after the general strike in solidarity with Palestine, al-Mubaidin said that while the cause was appreciated, the means chosen were harmful to the Jordanian economy and therefore proposed to redirect this energy to more fruitful endeavors, like donating profits to Gaza.³² As of early April 2024, Amman still has not revoked or suspended any of its existing agreements with Israel, despite the public and parliamentary pressure to do so.

A second pillar of the controlled pro-Palestinian approach is humanitarian aid, which was identified as an avenue to appease pro-Palestinians without antagonizing others. Amman was engaged in relief efforts in Gaza before the current conflict, and after war broke out, the Kingdom immediately deemed the shipment of additional aid necessary.³³ King Abdullah hosted various local and international meetings that focused on providing humanitarian assistance to Gaza.³⁴ Additionally, the Jordanian Army and the Hashemite Charity Organization shipped various types of equipment and provisions to the Strip. The King participated

in the delivery of one airdrop; his daughter Princess Salma personally delivered another.³⁵ The Kingdom also established new field hospitals to service Gazans both in Gaza and the West Bank (the former was visited by Crown Prince Hussein), and a tent city was set up east of Amman in case refugees did end up in Jordan.³⁶

The third pillar is international partnerships with other countries that share Jordan's above-mentioned concerns. Chief among these is Egypt, a country equally worried about the prospect of a Palestinian exodus into its territory. King Abdullah was quoted saying "I think I can speak here on behalf of Jordan ... but also our friends in Egypt: This is a red line ... no refugees to Jordan and also no refugees to Egypt..."³⁷ The two leaderships met several times and published joint statements calling against the displacement of Palestinians and in favor of a prompt ceasefire.³⁸ The linkage between the cessation of hostilities and the displacement is simple: a swift end to the war would prevent a further deterioration in the Palestinian territories, meaning that the Palestinians could stay put and be helped within the confines of their territory. Amman and Cairo seek together the support of other powers, chief among them is Washington, which – despite its early support of the Israeli operation in Gaza – now seems increasingly willing to pressure the Israelis to enter ceasefire and avoid further harm to Palestinian civilians. In January-February 2024 Biden and King Abdullah held

a summit and Washington gave its blessing to a political program proposed by Jordan, Egypt, and the Gulf States for the restoration of Gaza. This plan entailed Saudi recognition of Israel as well as Arab aid for the reconstruction of the Strip, in exchange for an Israeli road-map toward Palestinian statehood. However, the plan fell through, probably due to Israeli resistance.³⁹ In late March, the United States refused to veto a Security Council resolution for a ceasefire in Gaza despite protecting the Israeli offensive in this forum until late February; this American change of heart might be at least partly due to Israel's rejection of the Arab Gaza plan.⁴⁰

Conclusion: Pushed to the Brink?

It seems that Amman landed its most powerful diplomatic blows on Israel during the first weeks of the Gaza war, and later mostly confined itself to hardline rhetoric against the Israelis, coupled with humanitarian aid for the Palestinians. In December 2023 it was reported that the Brotherhood decided to curb its pro-Palestinian activity, fearing government retaliation.⁴¹ Nevertheless, as protests still occur,⁴² and Israeli officials warn that the war will last several more months,⁴³ public pressure on Amman might still rise and force Jordan to make difficult choices between internal stability and foreign interests.

1 ["The Jordanian Government to CNN"](#) [Arabic], *CNN Arabic*, 24 December 2023.

2 ["Al-Khasawneh: Israel Should Expect Anything from Jordan"](#) [Arabic], *Al-Ghad*, 8 November 2023.

3 ["The Palestinian Connection"](#), *The New Arab*, 28 October 2023.

4 ["The King of Jordan"](#) [Arabic], *Al-Jazeera*, 18 October 2023; ["Huge Rallies in Jordan"](#) [Arabic], *CNN Arabic*, 24 November 2023; ["Demonstrations in Jordan"](#) [Arabic], *Al-Jazeera*, 8 December 2023; ["Demonstrations in Jordan"](#) [Arabic], *Al-Jazeera*, 8 December 2023..

5 ["Jordan: 'A General Strike'"](#) [Arabic], *CNN Arabic*, 11 December 2023; ["Jordan... Solidarity with Gaza through 'Boycott Operations'"](#) [Arabic], *Daily Sabah*, 27 December 2023.

6 ["Pressures on the Jordanian King"](#) [Hebrew], *Israel Hayom*, 6 November 2023; ["The Jordanian House of Representatives"](#) [Arabic], *Andalou*, 13 November 2023; ["The Jordanian Parliament"](#) [Hebrew], *Israel Hayom*, 13 November 2023.

7 See for example: ["Where do the Abraham Accords Leave Jordan?"](#), *The New Arab*, 15 September 2022; ["Israel-Jordan Relations"](#), *Global Issues*, 1 December 2023; ["Not Just Because of the War"](#) [Hebrew], *Ynet*, 24 December 2023.

8 On the Jordanian turmoil in 2021, see: ["Jordan's Politics 2021: The Year of Amman Lemonade"](#), *The LSE International History Blog*, 22 February 2022.

9 ["Is Jordan Planning to Restore Ties with Hamas?"](#), *The Jerusalem Post*, 3 September 2022.

10 ["The Way Forward"](#), *CSIS*, 25 October 2023; ["Jordan: Israel's Immunity With Some Countries is Gradually Dwindling"](#) [Arabic], *Andalou*, 26 November 2023.

- 11 ["The Jordanian Court Decides to Dissolve the 'Muslim Brotherhood'"](#) [Arabic], *France24*, 16 July 2020; ["Jordan... Leaders of the Islamic Brotherhood"](#) [Arabic], *Amman Net*, 30 May 2023; ["Jordan Muslim Brotherhood Deeply Disappointed"](#), *Memo*, 25 October 2023; ["Jordan Sees the War on Gaza"](#), *Arab Center*, 2 November 2023; ["The Brotherhood in Jordan Embarrasses the Position of King Abdullah II"](#) [Arabic], *Al-Arab*, 4 November 2023; ["Pressures on the King of Jordan"](#) [Hebrew], *Israel Hayom*, 6 November 2023.
- 12 ["The Brotherhood is Retreating"](#) [Arabic], *Al-Arab*, 9 December 2023.
- 13 ["The American Clock and Israel's Actions In Fighting Hamas"](#) [Hebrew], *iNSS*, 6 November 2023; ["Jordan's Budget"](#), *The New Arab*, 30 November 2023; ["Austin Says US Support for Israel Unshakeable"](#), *Al-Jazeera*, 18 December 2023; ["US Foreign Assistance by Country – Jordan"](#), *ForeignAssistance.Gov*, accessed 2 January 2024; ["The Impact of the War in Gaza on Israel-Jordan Cooperation"](#), *The Washington Institute*, 31 January 2024.
- 14 ["Iran and the Shooting at Jordan"](#) [Arabic], *Al-Arabiya*, 29 November 2023; ["Jordan Faces Iranian Militias"](#) [Arabic], *Al-Arab*, 18 December 2023; ["A Lebanese Journalist"](#) [Hebrew], *MEMRI*, 22 December 2023; ["Iron Swords Places Jordan in a Triple Linchpin"](#) [Hebrew], *Hazira*, 23 November 2023; ["At Least 10 Civilians Dead"](#), *Al-Jazeera*, 18 January 2024.
- 15 ["Jordan Approves a Massive Military Budget"](#) [Arabic], *RT Online*, 5 December 2023.
- 16 ["The 11th Day of the War"](#) [Hebrew], *Haaretz*, 17 October 2023; ["Displacing Palestinians from West Bank is 'Red Line'"](#), *The New Arab*, 6 November 2023; ["Jordan's King Abdullah"](#), *Reuters*, 5 December 2023.
- 17 ["Fears for Internal Stability"](#) [Arabic], *Al-Arab*, 20 October 2023; ["Jordan to Receive Refugees from Gaza?"](#) [Hebrew], *Kan*, 13 December 2023.
- 18 ["Jordan and the War in Israel"](#) [Hebrew], *iNSS*, 25 October 2023; ["What Does the War in Gaza Mean for Jordan's National Security?"](#), *The Washington Institute*, 22 December 2023.
- 19 ["Jordan – Operational Update"](#), *UNHCR*, 30 November 2023; ["Jordan"](#), *UNHCR*, accessed 7 January 2024.
- 20 ["Concerns for Internal Stability"](#) [Arabic], *Al-Arab*, 20 October 2023; ["Jordan and the War in Israel"](#) [Hebrew], *iNSS*, 25 October 2023; ["Jordan – Funding Update"](#), *UNHCR*, 15 December 2023..
- 21 ["The #Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates"](#), *The Jordanian Foreign Ministry's X page*, 7 October 2023.
- 22 ["The Way Forward"](#), *CSIS*, 25 October 2023.
- 23 ["Jordan Recalls Ambassador to Israel"](#), *Al-Jazeera*, 1 November 2023; ["Amid the Israel-Hamas War, Jordan Balances a Fine Line"](#), *WorldView*, 2 November 2023.
- 24 ["Israel Slams Jordanian-Backed UN Resolution"](#), *The Times of Israel*, 26 October 2023; ["Jordan Supports UN Resolution"](#), *Jordan Times*, 10 November 2023; ["UN Failure to Adopt Gaza Cease-Fire"](#), *Andalou*, 8 December 2023; ["Jordan Backs South Africa"](#), *The New Arab*, 5 January 2024; ["Jordan Blames Israel"](#), *Reuters*, 12 January 2024; ["Jordan to ICJ"](#), *Al-Jazeera*, 22 February 2024.
- 25 ["Jordan Sees the War on Gaza"](#), *Arab Center*, 2 November 2023; ["A Crisis in Relations"](#) [Hebrew], *Maariv*, 16 November 2023; ["The Jordanian Foreign Minister"](#) [Hebrew], *Calcalist*, 16 November 2023.
- 26 ["Jordan, Egypt Leaders"](#), *Arab News*, 19 October 2023; ["The King of Jordan in the Political Summit in Cairo"](#) [Hebrew], *Israel Hayom*, 21 October 2023.
- 27 ["The Queen of Jordan"](#) [Hebrew], *Israel Hayom*, 24 October 2023; ["Jordan's Queen Rania"](#), *CNN*, 11 March 2024.
- 28 ["Jordan Says it Won't Sign Energy and Water Exchange"](#), *Al-Jazeera*, 16 November 2023; ["Jordan: What is Happening in Gaza"](#) [Hebrew], *Ynet*, 27 November 2023..
- 29 ["Jordan Struggles with Official Stance"](#), *The Jerusalem Post*, 11 October 2023; ["The Day of Rage"](#) [Hebrew], *N12*, 13 October 2023; ["Jordan Faces Mass Rallies"](#), *Al-Monitor*, 13 October 2023; ["King of Jordan"](#) [Arabic], *Al-Jazeera*, 18 October 2023..
- 30 ["Concerns for Internal Security"](#) [Arabic], *Al-Arab*, 20 October 2023.
- 31 ["Jordan: End Draconian Crackdown"](#), *Amnesty International*, 6 February 2024; ["Jordan: Arrests, Harassment"](#), *Human Rights Watch*, 6 February 2024.
- 32 ["A Spokesman for the Jordanian Government"](#) [Arabic], *CNN Arabic*, 11 December 2023.
- 33 ["Jordan: 'We Will not Allow the Displacement of Palestinians'"](#) [Hebrew], *Ynet*, 15 October 2023; ["Why Jordan is Hardening its Stance"](#), *The New Arab*, 31 October 2023..
- 34 ["Jordan Cancels Biden Summit"](#), *Al-Jazeera*, 17 October 2023; ["Jordan Says It Will Host Conference"](#), *Arab News*, 30 November 2023; ["The King of Jordan"](#) [Arabic], *Andalou*, 30 November 2023.
- 35 ["In Coordination with Israel"](#) [Hebrew], *Israel Hayom*, 6 November 2023; ["Jordan Sends Another Aid Plane"](#), *Andalou*, 29 November 2023; ["Jordan: 17 Aid Planes to Gaza"](#) [Arabic], *Andalou*, 7 December 2023; ["Jordanian King's Daughter"](#), *Andalou*, 15 December 2023; ["Jordan Dispatched 89 Trucks, 28 Planes with Aid"](#), *Andalou*, 21 December 2023; ["Jordan Announces a New Route"](#) [Arabic], *RT*, 21 December 2023; ["France Joins Jordan"](#), *The New Arab*, 6 January 2024; ["Jordan's King Abdulla Participates"](#), *Arab News*, 11 February 2024; ["UK and Jordan Air Drop Aid"](#), *Reuters*, 21 February 2024.
- 36 ["The Peace with Jordan is in Danger"](#) [Hebrew], *Ynet*, 19 November 2023; ["Emirates on the Way to Establish Field Hospital"](#) [Hebrew], *Kan*, 20 November 2023; ["Has the Immigration Plan from Gaza Gone Underway?"](#) [Hebrew], *Maariv*, 27 December 2023; ["Jordanian Crown Prince"](#), *Arab News*, 18 January 2024.
- 37 ["King of Jordan Tells Olaf Scholz"](#), *Politico*, 17 October 2023.

- 38 ["Jordan, Egypt Leaders"](#), *Arab News*, 19 October 2023; ["Jordan Fears"](#), *The Business Standard*, 20 October 2023; ["Jordanian King, Egyptian President"](#), *Andalou*, 27 December 2023; ["Al-Sisi, Abdullah, and Abu Mazen"](#) [Hebrew], *Ynet*, 10 January 2024.
- 39 ["Jordan king presses Blinken"](#), *France24*, 7 January 2024; ["An Arab Proposal"](#), *Bloomberg*, 19 January 2024; ["Biden Hosts King of Jordan"](#), *The New Arab*, 12 February 2024.
- 40 ["Security Council Again Fails"](#), *United Nations Press Releases*, 20 February 2024; ["UN Security Council"](#), *BBC*, 25 March 2024.
- 41 ["The Brotherhood is Retreating"](#) [Arabic], *Al-Arab*, 9 December 2023.
- 42 ["Jordanians Take to Streets"](#), *The Jordan Times*, 15 January 2024; ["War on Gaza: Jordan in Hot Water"](#), *Middle East Eye*, 5 February 2024; ["Jordanians Form Human Chain"](#), *The New Arab*, 16 February 2024.
- 43 ["The War Will Last Many More Months"](#) [Hebrew], *The Israeli Defense Army Website*, 26 December 2023; ["Netanyahu"](#) [Hebrew], *Calcalist*, 30 December 2023; ["Netanyahu on the Hostage Deal"](#) [Hebrew], *Maariv*, 5 February 2024.

Egypt's Perspective on Israel's War against Hamas in Gaza

*Michael Barak –
The International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), Reichman University*

The Israeli military campaign aimed at eradicating Hamas' control in Gaza, which was prompted by the terrorist attack on 7/10, is perceived unfavorably in Egypt due to the extensive loss of life and destruction of property witnessed in Gaza, suspicion surrounding the true motives driving the Israeli government's conduct of the campaign, and the apprehension that Egypt may face an overwhelming influx of refugees. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that despite the ongoing war in Gaza, Egypt maintains its role as a mediator between Israel and Hamas, particularly concerning the issue of abductees. Furthermore, Egypt expresses hope that the culmination of the campaign will pave the way for renewed political negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel, with the ultimate objective of achieving a lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The 7/10 attack in the Egyptian discourse

Solidarity with the Palestinians

The public discourse in Egypt mostly avoids denouncing the terrorist attack conducted by Hamas and instead exhibits a level of acceptance and understanding, that perceives it as a justifiable reaction to the Israeli occupation. On October 7, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued an official statement characterizing the Hamas attack as a Palestinian response to Israel's aggressive actions against Palestinian cities, while simultaneously advocating for restraint and calm from both parties involved.¹ Al-Kamal Sayyis, a representative of the opposition "National Coalition Party" within the leftist faction in Egypt, asserted that the attack was not an isolated event but rather a retaliatory measure in response to the actions of the far-right Israeli government, which seeks to undermine the

Palestinian cause.² Abd al-'Alim Muhammad, al-Ahram Research Center advisor hailed the attack as a triumph in strategic deception, drawing parallels to other historically significant instances of successful deception attacks such as the Egyptian deception tactics employed during the 1973 war and the Japanese deception strategy at Pearl Harbor.³ In the perception of numerous Egyptians, the occurrences of 7/10 profoundly undermined the prevailing Israeli notion of the Israeli armed forces' invincibility. Rifat al-Ansari, a former Egyptian diplomat who served at the Egyptian Embassy in Israel, said that "following the catastrophic defeat on October 7, Israel suffered a significant erosion of its military and intelligence standing, thereby enduring a lasting decline in its military prestige [...]", while simultaneously enduring substantial damage to its reputation as a democratic nation on the global stage in the aftermath of the Gaza bombings.⁴

Several prominent Egyptian politicians and religious leaders have vehemently denounced Israel's military operation in Gaza. President al-Sisi has consistently criticized Israel, accusing it of employing a disproportionate response that exceeds the boundaries of self-defense.⁵ Notably, on October 20, he authorized large-scale public demonstrations within Egypt, a rare gesture aimed at displaying solidarity with the Palestinian cause; It was likely driven by electoral considerations, aimed at garnering increased popular support for al-Sisi's presidential campaign.⁶ Mustafa Bakri, a Nasserist and a member of the Egyptian parliament, cautioned against Israel exploiting the 7/10 attack to fulfill David Ben-Gurion's vision of expanding Israel's territorial boundaries through annexation of Gaza.⁷

The al-Azhar Institute, renowned as a significant religious authority in Egypt and the Sunni world, categorized Israel's offensive on Gaza as an act of genocide and a grave violation of human rights.

Drawing parallels between Israel, ISIS, and the Nazis, al-Azhar Institute underscored the perceived imminent demise of the "Zionist entity". Considering these assertions, they urged the Muslim world to unite to halt Israeli aggression in Gaza.⁸ Al-Azhar Institute, traditionally regarded as the custodian of moderate interpretation to Islam, went farther and departed from its customary role by issuing a religious ruling that endorsed harm towards "Zionist settlers in the occupied lands." This ruling was justified on the grounds that these settlers, deemed as occupiers of Palestinian territories, therefore are not recognized as civilians. Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, the head of al-Azhar, went to the extent of commending the 7/10 attack and encouraged Palestinians to persist in their armed struggle within Israel, even at the cost of dying as martyrs.⁹ The Coptic Church in Egypt also condemned the devastation of the Gaza Strip and called on the international community to prosecute the Israeli officials responsible for the war.¹⁰

Standing Against Hamas.

In addition to the chorus of support for Hamas, there exist Egyptian voices that denounce Hamas' assault on Israeli civilians. Ibrahim Issa, a prominent Egyptian publicist, asserted that while the Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation forces is deemed legitimate, the same cannot be said for the abduction and killing of Israeli citizens and their transport to Gaza, as this constitutes an act of terrorism.¹¹ Dalia Ziada, an Egyptian intellectual, underscored the complicity of those who endorse the acts of terrorism perpetrated by Hamas, namely the rape of women, the abduction of vulnerable children and adults, incursions into civilian residences during religious observances, and the killing of unarmed individuals. Ziada emphasized that anyone who justifies these actions is implicated in the crimes committed by Hamas.¹² She even appealed to the Egyptian people to remember that the scourge of terrorism in Sinai was to a large extent the result of Hamas' acts of subversion in that region, stating, "Hamas will always and forever remain a terrorist organization".¹³ She had to flee Egypt due to threats and impending prosecution for treason, due to her criticism of Hamas and her defense of Israel.

Abd al-Mun'im Sa'id, a parliamentarian and prominent journalist in Egypt, concurred with the notion that the targeting of civilians and the subsequent abduction of individuals by Hamas constituted a grave misstep. He went on to elucidate that the extensive construction of 1300 tunnels from Gaza into Egyptian territory by Hamas undermined its credibility as a national liberation movement.¹⁴

In the Egyptian discourse, there is also a concern about the consequences of the 7/10 attack and the ongoing campaign in Gaza on the stability of the Middle East. For instance, Abd- al-Mun'im Sai'd expressed deep concern about the impact of the Gaza campaign following the terrorist attack by Hamas, saying that this impact extends beyond the reconciliation processes, the pursuit of regional peace, and economic prosperity in the region. It also affects the processes of economic and political reforms in some countries of the region over the last decade. In his view, the determination of Iran and its affiliates to sabotage these processes by exploiting the Palestinian issue intensifies this concern.¹⁵

Dismantling Hamas?

Many Egyptians express scepticism regarding Israel's ability to attain its stated war goal of eradicating Hamas. Muhammad Abu al-Aynain, a parliamentarian in Egypt, posits that Israel's steadfast determination to eradicate Hamas will engender a novel and more formidable resistance, thereby inciting an unparalleled surge of extremism.¹⁶ Al-Said Abd al-Hadi, the director of Horus University in Egypt, similarly contends that Hamas is unlikely to vanish given its status as an armed faction, and in the event of its demise, another adversarial entity will emerge as a replacement.¹⁷ Wafa Sandi, a Moroccan researcher at the "Egyptian Center," contends that Hamas should be viewed as a non-conventional guerrilla organization rather than a traditional army, thereby rendering its elimination a challenging task. In her assessment, the duration of American support for Israel is subject to limitations, particularly considering the substantial number of Palestinian casualties in Gaza. Consequently, mounting international pressure on Israel to bring an end to the conflict is anticipated.¹⁸ Furthermore,

in her view, Israel disregards the notion of resistance deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of all Palestinians, as exemplified by Hamas, "the eradication of this concept or the abrogation of the Palestinians' entitlement to safeguard their territory and engage in resistance against the occupying force through all feasible means, represents an unattainable endeavor".¹⁹

The Displacement of Palestinians from Gaza is a "Red Line"

Within the Egyptian public discourse, apprehension exists regarding the potential inundation of the Sinai Peninsula with Palestinian refugees originating from Gaza. President al-Sisi has issued multiple warnings to Israel, notably during the peace conference held in Cairo on October 21, 2023, in his address expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people on November 23, 2023, and during his meeting with the King of Jordan on December 27, 2023. Al-Sisi emphasized that any coerced relocation of Gaza residents to the Egyptian Sinai region would be deemed a "red line" that Egypt adamantly refuses to tolerate: "The elimination of the Palestine problem without a just solution will not happen and under no circumstances will it be pursued at the expense of Egypt".²⁰

Al-Said al-Hadi, director of Horus University in Egypt, warned that such a scenario could severely damage Egypt-Israel relations and renew the atmosphere of war not only with Egypt but also with Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the West Bank. According to his perspective, Israel has two possible courses of action: firstly, to bring an end to the ongoing conflict, thereby facilitating negotiations for the safe return of the abductees and the exploration of a political resolution to governance in the Gaza Strip, independent of Hamas; and secondly, to persist in the continuation of hostilities, leading to the unification of multiple war fronts against Israel and the potential escalation towards a full-scale war.²¹ Several Egyptian voices have raised concerns regarding the potential influx of Palestinian refugees into Sinai may overshadow Egypt's notable achievements in the development of the region in the eco-

nomic and health sectors, as well as the successful efforts in eliminating the terrorist threat posed by ISIS.²² Some Egyptians, including Egyptian publicist Abdullah al-Sinawi, criticize Israel's endeavors to gain control over the Philadelphia border axis under the pretext of eliminating the threat of the Hamas tunnels in the Rafah area, when it in his view intends to use this control to enable displacing the Palestinians.²³ Daa Rashwan, the head of the Egyptian State Information Service, refuted Israel's assertions regarding the smuggling route between Sinai and Rafah. He emphasized that the international community is well aware of Egypt's decade-long battle against terrorism in Sinai, during which approximately 1500 smuggling tunnels were eradicated. Rashwan cautioned that Israel's claims are aimed at legitimizing its efforts to occupy the Philadelphia Corridor (Saladin Axis) in the Gaza Strip along the border with Egypt, in violation of security agreements and protocols signed between the two nations. He also warned that any Israeli attempt to occupy the Philadelphia axis could pose a serious threat to Israel-Egypt relations.²⁴

The escalating likelihood of an Israeli military operation in Rafah appears to further strain Egypt's stance towards Israel. On February 18, Egypt indicated its readiness to provide guidance to the International Court of Justice regarding Israel's legal transgressions in the 1967 territories. Subsequently, on February 21, it submitted a plaintiff's memorandum to the International Court of Justice, seeking legal recourse against Israeli policies that contravene international law in the occupied territories. The aim is to compel Israel to withdraw from the 1967 territories, including East Jerusalem, and to provide compensation to Palestinians for the losses they have incurred due to the expropriation of their lands.²⁵

A Retreat in the U.S. Position?

The clear support of the Biden administration for Israel and its war in Gaza is also sharply criticized in the Egyptian discourse. Faiz Farhat, the director of the Al-Ahram Center in Egypt, has suggested that the West should reconsider its alliance with Israel. He argues that Israel has become a significant burden for the United States and European countries

due to its increasingly aggressive behavior, which poses a threat to regional stability. Furthermore, Farhat highlights Israel's divergence from Western values and the damage it causes to their image. He holds the United States accountable for its double standards, which were exposed during the war in Gaza. These double standards are evident in the selective promotion of human rights and democratic values that solely serve the interests of the United States. Considering these circumstances, Farhat proposed that the Egyptian government prioritize the cultivation of its relations with China over the United States. One of the reasons for this recommendation is China's non-interference policy in the internal affairs.²⁶

Publicists in the Egyptian daily "Al-Shuruq" have accused the U.S. of complicity in the Israeli aggression on Gaza due to its military, financial, and diplomatic support to Israel, making it the only country capable of stopping the Israeli aggression.²⁷ Senior officials within al-Dawa al-Salafiyya, a prominent Egyptian Salafi movement, asserted that Western support for Israel constituted a "Crusader-Zionist plot" to weaken Islam.²⁸

The Future of Gaza After the War

In the Egyptian context, there exists a unanimous consensus that following the cessation of war, it is imperative to reinstitute the political process between Israel and the Palestinians. This emphasis stems not only from the need for Gaza's reconstruction but also from a broader desire for a permanent solution to the Palestinian issue, viewed by many as crucial for regional stability. Ibrahim 'Awad, a professor of public policy at the American University in Cairo, emphasized the imperative of incorporating the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza as a single political unit into any discourse concerning the prospective governance of Gaza to instill a sense of hope among the Palestinian population.²⁹ Al-Sisi made it clear more than once that the only solution to the Palestinian issue would be in the recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as

its capital, even if demilitarized with a temporary international force that would maintain its security and the security of Israel. Hence, in his view, a road map must be drawn up that will lead to the revival of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians.³⁰

The Palestinian Authority is mentioned more than once in the Egyptian discourse as the one who should be entrusted with the management of Gaza. According to the viewpoint put forth by the "Egyptian Center for Strategic Thinking and Research," it is argued that for the Palestinian Authority to bolster its legitimacy within Palestinian society, it is crucial to broaden its composition beyond Fatah representatives alone. In addition to Fatah, inclusion of representatives from Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad is deemed necessary.³¹ Ibrahim 'Awad aligns with this perspective and advances the argument that the Palestinian Authority is plagued by a dearth of public confidence among Palestinians. Consequently, he posits that the inclusion of representatives spanning the spectrum of Palestinian society would diminish the potential for resistance against its governance. Awad further contends that, akin to Britain's engagement with the IRA, Israel would be compelled to engage in negotiations with the Palestinian Authority.³²

Muhammad Ibrahim Al-Dwayri, a former general in the Egyptian army, emphasized that despite the humanitarian crisis looming over Gaza, there exists an opportunity to establish a Palestinian state that would ensure future stability and avert further calamities in the region. He believes that achieving this objective entails, among other measures, the engagement of the Arab League in the matter, the formation of a new technocratic Palestinian government in coordination with the Palestinian Authority, the withdrawal of Israel's military from Gaza, and concerted pressure from the United States and European countries on Israel to cease hostilities and engage in peace negotiations aimed at establishing a Palestinian state.³³

As long as the war in Gaza continues, Egypt acts as a mediator between Israel and Hamas in order to achieve a bargain that will release the Israeli hostages and will bring a ceasefire in Gaza.

Summary and Conclusions

Since the ascent of al-Sisi to power, Egypt has been actively involved in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict thanks not only due to a desire to safeguard its national security and promoting regional stability, but also out of a perception that the Palestinian issue is a strategic instrument that bolsters its regional and international influence. Consequently, Egypt is meticulous in cultivating its image as a staunch guardian of the Palestinian cause. Abd al-Muhsin, who serves as the head of the Al-Ahram Management Council, has explicated that throughout the course of the four major conflicts with Israel (namely, the wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973), as well as during the period of signing the peace agreement and in the present day, Egypt has consistently demonstrated its commitment to safeguarding the well-being of the Palestinian people. Furthermore, Egypt has actively devoted its endeavors towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.³⁴ Therefore, it's not surprising that, the Egyptian media prominently emphasized the accolades expressed by senior Fatah official Muhammad Dahlan towards the significant role played by al-Sisi in foiling Israel's

proposed scheme to forcibly relocate Palestinians from Gaza to the Sinai region.³⁵

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the severe condemnation levied against Israel, Egypt maintains the perspective that the conflict in Gaza presents a propitious juncture and a catalyst for compelling both Israel and the Palestinians to reengage in the political negotiations, with the aim of propelling forward the two-state solution. This approach is undertaken to preempt any potential reoccurrence of hostilities in the region. According to Jamal Abd al-Jawad, a consultant at the Al-Ahram Center, achieving peace between Israel and the Palestinians is undeniably challenging given the influence of extremist religious factions in both Jewish and Palestinian societies. Nevertheless, he believes that it is achievable if moderate forces in both communities take proactive steps. In his own words, "The Middle East has fallen victim to the agendas of extremists on the Israeli and Palestinian fronts. Can we break free from this influence and escape this cycle of turmoil? Is it possible to diminish the influence of extremists on both sides and pave the way for the emergence of moderate, centrist forces committed to coexistence and peace?"³⁶

- 1 Egypt MFA Spokesperson [Arabic], *Twitter*, 7 October, 2023. <https://twitter.com/MfaEgypt/status/1710582901912338745>
- 2 Kamil al-Sayyid, "The Gaza war seeks to harm the Palestinian existence" [Arabic], *Al-Bawaba*, 7 December, 2023. <https://www.albawabhnews.com/4923089>
- 3 "The Road towards al-Aqsa Storm" [Arabic], *Al-Ahram*, 18 October, 2023. <https://acpss.ahram.org.eg/News/21031.aspx>
- 4 Muhammad Abdullah "The former consul of Egypt in Tel Aviv: Israel lost its honor and prestige after the "Al-Aqsa Flood"." [Arabic], *al-Jazeera*, 6 December, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.net/politics/2023/12/6/-/فصل-مصر-السابق-في-تل-أبيب-إسرائيل-خسرت>
- 5 "Al-Sisi's: Israeli Reaction Exceeding the Right of Self Defense to Punishment" [Arabic], *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 15-16 October, 2023. <https://aawsat.com/-/العالم-العربي/شمال-الافريقيات/4607206-السيسي-رد-الفعلة-الاسرائيلي-تجاوز-حق-الدفاع-عن-النفوس-إلى-العقاب>
- 6 "Angry Egyptians denounce staged pro-Palestine rallies amid Israel-Hamas war", *al-Jazeera*, 21 October, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/21/exploiting-our-anger-egyptians-denounce-staged-pro-palestine-protests>
- 7 Hussam Abu Ghazala, "Mustafa Bakri: Egypt's Leadership and Shaba Refuse to Liquidate the Palestinian Cause by Forced Displacement (A Dialogue)" [Arabic], *al-Watan*, 21 November, 2023. <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/6949264>
- 8 See for example: *Sawt al-Azhar* [Arabic], 13 Dec, 2023.
- 9 Michael Barak & Winter, Ofir. "Al-Azhar's stance: A blow to the global fight against terror", *Jerusalem Post*, 8 November, 2023. <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-772171>
- 10 Sandra Izzat, "Bishop Koos and a Critic in a special interview for *al-Bawaba News*" [Arabic], *al-Bawaba*, 8 November, 2023. <https://www.albawabhnews.com/4905411>
- 11 Ibrahim 'Issa, "Cairo Speech" [Arabic], *Moasher*, 10 October, 2023. <https://moasher.net/n-2749> ; November 26, 2023; Tamir Hindawi, "A dispute between the Palestinian ambassador to Britain and an Egyptian journalist attacked the Hamas movement and described the "Al-Aqsa Flood" as terrorism" [Arabic], *al-Quds al-Arabi*, November 26, 2023. <https://www.alquds.co.uk/-/سجال-بين-سفير-فلسطين-في-بريطانيا-واعلاء>
- 12 Dalia Ziada [Arabic], *Twitter*, 9 October, 2023. <https://twitter.com/daliaziada/status/1711327607910732038>
- 13 Dalia Ziada [Arabic], *Twitter*, 9 October, 2023. <https://twitter.com/daliaziada/status/1711372436585750673>

- 14 Lilian Nabil, "Dr. Abdel-Moneim Saeed in a Special Interview for the Homeland" [Arabic], *Watani*, 4 December, 2023. <https://www.wataninet.com/2023/12/-الدكتور-عبد-المونيم-سعيد-في-حوار-خاص-تارو-المنعوم-سعيد-في-حوار-خاص-تارو>
- 15 Abd al-Mun'im Sa'id, "A Reform in Time of War?", [Arabic], *ECSS*, 22 February, 2024. <https://ecss.com.eg/43787>
- 16 "Abu Al-Ainin from Washington" [Arabic], *Sada al-Balad*, 22 November, 2023. <https://www.elbalad.news/6008541>
- 17 Al-Said 'Abd al-Hadi, "The end of War or the End of Peace?" [Arabic], *al-Bawaba*, 7 December, 2023. <https://www.albawabhnews.com/4923086>
- 18 Wafa Sandi, "After the resumption of the war on Gaza" [Arabic], *ECSS*, 12 December, 2023. <https://ecss.com.eg/38956/>
- 19 Wafa Sandi, "The Gaza War and the Profit and Loss Accounts" [Arabic], *al-Ahram*, 24 December, 2023. <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/daily/News/925731.aspx>
- 20 Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, "President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's speech before the Cairo Peace Summit" (in Arabic), *State Information Center*, 21 October, 2023. <https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/264814/-كلمة-الرئيس-عبد-الفتاح-السيسي-أمام-قمة-القاهرة-للسلام>
- 21 Al-Said 'Abd al-Hadi, "The End of War or the End of Peace?" [Arabic], *al-Bawaba*, 7 December, 2023. <https://www.albawabhnews.com/4923086>
- 22 "The Comprehensive Development.. The Egyptian Barrier against the Israeli Ambitions in Sinai" [Arabic], *al-Marsad al-Masri*, 25 December, 2023. <https://marsad.ecss.com.eg/80259/>
- 23 Abdallah al-Sinawai, "The Other Side of Forced Displacement!" (in Arabic), *al-Shuruq*, 7 January, 2024. <https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=07012024&id=1a94b419-3cd9-4d82-a487-d67821176b8d>
- 24 "The Information Service: Egypt has responded to the false Israeli claims about its borders with Gaza", [Arabic], *State Information Service*, 22 January, 2024. <https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/270309/-هيئة-الاستعلامات-مصر-ترد-على-هيئة-الاستعلامات-مصر-ترد-على-حدودها-مع-غزة>
- 25 "Diaa Rashwan: Egypt submits a memorandum to 'International Justice' about Israel's practices that violate international legitimacy" [Arabic], *State Information Center*, 18 February, 2024. <https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/271148/-ضياء-رشوان-مصر-تتقدم-بمذكرة-ل-العدل-الدولية-حول-ممارسات-إسرائيل-المخالفة-للشرعية-الدولية>
- 26 Muhammad Said Farahat, "The Guarantor Ally for the Security of the Region", *al-Ahram Center for Political & Strategic Studies*, 22 November, 2023. <https://acpss.ahram.org.eg/News/21053.aspx>
- 27 Muhammad al-Minshawi, "Biden Can End the Aggression on Gaza... If He Wants!" [Arabic], *al-Shuruq*, 4 January, 2024. <https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=04012024&id=4d98c688-9fdb-4465-a4ad-a03c1e5293d6>
- 28 Ali Mansur, "During the Symposium 'Palestine is a Nation's Issue'... The Salafist Call warns of the West's conspiracy against Islam", [Arabic], *al-Fath*, 12 November, 2023. <https://fath-news.com/ar/news/497850/-خلال-ندوة-فلسطين-قضية-أمة-الدعوة-السلفية>
- 29 Ibrahim Awd, "The Ceasefire.. and the Future of Governance in Palestine" [Arabic], *al-Shuruq*, 23 December, 2023. <https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=23122023&id=967678d3-900b-4556-ac97-d67ad3a22a67>
- 30 Egyptian Presidency, "President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi Holds a Joint Press Conference with the Prime Minister of Spain and the Prime Minister of Belgium" [Arabic], *Youtube*, 24 November, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_HX0vZ5THg
- 31 "The Future of the Gaza Strip will be Predicted the Next Day" [Arabic], *ECSS*, 7 November, 2023. <https://ecss.com.eg/37987/>
- 32 Ibrahim Awd, "The Ceasefire.. and the Future of Governance in Palestine" [Arabic], *al-Shuruq*, 23 December, 2023. <https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=23122023&id=967678d3-900b-4556-ac97-d67ad3a22a67>
- 33 Muhammad Ibrahim al-Dwayri, "The Palestinian State, will we see it in the distant future?", *Al-Ahram*, 17 February, 2024. <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/daily/News/204768/4/932427/-قضايا-واراء-الدولة-الفلسطينية-هل-نراها-في-المستقبل-البعيد>
- 34 Abd al-Muhsin Salama, "Displacement and Elimination": an Egyptian Red Line in the Palestinian Issue" [Arabic], *al-Seyassa al-Dawliyya*, 26 November, 2023. <https://www.siyassa.org.eg/News/19731/-تحليلات-«التفجير-والإبادة»-خط-أحمر-مصري-في-القضية-الفلسطينية>
- 35 See for example: "Muhammad Dahlan: I Thank President Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi for Refusing to Relocate the People of Gaza" [Arabic], *Akhbar al-Yawm*, December 2023. <https://akhbarelyom.com/news/newdetails/4276501/1/-محمد-دحلان-أقدم-الشكر-للرئيس-عبد-الفتاح>
- 36 Jamal Abd al-Jawad, "Palestine remains and so does Israel.. this is the problem" [Arabic], *ECSS*, 24 February, 2024. <https://ecss.com.eg/43801/>

Qatar's Need for Adaptation: Shifting Foreign Policy in the Middle East

Moran Zaga – The Hebrew University

The war in Gaza has highlighted Qatar's influential role in the Middle East. However, the evolving geopolitical order may be challenging the principles that have guided Qatar's foreign policy success thus far. This paper aims to outline the key principles that have shaped Qatar's foreign policy and analyze their effectiveness in light of changing conditions. It will then discuss the new dilemmas Qatar faces as it seeks to maintain its influence in the post-war landscape.

Over the years, Qatar gradually became the most significant external actor involved in Gaza.¹ Its involvement spread over four significant dimensions: political support, media endorsement, economic sponsorship and energy supply [see figure 1]. Much of this support has been directed directly towards the Hamas leadership. Qatar's ability to wield such influence can be attributed to its three-pillar foreign policy approach: (1) backing political extremes, (2) seeking monopolistic advantages, and (3) operating as a "lone wolf".

Backing political extremes

This principle entails forming strong ties with actors on the opposite poles of regional conflicts. Qatar strategically engages with extremist players such as Hamas, Iran and the Taliban, and at the same time with some of the most powerful actors in the international sphere like the US (which defines it as a Major Non-NATO Ally)² and Israel. This positioning allows Qatar to leverage and maximize its influence in mediating between conflicting parties.³ Middle powers and non-hegemonic states are accorded less priority in Qatar's diplomatic calculus.

Seeking monopolistic advantages

In many cases, the Qatari economic aid and foreign investments intersect with those of other financial patrons in the Gulf. Within the competitive landscape of the Gulf States, Qatar strategically aims for monopolistic control over exclusive political and economic assets. It meticulously selects its investment targets and channels to maximize its advantages. For example, Qatar's acquisition of a major stake in a prominent media company allowed it to significantly influence regional media narratives. A more exclusive channel that Qatar promotes in its foreign policy is its focus on the LNG (liquefied natural gas) market, which sets it apart from its neighbors who primarily rely on the oil market.⁴ This approach not only empowers Qatar to wield substantial diplomatic leverage but also enables direct involvement in the daily lives of people on the ground.

Operating as a lone wolf

Qatar's foreign strategy is based on its inclination to be a forward player rather than a team player. Its long-standing tensions with its neighbors (that goes beyond the 2017 crisis) among other factors, have driven Qatar to develop an independent foreign policy and use ad-hoc partnerships for each of its projects.⁵ It's almost impossible to draw a systematic picture of Qatar's regional alliances, except for its commitment to the US and to regional bodies such as the GCC and the Arab League. Its closest semblance to a strategic alliance can be seen in its relations with Turkey, which have evolved since the 2000s to encompass economic, political, security, and military cooperation.⁶

Under this strategy, Qatar has emerged as the only Gulf country, and perhaps one of the few

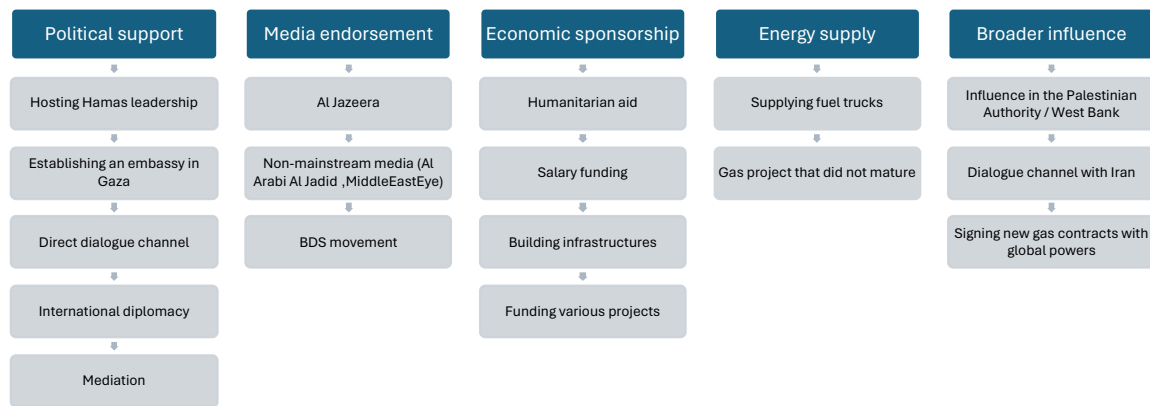


Figure 1: Qatar's versatile influence in Gaza

in the Arab world, to fully endorse and support Hamas, even establishing an embassy in Gaza. Apart from physically hosting its political leadership and providing financial aid to Gaza, Qatar has assumed the role of representing Hamas' aspirations and demands in international affairs, as well as in local Palestinian politics. Furthermore, Qatar was the only Arab country to supply energy to the strip and had planned to deliver natural gas from Israel to Gaza's sole power station.⁷ These efforts and other infrastructure development that Qatar had invested in Gaza, including roads and neighborhoods, unmatched by any other investment in Gaza, granted it exclusive access to important assets and bolstered its political importance in the region.

The war proved Qatar's strategy to be beneficial. From the outset, Qatar emerged as the key diplomatic nexus for negotiating hostage releases, and as far more. It has been a major broker in coordinating the safe evacuation of foreign nationals from Gaza, facilitating humanitarian access, maintaining vital infrastructure, and addressing other pressing concerns. Despite Israel's potential preference for Egypt or other mediators, Hamas has remained steadfast in its allegiance to Qatar.

Recognizing its own vulnerabilities, Qatar sought and secured commitments from the key stakeholders involved. Israel reportedly pledged to refrain from targeting Hamas leaders on Qatari soil.⁸ The United States extended the lease for its military base, Al-Udeid, by 10 years, providing Qatar with a crucial security buffer.⁹ And Qatar likely obtained an assurance from Hamas regarding their exclusive

partnership. On a broader scale, Qatar solidified its position by signing at least five major gas deals, including agreements with China and Germany.¹⁰ These deals not only bolstered Qatar's economic standing but also enhanced its political leverage on the global stage. They assure, for example, that Germany will not strongly oppose or pressure Qatar for at least the next three years, given its significant energy reliance on the Qatari resources.

At the same time, substantial shifts in the geopolitical landscape are now challenging Qatar's strategy and potentially impeding its progress. A key development is the growing sentiment among leaders in the Arab Gulf States towards collaboration and reconciliation. Qatar's Emir, Tamim bin Hamad, has notably increased his visits to Abu Dhabi and Riyadh, signaling a thaw in relations.¹¹ The personal dynamics between Gulf leaders have been closely watched since the onset of the war. This shift is particularly significant for the UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, all of whom had valid reasons, both individual and collective, for severing diplomatic ties with Qatar in 2017 and renewing them in 2021. In addition, as relations between these countries and Turkey and Iran are normalized, the uniqueness of Qatar's close relations with them has dwindled.

Furthermore, with the conflict escalating, the United States has taken a more active role in Middle Eastern affairs, particularly in dealing with terrorist organizations like Hamas and its supporters. Qatar, heavily reliant on the United States, may need to reassess its support for radical actors, notably Hamas. It is not blind to the fact that in

the wake of October 7, significant criticism has been directed at its Hamas policy in the U.S. political system.

At this junction, Qatar has to make crucial choices to its foreign policy and strategy – In this new era of potential collaboration, Qatar might choose to make the transition from a unilateral player to a team player. By moving into that direction, Qatar will enhance its credibility with neighbors that can result in greater maneuvering abilities. Also, such a shift would benefit the Gulf region by fostering a more stable and less tense environment. However, cooperating with regional countries also means that Qatar will have to relinquish its monopolistic aspirations.

Moreover, if Qatar will support and sponsor a moderate Palestinian leadership instead of Hamas it will win greater U.S., international, and perhaps even Israeli trust and legitimacy for a continued involvement in the close region. However, without Hamas, Qatar would lose a significant advantage in its role as a mediator during both routine and crisis situations, since it is assumed that a moderate leadership will diversify its partnerships in the Arab World.

In conclusion, Qatar is in the process of reevaluating its foreign policy approach in the aftermath of the Gaza war. While its previous strategies have yielded considerable influence and success, shifting geopolitical dynamics and heightened US involvement in the region may be prompting Qatar to adapt. In navigating these dilemmas, Qatar must carefully weigh its options to ensure its continued relevance and influence in the Middle East.

Qatar's choices will have significant implications for Israel.¹² A Qatar that embraces collaboration and supports moderate Palestinian leadership could contribute to stabilizing the Palestinian arena, which aligns with Israel's interests. Furthermore, Qatar's shift towards moderation could facilitate Israel's integration efforts in the Gulf, potentially leading to enhanced regional cooperation. Yet, removing Qatar's support for Hamas could also pose challenges for Israel. The loss of Qatar as a mediator, coupled with the potential for a diversified set of partnerships among Palestinian factions, could complicate Israel's efforts to manage the Palestinian situation.

- 1 Eddin, L. N., & Rahma, E. A. (2021). "On Qatar's Pragmatic Foreign Policy: The Palestinian Case". In *Contemporary Qatar: Examining State and Society*. Singapore: Springer Singapore, pp. 93-116.
- 2 Briefing Room - The White House, "[Memorandum on the Designation of the State of Qatar as a Major Non-NATO Ally](#)," *Presidential Determination No. 2022-10*. 10 March, 2022.
- 3 Kusumawijaya, K., & Machmudi, Y. (2022). Qatar foreign policy in Middle East conflict mediation. *Journal Middle East and Islamic Studies*, 9(2), pp.1-16.
- 4 In 2024, the UAE has intensified its gas fields acquisitions to compete in this market.
- 5 Kabalan, M. (2019). Actors, structures and Qatari foreign policy. *AlMuntaqa*, 2(2), pp. 61-82.
- 6 Bertrand Viala, "Why Are Qatari-Turkish Relations Unique?" *Eurasia Review*, 17 January, 2017.
- 7 Asmahan Qarjouli, "[Qatar to boost Gaza's electricity supply with gas pipeline project](#)." *Doha News*, 15 February, 2021. Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "[Ambassador Al Emadi: Qatar Pledges to Provide \\$60 Million to Solve Electricity Crisis in Gaza](#)". *MoFA Information office*, 25 February, 2021.
- 8 Yonah Jeremy Bob, "[Will Mossad be allowed to assassinate Hamas leaders in Qatar? – analysis](#)", *The Jerusalem Post*, 27 November, 2023.
- 9 Alex Marquardt and Natasha Bertrand, "[US quietly reaches agreement with Qatar to keep operating largest military base in Middle East](#)". *CNN*, 2 January, 2024.
- 10 Priscila Azevedo Rocha and Stephen Stapczynski, "[China's Sinopec, QatarEnergy Sign 27-Year LNG Supply Deal](#)". *Bloomberg*, 4 November, 2023.; Hans von der Burchard, "[German gas deal with Qatar under renewed scrutiny](#)". *Politico*, 12 October, 2023.
- 11 Yomna Ehab and Adam Makary, "[Leaders of Qatar and Saudi meet to discuss developments in Gaza](#)". *Reuters*, 10 November, 2023; "[Qatari emir, UAE president hold talks in Abu Dhabi](#)". *Arab News*, 9 November, 2023.
- 12 Moran Zaga, Ariel Admoni and Maryann Bisharat, "[Israel's policy on Qatar after the October 7 attack](#)". *Mitvim*, December 2023.

The Palestinian Authority and the West Bank in the “Iron Swords” Operation

Michael Milshtein – Palestinian Studies Forum, The Moshe Dayan Center (MDC), Tel Aviv University

The war that erupted on October 7 is the gravest episode in the hundred-plus year history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Never had so many Israelis been killed in one day (including in Israel's wars with its neighbors). And never have such a high number of Palestinians been killed in a confrontation with Israel, including in the 1948 Nakba. This difficult conflict has serious regional and international implications and is expected to reshape the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians, including the prevailing perceptions regarding any potential settlement between the two societies.

The war is also a reflection of profound changes in the Palestinian system. First, it illustrates the dominant position that Hamas has established in shaping the strategic agenda of the Palestinian collective, in contrast to the deep stagnation of the Palestinian Authority, and of the idea of a political settlement with Israel more generally. This is an expression of a deeper trend in the Palestinian system. The Islamic leadership has strengthened its position, while the national leadership of the PLO and Fatah, which led the Palestinians for many decades, has weakened. Moreover, the war represents an unprecedented nadir in the Palestinian system: there is no clear political vision, except for a continuation of the all-out war against Israel; there is no unified leadership; and there is no dialogue between the public and decision-makers.

Hamas's surprise attack occurred at a time when the Palestinian Authority was mired in a deep internal crisis that raises serious questions about its future. Thirty years after the signing of the Oslo Accords, it seems as if the two-state vision is shattered: the deadlock in the political negotiations has deepened; Israel has constantly changed the demographic, geographic, and economic conditions in the West Bank, bringing the two sides closer to a one-state reality; the world, including

the Arab world, demonstrated a growing weariness with the Palestinians; and in Israel, the widespread assumption took root that normalization with the Arab world was possible without resolving the Palestinian issue.

The influence of the war in Gaza on the West Bank reflects a combination of anger, in view of Israel's unprecedented damage to the Palestinian collective, together with a sense of satisfaction and elation at the damage inflicted on Israel. At the same time there is also anxiety from the possibility that the campaign in Gaza could spill into the West Bank and inflict carnage and destruction on a similar scale. This state of mind is reflected in the media with the widespread use of the phrase, “the threat of the second Nakba.” The same complex approach finds expression in the public discourse in the West Bank. On the one hand, the public shows strong support for the Hamas attack, even stronger than their compatriots in Gaza.

In a survey published in mid-December 2023 by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Public Opinion Research (PCPSR), and headed by Khalil Shikaki, it found that 82 percent of residents of the West Bank support the October 7 attack by Hamas (compared to 57 percent in the Gaza Strip); only 5 percent of West Bank residents believe that Hamas committed war crimes that day (compared to 17 percent in the Gaza Strip); while 75 percent thought that it was suitable for Hamas to rule in Gaza after the war (compared with 38 percent of Gaza residents); and 68 percent support armed struggle as the primary means of confronting Israel (compared with 56 percent in Gaza and 33 percent in the West Bank in September 2023).¹

On the other hand, more than four months after the start of the war, the West Bank has not developed into another front, as Hamas had hoped. There is indeed an increase in the scope of terror-

ism, but the public has largely avoided joining the cycle of violence and launching a third intifada. This is likely deeply frustrating for Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, added to Hizballah’s limited response, and the decision of the Arab public in Israel to refrain from inter-communal violence like that during Operation “Guardian of the Walls” in May 2021.

A large part of the public’s growing anger in the West Bank is directed at the Palestinian Authority, which is perceived by many Palestinians, even before the war, as a weak institution that is compromised by its collaboration with Israel. This is reflected in the previously mentioned PCPSR public opinion poll, which shows that approximately 90 percent of the Palestinian public would like to see Mahmoud Abbas (“Abu Mazen”) resign, and the majority of the respondents in the West Bank today say they would vote for Hamas in future elections. Against this background, demonstrations against the Palestinian Authority and in support of Hamas have taken place at several different locations across the West Bank. However, to date these events have not erupted into mass protests in the spirit of the 2010-2011 “Arab Spring” uprisings, with the power to threaten the stability of the government in Ramallah.

Indeed, the Palestinian Authority is in a particularly awkward position. On the one hand, it levels harsh criticism at Israel for the war in Gaza, and claims to represent all Palestinians (in both the West Bank and Gaza), while at the same time avoiding any condemnation of Hamas’s October 7 massacres. On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority continues to maintain its close coordination with Israel, particularly in the security sector, discouraging any violence that would lead to its losing control of the street. All of this has taken place as Israel has dramatically increased its military operations in the West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza. Israel has conducted large-scale operations in the West Bank’s refugee camps, especially in Jenin, Balata in Nablus, and Nur Shams in Tulkarm.

The growing military friction illustrates both Israel’s determination to quell any threat that develops in the West Bank, while exercising power that has not been seen in recent years (for example, the systematic operation of unmanned aerial vehicles

against terrorist targets in some Palestinian cities), and the profound weakness of the Palestinian Authority. This is particularly true in the northern region of the West Bank, where the PA has not been able to enforce security for several years. This has allowed various terrorist groups to expand and launch operations against Israeli settlers, and even target Israeli settlements that are located beyond the Green Line.

In addition to the PA’s diminished authority in portions of the West Bank, a serious economic crisis has erupted since Israel imposed severe restrictions on the number of Palestinian laborers who are permitted to work in Israel after October 7. The number of workers was reduced from 175,000 (25,000 who worked in Israeli settlements in the West Bank) to a few thousand, resulting in unemployment’s doubling from 15 to 30 percent.²

This has also become a controversial issue in the Israeli political discourse. There is broad support among decision-makers for allowing a relatively large number of the workers to return for the purpose of supporting certain ailing sectors of the Israeli economy (like construction) and preventing a further erosion of stability in the West Bank. However, some senior Israeli officials, mainly from the religious Zionism (but also several from the Likud), oppose the return of Palestinian laborers on the grounds that it could lead to another October 7 event. There are even some who call for the complete economic separation between Israel and the West Bank and argue that Israel should bring in more workers from abroad.³

Against the background of the deteriorating economic and security situation in the West Bank, Abu Mazen is confronted with the question of “the day after” in Gaza. For the time being, there appears to be a gap between the American expectation that the Palestinian Authority would demonstrate a strong interest in assuming responsibility for Gaza, and what looks like limited ambition of the administration in Ramallah to do so. Indeed, the expectation that the Palestinian Authority, which barely controls the West Bank, will be able to control an additional 2.2 million Palestinians in an area that has suffered unprecedented destruction, is unrealistic. Moreover, Gazans have been educated to

view Abu Mazen as a collaborator who has imposed sanctions on them and contributed to their misery and suffering.

The PA is also frustrated by American demands that it implement far-reaching reforms that address government corruption. At the same time, Israel has publicly declared it will not allow the PA, as it is currently configured, to return to Gaza. It has made it clear that first and foremost the PA must curtail the incitement against Israel that is prevalent in the media, in religious institutions, and in the educational system. The PA is reluctant to return to Gaza to begin with, and it has made it clear that it won't let others dictate the terms of its return to the Strip, particularly given the appearance of returning on the tips of Israeli bayonets.

It is still unclear if and when Israel will succeed in bringing down Hamas. Abu Mazen is therefore taking a cautious approach to discussions about the day after. He demands to be involved in any discussion of the post-Hamas future, and is working to build an Arab bloc of support for his position.

And yet he remains vague about what inducements it would take for the PA to accept responsibility for Gaza, which would include deploying security forces there and re-establishing an administration capable of governing the Strip.

The current war reflected the deep need for political and cultural changes to the Palestinian system. Beyond the administrative changes required, such as reducing corruption and addressing the alienation between the public and the leadership, the Palestinian system requires a deep change in consciousness, particularly with regard to attitudes towards Israel. After dealing a historic blow to Israel, but at the same time suffering unprecedented harm, the Palestinians must ask themselves difficult questions, which they have avoided for many years, chief among them is whether it is better to focus on the development of “the here and now” or to continue to pursue uncompromising maximalist goals that lead time and time again to suffering. The latter approach has produced a bipolar pattern that fluctuates between aggression on the one hand and victimization on the other.

1 <https://pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/Poll%2090%20English%20Full%20text%20Dec%202023.pdf>

2 <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/postar.aspx?lang=ar&ItemID=4560>

3 Yaara Shapira, “[the Plan to Replace the Palestinian Workers in the Israeli Economy – Forever](#)” [in Hebrew], *Kan News*, 31 December, 2023; Anna Bersky, “[Ben Gvir to National Security Advisor: Stop Immediately Entry of Workers to Judea and Samaria](#)” [in Hebrew], *Maariv*, 20 December 2023; Itamar Eichner, “[Smotrich: It is Wrong to Allow in Workers from Judea and Samaria: Netanyahu's Advisor: the PM Supports](#)” [in Hebrew], *Ynet*, 10 December 2023.

Arab-Israeli Society's Discourse on the War Between Israel and Hamas

*Arik Rudnitzky –
Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, Moshe Dayan Center*

Introduction

Since 1948, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has had a profound impact on the political orientation of the Arab minority and on the relations between Jews and Arabs within Israel,¹ as well as on Israeli government policies vis-à-vis the Arab citizens.² The reunion with the Palestinian people in the wake of the 1967 War intensified the Israeli-Arabs' dilemma of identity between their national sentiment as Palestinian-Arabs and their unique status as citizens of Israel.³

The interaction between the Arabs in Israel and the Palestinian issue continues up to the present, but over the past two decades, it has taken a different form. Owing to profound changes in the Palestinian arena since the passing of Yasser Arafat in 2004,⁴ the connection of the Arabs in Israel to the Palestinian leadership has weakened, while their national affiliation with the Palestinian people remained strong. In the recurring violent clashes between Israel and Hamas over the past two decades, and especially in the summer of 2014 and May 2021, Arab citizens in Israel voiced harsh criticism against Israel's military campaign in Gaza, while emphasizing their national identification with their Palestinian brethren in the Gaza Strip.⁵

Reactions of the Arab public in Israel

The reaction of the Arab public to the current war differs greatly from those in the past. Arab society was caught in complete shock by the horrific events of October 7. The initial reactions were very similar to those of the Jewish public, when many Arab citizens expressed their sincere sorrow and grief for over 1,200 Israeli individuals murdered by Hamas'

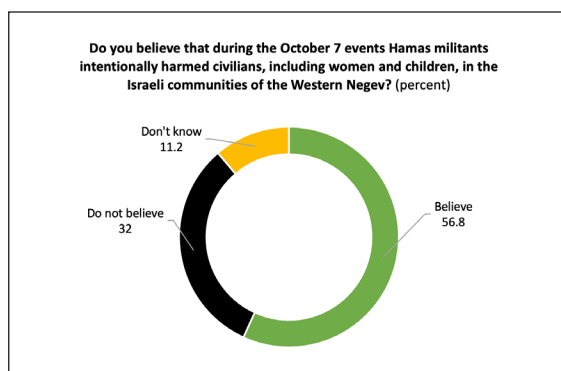
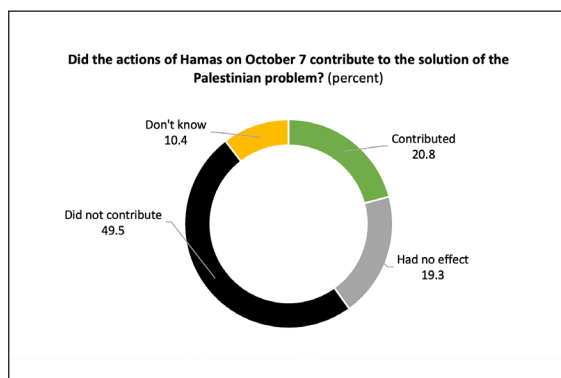
militants. At the same time, Arab society perceived a "state of emergency", especially following the statements of Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben Gvir, who warned of "Guardian of the Walls 2", i.e., another round of violent events among Arab citizens, similar to those of May 2021. During the first month of fighting, the country witnessed a "voluntary segregation" as Arab citizens, fearing acts of revenge by extremist Jewish elements, voluntarily confined themselves in their towns. Public and commercial activities in Arab localities almost completely stopped, and a high sense of tension was felt in the public sphere.⁶

There were a few cases of Arab individuals who glorified and expressed sympathy for the October 7 events on their social profiles, but these were rare incidents that were dealt with harshly by the Israeli authorities. The common responses were those expressing solidarity with the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip, not with Hamas. Many Arab citizens have family relatives in the Gaza Strip, and their main concern is for the well-being and safety of their relatives. According to a public opinion poll conducted by the Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation in November 2023, about one-half of the Arab public (47%) feel that the Israeli response to the attack by Hamas on October 7 is justified, while 44% do not feel that way.⁷ This is yet another evidence of the dilemma of identity experienced by Arab citizens in the shadow of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

At the same time, Arab citizens have expressed solidarity with the Israeli society, and especially with the direct victims of the events in the Jewish communities in the Gaza Envelope. In Rahat, the largest Arab city in Israel with 79,000 inhabitants, all Bedouin, a joint Arab-Jewish "operations room" was opened to supply food packages for needy families, Jewish and Bedouin, who suffered from the Octo-

ber 7 terror attack.⁸ Some Arab teenagers even volunteered to help reconstruct Jewish kibbutzim that were severely damaged during the attack.⁹

Moreover, according to the above-mentioned poll, one-half of the Arab public (49.5%) feel that Hamas' actions on October 7 do not contribute to the solution of the Palestinian issue, and 56.8% believe that Hamas' militants intentionally targeted civilians in the Israeli communities of the Western Negev. These reactions not only convey the extent of criticism directed by the general public at Hamas but also the fact that for many in the Arab society, Hamas' actions do not reflect the true nature of the Palestinian issue as a moral and humanitarian issue concerning the weak side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to the survey's findings, those who think that Hamas' actions did contribute to the solution of the Palestinian issue include mainly voters of the Hadash party, which is the main proponent of the two-state solution in Israeli Arab politics. Their position should not be interpreted as justification for Hamas' actions in the name of the Palestinian issue, but rather their hope that the two-state solution, which stands at the core of the Palestinian issue, will be put back on the agenda.



Positions of the Arab political leadership

Israeli Arab political leaders unanimously condemned Hamas' actions on October 7, but each party leader chose to highlight certain aspects, reflecting his party's platform. At the opening meeting of the Knesset's winter session in mid-November, Ayman Odeh, chairman of the Hadash party, delivered a speech in front of the house plenum. He described what happened on October 7 as "a massacre that deserves all condemnation, not just from the political standpoint, but mainly from the moral and humanitarian one", adding that "the damned occupation does not justify harming innocent people." At the same time, Odeh reiterated his party's support for the two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, saying that "the Jews are a nation entitled to the right to self-determination, which they have realized, but the Palestinian people has not yet realized its right. Anyone seeking a true and strategic security should strive to put an end to the conflict: One state alongside the other, living in peace."¹⁰

Sami Abu Shehadeh, chairman of the Palestinian-nationalist Balad party, wrote a lengthy op-ed in response to the October 7 events. In line with his party's ideological worldview, he opened by criticizing the Zionist approach which ignores the national connection between Arab citizens of Israel and the rest of the Palestinian people:

Zionism lied to its supporters and denied the existence of a Palestinian nation and its basic rights in its homeland. One of the central and important elements of the Zionist lie is the invention of the term 'Israeli Arabs'. This concept redefined the Palestinians who make up about 20 percent of the citizens of the State of Israel within the Green Line, and supposedly excluded them from belonging to the rest of their Palestinian people. [...] But despite the Zionist project's efforts to make them forget, the Palestinians insist on their memory and remind Zionism time and again of what it has been trying to erase: There is one Palestinian nation who lives in all of the territories of Mandatory Palestine.

At the same time, Abu Shehadeh considered the October 7 events "the most serious acts and crimes

committed by Hamas against the civilian population in Israel. Any harm to innocent lives, their bodies, their property, and their souls cannot be accepted in any human society.” He concluded by saying that “the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to fight against the occupation, the blockade and the apartheid regime cannot justify any harm to the civilian population.”¹¹

The position of Mansour Abbas, chairman of the Islamist United Arab List (Ra’am), stands out. Ra’am is the political branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel. Hamas and the Islamic movement are two Palestinian offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood established in Egypt in 1929. The two movements share similar social and religious values.¹² Politically however, the Islamic movement stands in complete contrast to Hamas: While the Islamic Movement recognizes the State of Israel and accepts the two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Hamas does not recognize Israel nor does it accept a two-state solution as a permanent settlement to the conflict.¹³

In several public statements, Abbas vehemently condemned the October 7 massacre, saying that “any action that is taken against innocent people — against women, children, elderly — is inhumane and it goes against the values of Islam as well.” He went even further by calling upon the Palestinian militant factions to put down their weapons and join forces with the Palestinian Authority to build a Palestinian state in a peaceful solution alongside the state of Israel. When his party’s member, MK Iman Khatib Yassin, ignored the murdering of women and children in the Jewish kibbutzim in the Gaza Envelope during an interview to the Knesset TV channel, Abbas publicly urged her to resign from the Knesset.¹⁴

Back to the two-state solution

The year 2023 marked the 30th anniversary of signing the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO. While initial reactions in Arab society praised this historical milestone at the time, over the past three decades the Arab narrative on the Oslo Accords has become more critical. Some political figures, identified ideologically with the nation-

alists, have criticized Oslo as the root of all the evil experienced by Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line, claiming that the accords failed to realize the establishment of a Palestinian state, and also failed to bring equality for Arab citizens within Israel.¹⁵

The general Arab public, for its part, had gradually lost faith in the two-state paradigm as a realistic solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Only 23.7% in November 2021 and 17.2% in May 2023 thought that it was the most realistic solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, according to several polls carried out by the Konrad Adenauer Program. According to the May 2023 poll, about one-half of the Arab public (55.6%) felt that there is no solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and 22.3% believed that the solution should be one Palestinian-Jewish state from the Sea to the River.¹⁶

The October 7 events brought about a profound shift in the position of the Arab public. According to the November 2023 poll, one-half of the Arab public (52.2%) now believe that the most realistic solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the two-state solution based on the 1967 borders, one-quarter (25.5%) still do not believe that there is a negotiated solution on the horizon, and only 14.4% think that the solution should be one Palestinian-Jewish state.¹⁷ Taking into account that the November poll was carried out at the height of the Israeli military response in the Gaza Strip and against the backdrop of the rising number of Palestinian casualties, this shift represents the increasing understanding among Arab citizens that the current situation must change, and that there is an urgent need to resolve the conflict through a solution that will secure the lives of their Palestinian brethren.



Conclusion

The current war between Israel and Hamas constitutes a major negative development in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as far as Israel's Arab citizens are concerned. Against the backdrop of the October 7 Hamas atrocities, the criticism directed at Hamas reaches such an extent that many in the Arab public now believe that Hamas' actions on October 7 do not contribute to the solution of the Palestinian issue, as these actions stand in sharp contrast with moral, human, and even religious values on which the Palestinian issue is based, in their opinion.

The war also intensified the dilemma of identity experienced by Arab citizens. Many in the Arab public express solidarity in words and deeds with the large Israeli society, and especially with the Jewish communities in the Gaza Envelope who were the direct victims of the October 7 events. At the same time, the main concern of the Arab citizens goes to their Palestinian brethren in the Gaza Strip, especially as the war continues and they are exposed to the harsh sights and news from the military confrontation in Gaza. The increasing sup-

port for the two-state solution derives from their concern for the well-being of the other parts of the Palestinian people, both in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

The discourse of Arab citizens on the current war should also be understood against the backdrop of the May 2021 events, when the country witnessed violent clashes between Arab and Jewish citizens, especially in mixed cities where Jews and Arabs have been living side by side for decades. The events of May 2021 within Israel, which coincided with the previous large-scale violent confrontation between Israel and Hamas, have had a profound negative impact on Jewish-Arab relations in Israel. The political and social circumstances of October 2023 differ greatly from those of May 2021. Yet, many Arab citizens continue to feel that they are caught between the hammer and the anvil. While they express solidarity with victims of the current war on both sides of the Green Line, the common feeling in the Arab public is that they are the ones who will pay the price for the current conflict, even after the fighting is over.

- 1 As'ad Ghanem, *The Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel, 1948-2000: A Political Study* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001); Elie Rekhess, "The Evolvement of an Arab-Palestinian National Minority in Israel." *Israel Studies*, 12:3 (2007), pp. 1-28; Sammy Smooha, "Distrust and discord on the Israeli-Arab conflict between Arabs and Jews in Israel." In: Ilai Alon and Daniel Bar-Tal (eds.), *The Role of Trust in Conflict Resolution: The Israeli-Palestinian Case and Beyond* (Springer International Publishing, 2016), pp. 283-308.
- 2 Yitzhak Reiter, *National Minority, Regional Majority: Palestinian Arabs Versus Jews in Israel* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009); Hillel Frisch, *Israel's Security and Its Arab Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- 3 Nadim N. Rouhana, *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State: Identities in Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Muhammad Amara and Izhak Schnell, "Identity repertoires among Arabs in Israel." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30:1 (2004), pp. 175-193.
- 4 As'ad Ghanem, *Palestinian Politics after Arafat: A Failed National Movement* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010).
- 5 Gadi Hitman, "May 2021 Riots by the Arab Minority in Israel: National, Civil or Religious?" *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 10:4 (2023), pp. 346-363.
- 6 Arik Rudnitzky, "On a tightrope: Israel's Arab citizens and the war with Hamas." *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 November 2023.
- 7 Arik Rudnitzky, "In-depth Survey of Arab Society's Views on the War between Israel and Hamas." *Moshe Dayan Center's website*, December 3, 2023: <https://dayan.org/content/depth-survey-arab-societys-views-war-between-israel-and-hamas>
- 8 *Jerusalem Post*, 13 November 2023.
- 9 *Israel Hayom*, 2 November 2023 [Hebrew]
- 10 <https://twitter.com/AyOdeh>, 17 November 2023.
- 11 Sami Abu Shehadeh, "When the war is over, Israel will be force to admit that millions of Palestinians live here [in Hebrew]." *Sikha Mekomit* [Local Call], 1 November 2023.
- 12 Mansour Nasasra, "The Politics of Claiming and Representation: The Islamic Movement in Israel." *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 29:1 (2018), pp. 48-78.
- 13 Martin Kear, "Wasatiyyah and Hamas's modulating positions on the two-state solution and Israel: Finding the middle path." *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 76:1 (2022), pp. 57-75; Arik Rudnitzky, "Is there anything new in Mansour Abbas' declaration concerning the 'Jewish State'?", *Bayan: The Arabs in Israel*, no. 25 (February 2022), pp. 3-8.

- 14 *Times of Israel*, 5 November 2023; *Times of Israel*, 1 December 2023.
- 15 Arik Rudnitzky, "[On a tightrope: Israel's Arab citizens and the war with Hamas](#)." *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 November 2023.
- 16 Arik Rudnitzky, "Survey among the Arab public in Israel." *Moshe Dayan Center website*, June 26, 2023: <https://dayan.org/content/survey-among-arab-public-israel>
- 17 Arik Rudnitzky, "In-depth Survey of Arab Society's Views on the War between Israel and Hamas." *Moshe Dayan Center website*, December 3, 2023: <https://dayan.org/content/depth-survey-arab-societys-views-war-between-israel-and-hamas>

Morocco and the Israel-Gaza War: Riding Out the Storm

Daniel Zisenwine – Truman Institute, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

The October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel and the subsequent Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza has affected Moroccan public life, and continues to generate political developments in the North African kingdom. Although geographically distant from the conflict, the war is closely followed by many Moroccans. Popular solidarity with the Palestinian cause remains high, while the Moroccan government and King Mohamed VI have so far opted to try and ride out the current storm, and not risk endangering achievements Morocco has gained over the past three years after renewing diplomatic relations with Israel. This paper discusses Moroccan reactions to the Hamas-Israel war, Moroccan views on the war's potential outcome, and its implications for future relations with Israel and other parties.

October 7, 2023 found Morocco in a desirable regional and international diplomatic position. In recent years, Morocco's position as a stable and reliable ally to Western countries in a challenging region has been further strengthened. It has also expanded its involvement on the African continent, and was invited to rejoin the African Union in 2017. These developments advanced Morocco's claims regarding the Western Sahara region. Securing international endorsement of its sovereignty over the contested region remains Morocco's primary foreign policy goal. The Kingdom seeks to secure a Moroccan victory in a conflict that has been lingering on for nearly 50 years, extending control over the region and removing the possibility of any alternative. This has generated regional tension, primarily between Morocco and Algeria, which endorses the notion of an independent Sahara state.

The Western Sahara issue is linked to Morocco's wider involvement in Middle Eastern affairs. In December 2020, the United States recognized Morocco's sovereignty over the region, delivering a major diplomatic breakthrough to Rabat. As part of that recognition, Morocco agreed to renew diplomatic relations with Israel, which were sev-

ered in 2000 following the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada. For Morocco, the benefit of American recognition of its position in the Western Sahara outweighed any reservations it may have had about cultivating ties with the Jewish state. While no other country has followed the American recognition (apart from Israel, in August 2023), the pendulum in the Western Sahara question is increasingly swinging in Morocco's favor. Few in the international community today endorse the idea of securing the region's independence, and most lean towards the Moroccan proposal of autonomy rule under Moroccan sovereignty as the solution to the lingering crisis.

Moreover, by linking relations to Israel with the Western Sahara question, the Moroccan monarchy (which effectively manages the Kingdom's foreign policies) neutralized domestic opposition to the move. Nevertheless, there has been an undercurrent of opposition to relations with Israel, periodically expressing itself in demonstrations and petitions demanding their end. These calls so far have had no effect. Indeed, Morocco's relations with Israel have flourished over the past two and a half years, as Morocco moved "full speed ahead" in expanding ties. These efforts included official visits of Israeli ministers (including then Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid in August, 2021; then Defense Minister Benny Gantz in November, 2021 and Transportation Minister Miri Regev in May, 2022). In July, 2023, King Mohamed VI extended an invitation to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to visit the kingdom, thanking him for Israel's recognition of Morocco's sovereignty in the Western Sahara;¹ This proposed visit did not materialize after the war's outbreak. Israeli tourism to the kingdom was also encouraged, as Morocco allowed direct flights to and from Israel.

The scope and pace of these developments exceeded all expectations, suggesting that Morocco had no reservations concerning its relations with

Israel. Military cooperation with Israel has become particularly important to Morocco, as it gained greater military advantages that would be difficult to abandon. In January 2023 the Moroccan armed forces announced expanded military cooperation with Israel, including in logistics, electronic warfare acquisition, and modernization of air defense equipment. Later in the year it was announced that Elbit, an Israeli company, would open new sites in Morocco for arms manufacturing. Morocco also reportedly began in 2022 building Israeli military drones under Israeli supervision, and purchased a 500 million dollar Israeli-made modular air defense missile system.²

This was the backdrop to Morocco's reaction to the Israel-Hamas war. Israeli tourists hastily departed Morocco after the October 7 attack, and flights between the two countries were and remain suspended (on the Moroccan side because of fear of the war, and on the Israeli end due to concern about attacks on visiting Israelis). Business meetings have been relocated to other countries. Israel closed its diplomatic mission in Rabat out of security concerns. Morocco, for its part, has not followed suit, and refrained from formally closing its diplomatic mission in Israel, keeping its diplomats in place. Together with other countries, Morocco vetoed a proposal to cut ties with Israel at the special Arab-Islamist summit in Riyadh in November 2023.

Public opinion in the Kingdom has largely rallied behind the Palestinian cause, with regular protests taking place in Moroccan cities, demanding an end to Israel's military actions in Gaza. Tens of thousands of Moroccans participated in these demonstrations, in solidarity with the Palestinians. These protests have been organized by influential Islamist and leftist party leaders, with the authorities' consent. They have been peaceful, and refrain from targeting Morocco's small Jewish community. The government views the protests as an expression of civil rights, and has not objected to the public demands for de-escalation of the Gaza conflict, humanitarian aid, and the protection of civilians.³

In addition to the protests, there have been calls to boycott French and American companies that are active in the Moroccan market and also operate in

Israel. These include the French Carrefour supermarket chain, McDonald's, and Starbucks. Earlier protests against Carrefour prior to the war were dispersed by the police. These calls have not generated much public action, but have caused some apprehension among these retailers. McDonald's Morocco denied supporting or financing any governmental affiliations.⁴

It is difficult to assess to what extent these protests reflect the entire Moroccan society. Beyond the political movements and elites demanding a more robust Moroccan response to the war in Gaza, the silent majority of Moroccans, without internet access or deep involvement in public life, seem to be less involved and does not have strong opinions about the war, according to Sarah Zaaimi of the Atlantic Council.⁵ Some Moroccans balked when Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal called on Moroccans in November to "address" their leaders and request the termination of relations with Israel. They viewed this as an intervention in domestic affairs, and a lack of sensitivity to the complex diplomatic landscape in which Morocco operates, even as the Kingdom's rallying behind the Palestinians cause is clear.⁶

Moroccan authorities appear not to be very concerned about domestic opposition to relations with Israel and demands for a more robust reaction to the war. On January 10, the Moroccan government refused to receive a petition signed by 10,200 people, demanding an end to normalization with Israel. A government spokesperson claimed that the refusal was due to procedural reasons, without referring to the petition's topic. The government continues to refrain from getting involved with the anti-normalization movement, even as these activists promise to intensify their campaign. Officials seem confident in their ability to steer the course.⁷

While Morocco has called for a cease fire between Israel and Hamas, official statements related to the crisis have been sparse. More than anything, Morocco has been trying for the past three months to "ride out the storm" and limit its involvement in the crisis. Morocco traditionally prefers to embrace quiet, behind the scenes diplomacy, and its cautious stance in this case is not unusual.⁸

Moroccan foreign policy under King Mohamed VI has witnessed an overall retreat from Middle Eastern affairs. While his late father, Hassan II, was involved in regional diplomacy, the current King is less interested in being in the spotlight. He is largely absent from regional summits, and maintains a low profile compared to other leaders. Much of Morocco's diplomatic energy is currently channeled towards expanding its imprint on the African continent, and less on the Middle East. Other issues at the top of the Kingdom's diplomatic agenda are its relations with Europe, and the recently announced FIFA decision that Morocco would be one of the countries to host the football

World Cup in 2030. Preparations for that event, and a declining involvement in Middle East politics (without compromising its general positions concerning the region) suggest that Morocco's attention will be on other diplomatic arenas. Morocco could potentially play a role and post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction, capitalizing on its good relations with both Israelis and Palestinians.⁹ The extent of this, however, is questionable. Its actions, if at all, may be limited to behind the scenes mediating efforts, rather than high profile projects. For now, Morocco's aspirations concerning the war are riding out the storm.

- 1 Isabel Kershner, "Morocco Invites Netanyahu to Visit, A Possible Opening to Deeper Ties", *New York Times*, [19 July 2023](#); "Morocco-Israel Sign First-Ever Defense Agreement in Rabat", *Al-Jazeera*, November 24, 2021.
- 2 "Morocco, Israel Agree to Expand Military Cooperation", *www.africanews.com*, [18 January 2023](#); Basma el-Atti, "Moroccan Activists Call on Government to Cut Ties with Israel over Attack on Jenin", *the New Arab*, 4 July 4, 2023; Joe Saballah, "Israel, Morocco Sign \$500 million Air Defense Deal", *www.thedefensepost.com*, 15 February, 2022; "With the Help of Israel, Morocco is the First African Country to Enter Drone Manufacturing", *Middle East Monitor*, 15 October, 2022.
- 3 Sarah Zaaimi, "Why Morocco Will Not Cut Ties with Israel", *www.atlanticcouncil.org*, 28 November, 2023; "Thousands March in Rabat Demanding End to Israel-Moroccan Ties", *Reuters*, 24 December 2023.
- 4 Achraf Tijani, "Israel-Hamas War-What Impact have Calls for Boycotts Had in Morocco", *www.theafricareport.com*, 22 November, 2023; Basma El-Atti, "BDS Morocco to 'Besiege' Carrefour Stores Over Israeli Settlement Links", *the New Arab*, 28 November 2023; Basma El-Atti, "'No Place for Silence or Neutrality': Moroccans Boycott Pro-Israeli Businesses Amid Israel's War on Gaza", *the New Arab*, 24 October 2023.
- 5 Sarah Zaaimi, "Why Morocco will not cut ties with Israel", 23 November 2023, *www.atlanticcouncil.org*.
- 6 Aziz Boucetta, "Khaled Meshaal's Controversial Speech to Moroccans", *www.moroccoworldnews.com*, 23 November 2023.
- 7 Bassma El Atti, "Amidst Israel's War on Gaza, Morocco's Liaison Office in Tel Aviv Launches New Services", *the New Arab*, 12 January 2024.
- 8 Einat Levy, "How Can Morocco's Neutrality Help in Solving the Current Crisis?" [Hebrew], www.haaretz.co.il/blogs/mitvim, 28 December, 2023.
- 9 Einat Levy, "How Can Morocco's Neutrality ..."

The Arab Media Discourse Following the October 7 Attacks

Tom Sharon – The Moshe Dayan Center (MDC), Tel Aviv University

In the weeks that followed Hamas' brutal October 7 terrorist attacks on Israel, one can find rhetoric, narratives, and descriptions in the Arab media that express clear support for and identification with the attacks. The actions were characterized as legitimate acts of resistance and accompanied by expressions of mockery and joy as "Israel's September 11" [a reference to al-Qaida's attacks on the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon in the United States on September 11, 2001]. The coverage in the Arab media spread lies about the details of Hamas' operation and rejected Israeli eyewitness testimony from the sites of the horror. The coverage also included detailed reports defending and justifying Hamas' brutality.¹

Given the "Da'eshization" ("Da'esh" is the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State or ISIS) of Hamas' brutal acts and propaganda, which adopted the style of the Islamic State's "Hollywood of Jihad" high quality productions² – it is worth noting the different approaches in the Arab Media discourse: While ISIS brutal acts criticized and harshly condemned by leading Arab media figures and writes, the same atrocities made by Hamas received sympathetic expressions, support and justification in the same Arab media outlets.

Following the beginning of Israel's military campaign against Hamas at the end of October, the Arab media's coverage of Israel's response has entirely supplanted Hamas' October 7 terrorist attacks as the main focus of its coverage. The Arab media compares Israeli actions to the Holocaust and criticizes the international community and the West for their staunch support for Israel. The coverage focuses on leveling accusations against Israel, such as, the disproportionate or indiscriminate use of force against civilians; murdering children; committing a "second Nakba" against the residents of Gaza; and "exploiting the opportunity" to fulfill its long-standing plan to reoccupy Gaza and expel thousands of Palestinians from their homes.³

There are also prominent articles that praise Hamas for the attacks and argue that the Israeli response justifies the murder of Zionists and provides an opportunity for additional attacks. For example, the Moroccan journalist, Abd al-Salam Benaissa, called for Mohammed Deif, the leader of Hamas' military wing, to receive the rank of Marshal, which in many armies the highest rank in the military, for the planning and execution of the October 7 attacks.⁴ A Palestinian writer, Khaled Shaham, claimed the attacks have produced the current Arab generation's brightest days.⁵ A Jordanian writer, Sands al-Kisi, wrote that the "Palestinian resistance breathed life into the spirit of all Arabs, when it shattered the myth of Israeli supremacy."⁶ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was described as "a wounded animal," as a metaphor for Israel as a whole after the attack.⁷ The Lebanese journalist Leila Amasha explained why it was necessary to murder Zionists – even women, children, and the disabled: "They are not human beings," she wrote, adding, "The Zionist is a robot programmed to attack us. He was born and died a killer."⁸

Al-Jazeera, the Qatari network known for its close ties to Hamas' leadership, has provided the most sympathetic coverage of the movement.⁹ From the beginning of Israel's ground operation in Gaza at the end of October 2023, the station devotes the vast majority of its coverage to what is happening in Gaza, while almost completely neglecting all other regional and global news. The station broadcasts authentic videos of the Hamas' al-Qassam Brigades (the military wing); images of the IDF's physical destruction of Gaza as a result of the fighting; and emotional stories documenting the humanitarian plight of Gazan citizens.¹⁰ The network has amplified Hamas' propaganda emphasizing that it is not like the Islamic State, and that it has not harmed civilians or its hostages. It broadcast an interview of senior Hamas official Salah al-Arouri (before his targeted killing in Lebanon), in

which he rejected the comparison of Hamas to the Islamic State and argued it was the West that has given birth to extreme ideologies. He also claimed Hamas' October 7 attacks were directed only at Israeli forces on the Gazan border and not at the surrounding Israeli communities.¹¹ Al-Jazeera benefits from its base in Qatar, where Doha's role as mediator between Hamas and Israel, as well as its widespread popularity, insulates the network from criticism from Arab leaders about its sympathetic coverage of Hamas.

In November and December, the Arab media sympathetic to Hamas focused their coverage on Hamas' battlefield success, its ability to bleed Israeli forces, and its disruption of daily life on Israel's home front. This coverage highlights blows to Israeli morale as reported in the Israeli and Western media, whether it is criticism from reservists; challenges to the Israeli economy; or domestic political divisions. Two consistent themes stand out in this coverage: sympathy for the public face of Hamas, principally for Yahya Sinwar and Hamas' spokesperson, Abu Ubaida; and, second, despite Israel's battlefield advances, it is Hamas that is winning the media and moral campaign. It should also be noted that it is not just elements of the media that promote sympathy for Hamas. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Shaykh Ahmad al-Tayeb in Egypt, and Abdelilah Benkirane, the Secretary-General of the Justice and Development Party (PJD) in Morocco, which is aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood, have all expressed support for Hamas' actions in the name of legitimate resistance movement that represents the Palestinian cause against Israel.¹²

Alongside the pro-Hamas support in the Arab media, there have also been Arab media networks that condemn Hamas. These condemnations can be found in Saudi-backed or aligned media organs, which to some degree represents the ongoing competition between them and the more popular Qatari-backed Al-Jazeera. Saudi Arabia and Egypt lead the media and policy effort in the region to stamp out any expression of support for the Muslim Brotherhood. In the Saudi-backed media Hamas' October 7 terrorist attacks are depicted as an expression of rebellion against Islam, and the responsibility of Iran.¹³ Prominent Saudi journalists, close to the royal family, have written articles about what can be done to "get rid of Hamas," and characterized Hamas' leaders as having committed suicide.¹⁴ Saudi-backed media coverage since the start of the war has also raised controversy. Saudi hosts have aggressively questioned Hamas leaders; media coverage has amplified voices on the ground in Gaza who have been critical of Hamas; and the amount of direct coverage of the war has been limited. This has raised the question in some quarters of the Arab world of whether the media's posture reflects a change in the "righteousness of the Palestinian cause."¹⁵ However, the criticism of Hamas in the Saudi and Saudi-backed media is often combined with harsh criticism of Israel, and what it perceives as a disproportionate response in Gaza.¹⁶ Moreover, the atrocities committed against Israel by Hamas receive scant attention, and when they are addressed, it is almost as if Israel is responsible for them.

1 For example: Muthanna Abdullah, "[When Palestine speaks the language the world understands](#) [Arabic]," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 9 October, 2023; Jamal Mohammed Taqi, "[An outburst of anger that did not come out of nowhere](#) [Arabic]," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 16 October, 2023; "[Al Aqsa Flood: The Palestinian issue returns to the top of the agenda](#) [Arabic]," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 9 October, 2023; "[Fifty Years and a day: The Palestinian war was a success](#) [Arabic]," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 8 October, 2023.

2 Hamas has recently produced videos and television content (characterized by stereotypical anti-Semitic symbols and tropes) that encourage followers to murder Jewish and Israeli citizens in public places - by shooting them, stabbing them, or using cars to run them over. See: [Incitement and encouragement for terrorist attacks in Hamas TV shows during Ramadan](#), The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2 May, 2023.

- 3 For example: Aisha Belhaj, "Who woke up the Nazis [Arabic]," *al-Arabi al-Jadid*, 13 October, 2023; Jumana Farhat, "[The annihilation of Gaza and the image campaign](#) [Arabic]," *al-Arabi al-Jadid*, 13 October, 2023; Turan Kashlakji, "[The Zionists, imperialists and their lies](#) [Arabic]," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 12 October, 2023; Osama Abu Irshayd, "[Biden's green light to commit genocide in Gaza](#) [Arabic]," *al-Arabi al-Jadid*, 13 October, 2023; "[An unambiguous Western alignment with Israel and a weak Arab position](#) [Arabic]," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 12 October, 2023; For a comprehensive historical analysis of the Holocaust in the Arab discourse, see: Esther Webman and Meir Litvak, *From Empathy to Denial: Arab Responses to the Holocaust* (London: Hurst Ltd, 2012).
- 4 Abd al-Salam Benaissa, "[Commander Mohammed al-Deif is worthy of the title of Marshal...and his fighters are well-deserved generals](#) [Arabic]," *al-Rai al-Youm*, 12 October, 2023.
- 5 Khaled Shaham, "[Days are better than a thousand months...why have we moved to a new era?](#) [Arabic]," *al-Rai al-Youm*, 12 October, 2023.
- 6 Sundus al-Qaisi, "[Gaza the hero...the cemetery of invaders](#) [Arabic]," *al-Rai al-Youm*, 13 October, 2023.
- 7 Suhail Kiwan, "[The wounded animal](#) [Arabic]," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 11 October, 2023.
- 8 Leila Amasha, "[Liars preach humanity...so eloquently!](#) [Arabic]," *al-Ahed*, 10 October, 2023.
- 9 Salim Azuz, "[Al Jazeera is celebrating in its own way... Is the project finished!?](#) [Arabic]," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 3 November, 2023.
- 10 In this context, it is worth noting the *Al Jazeera* owned channels "Midan" and "AJ+" that also publish on "X" (formerly known as *Twitter*). See, for example: "[Positions in support of the resistance as expressed by the Arab street to AJ+ cameras](#)," X, 10 October, 2023; "[Gaza Envelope...an Israeli act and an easy hunt for the resistance](#)," X, 8 October, 2023.
- 11 "[Al-Aruri to Al Jazeera: These are the reasons we launched 'Al Aqsa Flood'](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 12 October, 2023.
- 12 Nabil Bakhani, "[Benkirane: Hamas is a source of honor for the umma...](#) [Arabic]" *al-Rai al-Youm*, 19 December, 2023; "[The World Union of Muslim Scholars, operating in Qatar, Calls on Muslims to Intervene Militarily in Gaza](#) [Hebrew]" *The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center*, 4 November, 2023; Tuvan Gumrukcu, Huseyin Hayatsever, "[Turkey's Erdogan says Hamas is not terrorist organization, cancels trip to Israel](#)", *Reuters*, 25 October, 2023; Ofir Winter, Michael Barak, "[From Moderate Islam to Radical Islam? Al-Azhar Stands with Hamas](#)", *INSS insight* No. 1777, 2 November, 2023.
- 13 Fahd Suleiman Al-Shuqairan, "[The Hamas adventure...](#) [Arabic]" *al-Arabiya*, 12 October, 2023.
- 14 Fahd Ibrahim Al-Deghaithir, "[Hamas suicide bomber](#) [Arabic]," *Okaz*, 18 October, 2023; Kamal Salman, "[Islam and Terrorism](#) [Arabic]," *Elaph*, 1 November, 2023; Magdy Abd al-Wahab, "[Palestinians and Hamas kamikazes](#) [Arabic]," *Elaph*, 26 December, 2023; Radwan Al-Sayed, "[Jihadist Islam died out and regenerates like a cancer](#) [Arabic]," *Asas*, 1 January, 2024; Abd al-Rahman Al Rashed, "[This is the way to get rid of Hamas](#) [Arabic]," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 28 December, 2023.
- 15 Noor Ali, "Saudi journalist Dawoud al-Sharyan attacks *al-Arabiya*..." [Arabic]" *al-Rai al-Youm*, 19 November, 2023; Abd al-Aziz Al-Jarallah, "The unjustified neutrality of the Arab media [Arabic]," *Al-Jazirah*, 3 November, 2023; Yasser Abd al-Aziz, "[What did the Arab media lose in covering the war in Gaza?](#) [Arabic]," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 11 December, 2023.
- 16 Sadeq Yahya Fadel, "They are criminal beasts...enemies of humanity [Arabic]," *Okaz*, 22 October, 2023; Abdullah Al Otaibi, "Gaza: Between apostate and the necessary identification [Arabic]," *al-Arabiya*, 23 October, 2023; Faisal Abbas, "Do you condemn Hamas? [Arabic]," *al-Arabiya*, 5 December, 2023.



Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
Foundation Office Israel

Rabbi Akiva Street 8, PO Box 7968
9107901 Jerusalem
Israel



+972 2 567 1830

Connect



kas.de/israel



facebook.com/KonradAdenauerIsrael



linkedin.com/company/konrad-adenauer-stiftung