Webster UNIVERSITY

International Security Report

The Israel-Gaza Conflict

2024

By
Joshua Hayes
Dani Belo, PhD

May 2024

THE GLOBAL POLICY HORIZONS LAB

Empowering Evidence-Based Solutions

For a Better World

Note from the Lead Author, Joshua Hayes

This International Security Report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the conflict between Israel and Hamas, as well as the impact of international stakeholders. Through rigorous research and analysis, we endeavor to shed light on key trends, challenges, and opportunities in the realm of conflict and security as well as broader policy implications.

We hope that this report will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, scholars, practitioners, and all those interested in understanding and addressing the complexities of contemporary conflicts.

We express our deepest gratitude to our donor, the Don Maland Scholarship Fund, for their invaluable and generous support for this research and publication.

Webster UNIVERSITY

About the Author

Josh Hayes is an undergraduate student studying Political Science at Webster University in St. Louis, USA. His research focus is on stability in the Middle East, specifically in Israel and Palestine. With his policy-oriented research, he hopes to provide an analysis of the underlying conflicts that have shaped the region for centuries as well as propose a framework for future pathways to peace and stability. Additionally, he is working on a research paper that explores the foreign policy of Israel and its impact on the broader region and global stakeholders.

About the Global Policy Horizons Research Lab

Webster University's Global Policy Horizons Lab is a policy-focused research entity where students, Lab researchers, affiliated faculty, as well as members of the policy community from across disciplines, can explore national and global security issues, generate original research, as well as produce peer-reviewed policy papers and commentaries. The Lab pursues innovative research focusing on unconventional threats, identity and security, role of technology in security, economic security, as well environmental and food security. The goal of the Lab is to become a knowledge hub that informs national governments and other members of the global policy community on contemporary and future security challenges.

The current Director of the Lab is Professor Dani Belo, PhD.

Executive Summary

In October 2023, the region of Israel and Palestine, places already susceptible to violence, descended into a violent conflict following the October 7 Hamas terrorist attacks within Israel, that killed over 1200 Israelis and resulted in over 240 hostages being taken. Israel responded with a full-force ground invasion of Gaza; a Palestinian territory controlled by the terrorist group Hamas. Since the onset of violence, there has been a significant decline in already low human development levels in Gaza as well as a significant drop in economic performance in Israel. The war has led to nearly the entire population of Gaza being internally displaced, along with over 25,000 deaths. Currently, the greatest risk within Gaza is the potential of famine which is largely due to the inability to get enough humanitarian aid into Gaza and the right hands. On a military level, Israel's stated goal of the war is the destruction of Hamas and its ideology which is tricky if not impossible to measure and complete. Additionally, there is a possible although less likely option of the war expanding to other actors such as Hezbollah or Iran. Even if Israel is successful in their goal, the question that will be raised is what comes next. The current Israeli government, the most right-wing in its history, is unwilling to negotiate on a potential sovereign Palestinian state, but without the possibility of such a state, the violence between the two sides may never truly end. Diplomatic efforts of major international players and neighboring Arab states in the short term will be aimed at the release of hostages and a durable pause in fighting to get aid into Gaza. These talks are currently ongoing and are being led by Qatar and Egypt but so far, a breakthrough hasn't occurred. In the long term, a political solution will need to be implemented to the conflict, likely involving a Palestinian state, but only if Israel agrees. How the situation develops will affect the entire region in the decades and centuries to come.

Background

The region has a tumultuous history dating back centuries, as it was the birthplace of Judaism and Christianity, and has been controlled by many different empires. In the early 20th century, Britain captured the region from the Ottoman Empire. Due to growing violence in the area between Jews and Arabs, the UN recommended partitioning Palestine into two separate states. The plan was rejected and when Israel declared its independence in 1948, nearby Arab countries invaded. Despite a lack of international military support, Israel prevailed and ended up controlling more land than the Partition called for. 700,000 Palestinians were driven out of the area by Israel in what is known as the Nakba, creating a large group of stateless refugees. Functionally, Egypt commanded control of the Gaza Strip and Jordan controlled the West Bank. The territory has continued to see much upheaval, and these were later captured by Israel in 1967, during the Six-Day War and they began to establish settlements. Since then, attempts at peace including the Camp David Accords, the Egypt-Israeli Peace Treaty, and most recently the Abraham Accords have been successful at achieving normalization and reducing hostilities with neighboring states. Violence in the region has continued, but Israel agreed to allow limited self-rule in the Oslo accords of the 1990s by transferring some authority to the newly created

Palestinian Authority (PA). Violent intifadas have erupted since, and the larger peace process stalled. Hostilities now are most significant with Hamas, a Palestinian terrorist organization and political entity in control of the Gaza Strip, and Hezbollah, a Lebanese Shia Islamist militant group, both of whom are considered proxies of Iran. During the 2006 PA elections, the terrorist group and political party Hamas won a majority of seats which resulted in them controlling Gaza, while the PA continued to control the Palestinian parts of the West Bank. In 2012, the UN General Assembly voted to recognize the State of Palestine, while upgrading its status to a non-member observer state[1]. Palestinian militants have continued to periodically engage with the IDF, but the situation has escalated severely since the recent October 7 Hamas-led attack that killed 1200 Israeli civilians. These attacks are largely explained by a desire to destroy the Jewish state, with the attempted justification being the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. Israel responded by declaring war on Hamas and launched a full-scale ground invasion of Gaza that is currently ongoing. The situation has left thousands of Palestinian civilians dead and many more displaced. The efforts of the international community are now focused on limiting civilian casualties, getting humanitarian assistance into Gaza, and determining a way to end the conflict that will ensure Israeli security while also creating a horizon for a non-Hamas-led Palestinian state, something the current Israeli government does not support.

Primary Stakeholders

Actor	Impact	Effect
Netanyahu Government	Mixed	(+) Has successfully worked with the US to normalize Israeli relations with formerly hostile states in the region. (-) May be put in a position to choose between his political future and post-war peace with the Palestinians. (-) Has overseen previous military failures and is accused of not taking serious threats about Hamas attacks pre-October 7.[2] (-) Has continued to pursue objectionable acts that have been condemned as human rights abuses. These include restrictions on the freedom of movement for Palestinians, blockades and closures of the Gaza Strip and its border, as well as the destruction of Palestinian homes followed by Israeli settlements in the West Bank.[3] Some human rights groups like Amnesty International have even called it apartheid.[4]

Actor	Impact	Effect
Hamas	Negative	(-) Perpetrated the October 7 attacks on Israel by breaching the Gaza border and killing hundreds of Israelis, wounding many more, and taking over 240 hostages of all ages. Currently involved in a sustained war against Israel, primarily in Gaza.[5] (-) The original charter in 1988 called for the destruction of Israel, a belief still firmly held in the group to this day.[6] (-) Designated as a terrorist group by the US and other states and organizations.[7]
Hezbollah	Negative	(-) Political and militant force in Lebanon that has been involved in constant military operations against Israel. It has stepped into the power vacuum in Lebanon given the recent internal turmoil.[8] (-) Immediately following the October 7 attacks, Hezbollah began to engage Israel along its northern border with rocket attacks. Though they were likely not involved in the planning of October 7, the attacks signaled that Hezbollah was standing with Hamas.[9] Still, they have yet to fully engage in the conflict.
PLO-PA	Mixed	(+) Is the rival political party to Hamas and is considered more moderate. Is open to a two-state solution. Recognized Israel as a state during the 1993 Oslo Accords, long before many other states in the Middle East. (-) Responsible for governing the Palestinian territories under the supervision of Israel, but functionally only controls a portion of the West Bank.[10] While it was only intended as a temporary government structure and its hands are essentially tied, the PA has been an abject failure in governing Palestinians. (-) There are serious questions about whether Palestinians would view them as a legitimate authority due to cooperation with Israel and high levels of corruption.[11]

Secondary Stakeholders

Actor	Impact	Effect
Lebanon	Mixed	(-) An extremely weak and unstable government that both includes some elements of Hezbollah and has been historically unable to control the actions of Hezbollah. (+) A longstanding tense relationship with Israel, but generally unsupportive of a renewed Hezbollah war with Israel as it would likely cause further Lebanese instability and lead to civilian casualties as previous conflicts have.
United States of America	Positive	(+) Has long been Israel's strongest and most sacred ally. One of the first states to recognize its existence and has since been a steadfast ally both militarily and economically. Home to a sizable population of the Jewish diaspora. (+) Has given over $100 billion in military support to Israel since its founding. Now responsible for $3.8 billion every year in military aid and defense systems such as the Iron Dome.[12] Has also been the single biggest individual state contributor to Palestinians since the Oslo Accords were signed, responsible for $5.6 billion in aid since 1994.[13] This aid has been both economic and humanitarian aid, mainly through USAID and the UNRWA. (+) The long-held position of the US is that a two-state solution is the only viable pathway to achieving lasting peace for Israelis and Palestinians.[14] While Israel is not yet on board, the US will be a key player in convincing the Israelis in that direction. (-) Due to longstanding unequivocal support for Israel, the US consistently votes against UN resolutions condemning Israel for its actions and uses its veto to block measures at the Security Council.[15] Viewed as slow to criticize the heavy-handed response by Israelis.

Actor	Impact	Effect
Neighboring Arab States	Positive	(+) Leading negotiators in previous and recent agreements between Israel and its opponents. Qatar has already organized deals during the current Israel-Hamas War to rescue hostages in return for humanitarian aid and temporary ceasefires.[16] (-) Arab states have often refused to take in any Palestinian refugees. One of those reasons is that the refugees will never return or be able to return to their homeland. But the other, more cynical, reason is that there is concern that allowing a mass influx of Palestinians into a place like Egypt would allow Hamas another place to launch attacks from and further destabilize another country.[17] (+) Egypt is against Hamas due to connections within its borders. Despite previously vowing to destroy Israel, Egypt and Israel now have a mutual understanding, dating back to their 1979 Peace Treaty.[18] (+) Saudi Arabia has not yet formally recognized Israel and while they have been critical of Israel's treatment of Palestinians, a deal was reportedly within reach pre-October 7 and could be revived. Any such deal would require a pathway to a Palestinian state but would be a significant breakthrough in diplomacy.[19]
International Organizations	Mixed	(-) The UN General Assembly has passed or attempted to pass several resolutions on the Israel-Hamas conflict. While they condemned the Hamas terrorist attacks on October 7, they have yet to explicitly condemn the group. They also called for a sustainable ceasefire back in October, just a few weeks after the military campaign began.[20] (-) The EU has been largely supportive of Israel's right to defend itself, although there is much internal conflict in the group. While EU leaders such as President Ursula von der Leyen have been vocally supportive of Israel, the internal fragmentation has left the group paralyzed.[21] (+) The UN has taken a firm position regarding Palestinian statehood, acknowledging them to be the sole rightful power in

Actor	Impact	Effect
		Gaza and the West Bank. It has also, as a body, been critical of Israeli settlements and military actions against Palestinians.
Iran	Negative	(-) Responsible for funding terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. They have been estimated to give Hezbollah $700[22] million a year and Hamas around $100 million a year.[23] (-) Iran has supported Palestinian statehood since it reversed course and severed its ties with Israel in 1979 but has opposed peace negotiations because it opposes a two-state solution, believing there should just be a single unified Palestinian state.[24] This has been a destabilizing force in the region.
Israeli Opposition	Positive	(+) They are currently not in power, but they may be the decision-makers shortly. Israelis across the political spectrum have lost trust in Netanyahu and he is expected to lose power when the next elections occur either soon or once the war in Gaza is over due to the public holding his government responsible for the security failures that led to October 7 as well as his open defiance of the US.[25] (+) There is wide support across Israeli politics for the War against Hamas, but when it comes to future pathways to peace and security for Israel, polls show that leaders like Benny Gantz and Yair Lapid may be primed to form a center-left coalition that is more amenable to cooperation post-Hamas in Gaza.[26]
Russia	Mixed	(+) Has a relatively nuanced relationship with Israel, but under Putin has tried to maintain good ties, although this may be changing. (-) Russia has been working quite closely with Iran and has even depended on them for military support in its attempted invasion of Ukraine. Russia's relationship with Iran is significant and further complicates the situation for Israel.[27]

Risk Assessment Indicators

Extremely High Risk	High Risk	Medium Risk	Low Risk

History of Armed Conflict — **Level: Extremely High Risk** — **Trend: Declining** ↓

Stabilizing Factors

Military Capabilities: The capabilities of the Israeli armed forces combined with their intelligence agencies, and missile defense systems provide a strong deterrent to neighboring states to start a broader conflict. High militarization is not always a good thing but, in this case, it has created an understanding, at least with neighboring state actors, that engaging in armed conflict with Israel is not in their best interest. Since the Oslo Accords, Palestine has not had anything that could be considered a standing army, meaning there is much asymmetry between the military capabilities of Israel and Palestine.[28]

Destabilizing Factors

Armed Conflict: Israel and the entire region have historically had few moments of peace from fighting. Even in times of not absolute war, there has not been absolute peace. This is due to the groups Hamas and Hezbollah and the near-constant tensions. But the October 7 Hamas attacks that left over 1000 Israeli citizens dead and created over 200 hostages have interrupted a relative lull in fighting and caused an all-out war in the Gaza Strip. Israel has military superiority over Hamas but if other actors engage the situation could get much worse.

Quasi-State Actors: Israel's primary opponents on the battlefield are best described as quasi-state actors who are primarily militant groups but also have some political influence in their areas. Terrorist groups like Hamas are separate from the State of Palestine but represent the only de facto militant forces in the area. Having to fight against Hamas and Hezbollah is difficult for Israel because, while they may enjoy some levels of on-the-ground civilian support in Palestine and Lebanon respectively, they are not states and so Israel must be careful to differentiate between civilians and militants which can be difficult.

Assessment

A renewed full-scale war in Gaza followed by the Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel has created a dangerous situation with rising regional tensions. If the conflict is contained to Gaza, Israel's military superiority over Hamas is not in doubt and the state of Israel itself will be safe. The challenge on the ground in Gaza will be how to destroy Hamas and its capabilities, if possible while minimizing civilian casualties and determining what comes next. What must be avoided at all costs is the broadening of the conflict to other actors such as Hezbollah or Iran which would be catastrophic and initiate a multi-front war.

Governance and Political Instability **Level: Medium Risk** **Trend: Declining**

Destabilizing Factors

Israel's Judicial Overhaul: A law passed by Prime Minister Netanyahu and some far-right members of his coalition in 2023 created much civil unrest before the October 7 attacks. The coalition wanted the law to restrict some of the power of its court system because it consistently ruled against some of its policies. The response to this was the largest protests in modern Israeli history against the government, threats by important businesses to leave, and military reservists suspending their voluntary duty.[29] The court struck down the law in early 2024 and the government has put its appeal on hold due to the war, but the clash is emblematic of the political and cultural divide within Israel today.

Electoral Gridlock: Israel has experienced much political gridlock over the last several years, including 5 parliamentary elections in less than 4 years. The primary cause was the corruption allegations against Netanyahu which later led to charges being filed. When he failed to resign, his coalition broke down. 3 consecutive elections failed to create a clear coalition. The fourth election led to a very ideologically diverse coalition that temporarily ousted Netanyahu but failed around a year later. When Netanyahu returned to power, it was with a right-wing coalition that ran on unpopular reforms such as the judicial overhaul and provocative positions against Palestinians.[30]

Corruption: Israel is not prone to significant corruption. In Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index, Israel was ranked 33 out of 180 countries and territories, a solid score.[31] Despite this, its most prominent political figure, PM Netanyahu has been accused of corruption. His response of labeling the investigation a witch hunt and the passing of judicial reforms that could legalize his conduct has caused concerns among opponents of democratic backsliding.[32] Meanwhile in Palestine, the government, which is curbed by not being an official state, not having actual control over its territory, and dealing with Hamas, is fraught with cronyism in political appointments, a weak rule of law, and a lack of real democracy.[33]

Lack of Democracy in Palestine: The lack of real democracy in Palestine is due both to the Israeli control of the territory as well as the weak current government in the form of the PA. In the most recent Global State of Democracy Indices, Palestine scores 0 out of 1 for representation, 0.43 out of 1 for rights, 0.36 out of 1 for rule of law, and 0.43 out of 1 for participation.[34] These indices put Palestine below average for some categories and near the worst in the world for others.

Assessment

Israel is a thriving democracy in a region where democracy has not usually survived. However recent events have caused political gridlock and caused concerns of backsliding. Overcoming political polarization is not an easy thing to do and has no easy solution. Democracy is still

strong in Israel but continued gridlock on top of outside threats makes it difficult to maintain national unity when embroiled in outside conflict. In Palestine, the absence of true democracy will continue until a political horizon exists and even then, the future is unclear. Part of the instability in the Palestinian territories is that while Palestinians may govern themselves on the ground, they are at the tactical mercy of Israel as it controls the flow of goods into its territories. The central question that will emerge from the war is what will the governing of Gaza and the West Bank look like after Israel views its mission to be complete?

Population Heterogeneity **Level: High Risk** **Trend: Stable**

Ethnic Diversity: The population of Israel is approximately 9.05 million. The main ethnic groups the country comprises are the Jews 73.2%, the Arabs 21.1%, and others 5.7%.[35] The West Bank has an estimated population of 3.17 million. The country is composed mainly of Palestinian Arabs 72% and 28% Jewish (75% Israeli Jew, 20% Israeli Arab). The ethnic tensions are severe in the West Bank as much of the Jewish settlements are around East Jerusalem in Area C which Israel controls, creating logistical challenges for Palestinians in the rest of the West Bank.[36] The Gaza Strip has an estimated population of 2.1 million. Essentially, the entire population of Gaza has been Palestinian Arab since Israel withdrew all its settlers and soldiers from the area in 2005.[37]

Religious Diversity: Israel was founded on the idea of forming a haven for Jews both religious and ethnic alike. Overall, 75% of Israelis are Jewish, 17.5% are Muslim, with others making up the remaining groups.[38] The Jewish population is relatively split between variations of secular and Orthodox[39]. The West Bank is predominantly Sunni Muslim although one sector is majority Jewish. Overall, Muslims make up around 80-85% of the population, Jews 12-14%, and Christians around 1%[40]. There are many different religious sites in the area and control is subject to the local authority which creates hostilities. Since the Jewish settlers pulled out, virtually all of the population in Gaza is Muslim, close to 98%.[41]

Assessment

Jews form a clear majority of Israelis, but a sizable Arab population is subject to much discrimination due to their support for Palestinian independence. In Gaza and the West Bank, there is little ethnic or religious diversity except in the areas with Jewish settlers. Ethnic and religious differences themselves are a central cause of the broader conflicts in the region. The centuries-long conflict between Jews and Palestinians and Jews and Muslims in this region are longstanding and not easily solvable. Peaceful cohabitation in the region between the two groups is the only long-term pathway for stability.

Demographic Stress **Level: Medium Risk** **Trend: Stable**

Population: Israel has a relatively small population of 9.05 million with a modest population growth rate of 1.56%.[42] (This number includes the over 700,000 Israelis in settlements in the

West Bank and East Jerusalem.[43]) The West Bank has a population of 3.17 million with a relatively high population growth rate of 2.1%.[44] Gaza has a population of 2.1 million with a relatively high population growth rate of 2.07%, like the West Bank's.[45]

Population Density: Israel has a high population density of approximately 415 people per square km as of 2023 with a once high but now slowly decreasing growth rate over the last 35 years.[46] The Gaza Strip is known as one of the most densely populated areas on the planet. Gaza City itself is even more dense and has a similar density to Jerusalem. Gaza City has a population of over 650,000 living within its 18 square miles with a population density of around 36,000 per square mile.[47]

Fertility Rate: Israel has a fertility rate of 2.94 children per woman[48] which is significantly higher than the OECD average range of 1.2 to 1.8 and makes it the highest rate in the group.[49] Because of this, the current population aged 0-14 in Israel is 26%.[50] Because of this, there are strong levels of health and education spending. The total fertility rate in the West Bank is high at 3.54 per woman. This has created a large youth bulge in which children ages 0-14 make up 34% of the population in the West Bank.[51] The story is largely the same in Gaza with a total fertility rate of 3.38 children per woman and the population ages 0-14 being nearly 40%, an extremely high number.[52]

Assessment

While in some cases having a high population density and being a highly urbanized nation can sometimes be a negative thing, it is currently not a concern for Israel. The stable population and growth are signs of strength in both states. Despite the abnormally high fertility rate, it has not caused undue strain. While in some cases having a high population density and being a highly urbanized nation can sometimes be a negative thing, it is currently not a concern for Israel. The biggest demographic concerns in the Palestinian territories are the high youth bulge and the population density of Gaza. The high population density of Gaza is wreaking tremendous havoc during Israel's military campaign because it is a contributing factor to the high level of civilian casualties and displacement. It also makes the humanitarian situation worse because so much of the civilian population is children. Overall, demographic stress within Israel and Palestine is not a significant cause of the conflict.

Economic Performance — Level: High Risk — Trend: Declining

Destabilizing Factors

Inflation: Inflation continues to decline in Israel from the increase that many countries around the world experienced in the past few years. As of March 2024, annual inflation is 2.7% which is an improvement from 3.8% in September 2023, before the 10/7 attacks.[53] In Palestine however, inflation has increased significantly following the attacks. As of September 2023, annual

inflation was 4.97%, but in the preceding months, it spiked and was at 37% YOY as of March 2024.[54]

GDP Growth: The war has significantly impacted GDP growth in both Israel and Palestine. Israeli GDP for Q4 2023, the quarter that began with the attacks, declined 19.4% on an annualized basis from the previous quarter which saw growth of 1.8%.[55] The war in Gaza has taken a toll on the Israeli economy as consumption has dropped significantly as well as investment by businesses. For Palestine, the situation is even worse. GDP for the Gaza Strip declined 80%, while GDP in the West Bank was down 22%, which led to a total GDP decline of 33% for the State of Palestine in Q4 2023. The unemployment rate for Palestinians remained obscenely high and according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, over 90% of Palestinians working in Israel and Israeli settlements were laid off.[56]

Assessment

Before the latest conflict, Israel had a strong economy and had recovered well from the pandemic. The Palestinian economy was struggling before but is essentially non-existent now. The conflict has had negative economic effects in both Israel and Palestine. Still, due to the highly developed nature of Israel's economy, they will be severely less impacted than Palestine.

Human Development **Level: Extremely High Risk** **Trend: Declining** ↓

Life Expectancy at Birth: Life expectancy in Israel is high at 82.2 years.[57] Additionally, Israel has a maternal mortality rate of 3 deaths per 100,000 live births, one of the lowest in the world. In the West Bank, life expectancy at birth is 75.9 years[58] while in Gaza, the life expectancy is 74.8 years.[59]

Health Expenditures: Israel spent 8.3% of its GDP on health care expenditures which is continuing to increase, although it remains lower than the OECD average of 9.3%.[60] Health services in Gaza and the West Bank are managed by the Palestinian Ministry of Health and Military Medical Services, the UNRWA, and other private entities. As of 2021, health expenditures represented a large 10.4% of GDP, but with limited success.[61]

Education: Israel ranks 19th in education expenditures at 7.1% of GDP. The total literacy rate is 97.8% and is similar for both males and females. The average years of schooling is 15 years for men and 17 years for women.[62] The combined Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza rank 65th in education expenditures at 5.3% of GDP. The total literacy rate is 97.5%, similar for both males and females while the average years of school are 12 years for males and 14 years for females.[63]

Destabilizing Factors

Internally Displaced Persons in Gaza: According to the UN, currently 1.7 million people are displaced in Gaza, which amounts to nearly 75% of the strip's population.[64] This creates significant challenges for shelter and security.

Food Insecurity: According to recent reports from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the entire Gaza population is in Phase 3 (crisis) or worse levels of food insecurity, with 50% of the population in Phase 4 (Emergency), and 25% in an IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe).[65]

Health: Currently, the healthcare situation in Gaza is dire. Only 14 of 36 Gaza hospitals are even partially functional and all these hospitals are facing critical shortages of drugs blood supply, and equipment, along with a lack of water and electricity.[66]

Assessment

Human development in Israel is high and improvements continue to be made. These high levels of human development are correlated to their strong economic performance in tech and health care. Additionally, healthcare and education spending has continued to be more than sufficient despite increasing military budgets due to security threats. The conflict has had some initial destabilizing human development impact within Israel. The indicators in Gaza were already poor before war broke out, but the situation is approaching a full-blown humanitarian crisis. Without more aid allowed in and any temporary pause in fighting, displacement, and food insecurity will continue. This will cause disease to spread due to overcrowded places. The health system in Gaza is not currently equipped to handle this burden which will cause many preventable deaths.

Environmental Stress — Level: Medium Risk — Trend: Declining

Water Management: Both Palestine and Israel, like other countries in the region, face many challenges when it comes to managing their water resources due to limited supply and increasing population. These significant challenges, which still cause many problems in neighboring countries have currently been solved. To meet its needs, Israel has been a world-leading innovator[67] in policies like desalination and the reuse of wastewater.

Waste and Pollution: Israel is attempting to be zero waste by 2050 but is currently experiencing rising waste levels due to growth in population and a lack of broad waste management policies.[68] Developing long-term and substantive policies to reduce waste and air pollution will be key to the future of Israel and the region.

Destabilizing Factors

Political Focus: The main environmental concern shared by analysts in both Israel and Palestine is that the two states are so concerned about their political security that they cannot plan for future environmental threats such as climate change and all the challenges that come with it.[69]

Both states have plans to reduce emissions but, in many ways, the success of the goals is correlated to the political conflicts between the two states.

Shared Resources Imbalance: As threats of climate change increase, tensions over the dwindling amount of already scarce resources will continue. The water shortage is huge for both states, but Israel currently controls the lion's share of the region's freshwater resources. Israel has, in recent years, exerted its leverage through the Gaza blockade to delay vital parts used for Gaza's water and sewage systems from getting in, causing reduced quality of drinking water and the release of more sewage into the Mediterranean Sea.[70]

Assessment

Elements of environmental stress exist in Israel and Palestine, although both are attempting to take steps to remedy it, and there are signs of success. Environmental stress is not a significant contributing factor to the conflict. The environmental tensions between Israel and Palestine underscore the current power imbalance between the two and could cause further tensions. The current conflict could certainly exacerbate environmental problems although these issues are generally put to the backburner during times of warfare when survival is paramount. Solving these issues long-term is critical for both states and could also be an opening for further cooperation between Israelis, Palestinians, and other neighboring partners.

International Linkages — Level: Medium Risk — Trend: Declining

Stabilizing Factors

Foreign Aid: Israel and Palestine both have a long history of receiving international aid, most notably from the United States, both military and economic. The previous economic aid was key to making Israel a regional economic power and they are now not dependent on international aid for financial purposes. Israel still depends on annual US military aid. $3.8 billion in US military aid is sent to Israel every year for purposes such as missile defense. This accounts for 16% of Israel's annual military budget.[71] The primary aid specifically for Palestinians comes via the UNRWA, which supports the relief and human development of Palestinian refugees and has a budget of over $1 billion a year. The budget primarily goes towards education, health care, and social services.[72] Due to the longstanding Israeli blockade of Gaza, many Palestinians in the occupied territories are reliant on the UNRWA. Some of this aid has been paused due to concerns of corruption and now recently due to allegations regarding employee involvement in the October 7 attacks. The two largest donors the US[73] and Germany[74] temporarily paused funding in early 2024 while they investigated the matter and praised the humanitarian impact of the agency.

Recent Normalization Processes: One of the most recent and significant diplomatic breakthroughs in the Middle East was the Abraham Accords, which normalized diplomatic ties between Israel, the UAE, Morocco, and Bahrain.[75] This has caused greater economic and

security cooperation between the countries, but the process was always designed with an ultimate grand bargain involving Saudi Arabia and potentially the Palestinian Authority.[76] Ensuring diplomatic efforts do not go cold in this process post-October 7 will be key to strengthening Israeli security.

Humanitarian Aid: Along with plenty of humanitarian aid promised by other countries, the US has recently announced it will establish an aid port in Gaza that will receive large shipments of humanitarian aid to prevent famine and stave off the worsening of already bleak conditions in Gaza.[77]

Destabilizing Factors

International/Regional Disputes: Faced with growing tensions due to the ongoing conflict, relations between neighboring states have been strained. A normalization process with Saudi Arabia was reportedly close pre-October 7 but has temporarily been put on hold. The current war in Gaza has led to condemnation as international groups and foreign leaders have accused Israel of indiscriminate killing and using a policy of collective guilt. A recent ICJ ruling on a case brought by South Africa, accusing Israel of genocide is controversial yet concerning.[78] Meanwhile, after much discussion over the sexual violence that was perpetrated against Israeli violence by Hamas terrorists on October 7, the UN released a report declaring there to be convincing evidence of sexual violence committed both on October 7 but also against the Israeli hostages held in Gaza since then.[79]

Assessment

Israel will continue to rely on maintaining strong ties with the United States, as well as other Western allies. However, they are becoming more and more isolated on the international stage due to their heavy-handed response. To allay these concerns and convince skeptical international organizations, it must do all it can to emphasize and prove that its current conflict is with Hamas, not the Palestinian people by encouraging and helping to facilitate humanitarian aid. It also should continue to seek diplomatic avenues to end the conflict, or the region will remain unstable. The Palestinian issue resonates in many pockets of the world. Maintaining strong ties to the Arab world will be important in negotiations for Palestine to receive more sovereignty in the future.

Possible Scenarios for the Next Year

Best Case Scenario

The best-case scenario is that Israel can effectively destroy Hamas and get the remaining hostages back alive while taking much greater pains to minimize further civilian losses in Gaza. This means Hamas would no longer control the Gaza Strip and remain a threat to Israeli security. It would also come with an understanding that the time for a Palestinian state is rapidly approaching. After the duration of heavy conflict is over, new Israeli elections could take place

that remove Prime Minister Netanyahu and his far-right coalition from power and insert a more moderate government ready to deal. A potential deal to officially terminate the war could be brokered with the help of other neighboring states and could include Saudi Arabia finally agreeing to recognize Israel in exchange for Israel agreeing to a state of Palestine in the future. The new state could be managed by a reformed PA that works closely with Israel to jointly manage certain resources and create a level of peace and security that the region has not seen for far too long if ever.

Worst Case Scenario

The worst-case scenario is the conflict enters a prolonged gray period in which Israel is incapable of completely dismantling Hamas and civilian casualties in Gaza remain extremely high. Additionally, the hostages would not be returned in this scenario. This scenario also runs the risk of destruction and devastation on a human level in Gaza as a significant portion of the population there is already displaced, and food security is an immediate concern. A prolonged conflict would be devastating for the people of Gaza and the long-term stability of the region. In this scenario, the failure of Israel to complete its military objectives would lead to less long-term security for them and likely a continued dip in both international support and perceived strength. A weakened Israel also heightens the possibility of other actors such as Hezbollah or even Iran entering the conflict which would be the worst-case scenario for Israel, the entire region, and the international community. While the chances of a broadened conflict are lower now than at the beginning of the war, there is still a chance that it could spread to another front. This scenario leaves Israel isolated on the global stage, leaves Gaza destroyed, and ensures the destructive ideology of Hamas remains embedded in the Arab world.

Most Likely Scenario

Given the current trends in the conflict and Israel's recent history in asymmetric warfare, there is a significant chance that the conflict will continue for quite some time before eventually stalling out. Temporary ceasefires could occur with exchanges of Israeli civilian hostages for Hamas prisoners taking place. The questions that define the next steps will be what Israel considers a success and what will happen to post-war Gaza. Destroying Hamas as both an entity and an ideology is incredibly difficult and unlikely. The war will likely begin to be scaled down but nearly the entire population of Gaza has already been internally displaced. International organizations and other actors will ensure as much humanitarian aid as possible gets in, but the situation on the ground will be catastrophic. The current Israeli government may work with other Arab states to manage Gaza for the foreseeable future but will resist efforts by the US and other states to begin discussions on a Palestinian state. Netanyahu could be defeated in the next elections, but it is unclear if the next government will have the political capital or will to try and negotiate a deal in the short term for a Palestinian state. Ultimately, as Israel begins to wind down its military operations in Gaza, the military stage of this conflict will be considered a failure, and pressure will turn to the political stage. If there is no prospect for a Palestinian state

along with poor treatment and conditions in Gaza, the security and stability of the region will remain a powder keg.

Endnotes

[1] "U.N. General Assembly Votes to Recognize Palestinian State - CBS News." 2012. www.cbsnews.com. November 30, 2012. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/un-general-assembly-votes-to-recognize-palestinian-state/.

[2] Bergman, Ronen, Mark Mazzetti, and Maria Abi-Habib. 2023. "How Years of Israeli Failures on Hamas Led to a Devastating Attack." The New York Times, October 29, 2023, sec. World. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/29/world/middleeast/israel-intelligence-hamas-attack.html.

[3] Review of World Report 2022: Israel and Palestine. 2022. Human Rights Watch.

[4] Amnesty International. 2022. "Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime against Humanity." Amnesty International. February 1, 2022. https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/?utm_source=annual_report&utm_medium=epub&utm_campaign=2021.

[5] "What Is Hamas?" n.d. Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-hamas#chapter-title-0-3.

[6] Yale Law School. 2019. "The Avalon Project: Hamas Covenant 1988." Yale.edu. 2019. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp.

[7] National Counterterrorism Center. 2022. "National Counterterrorism Center | FTOs." Www.dni.gov. September 2022. https://www.dni.gov/nctc/ftos/hamas_fto.html.

[8] Robinson, Kali. 2023. "What Is Hezbollah?" Council on Foreign Relations. October 14, 2023. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-hezbollah.

[9] Granitz, Peter. 2023. "Fighting with Israel Signals Coordination between Hamas and Hezbollah, Analysts Say." NPR. October 10, 2023. https://www.npr.org/2023/10/10/1204789074/israel-hamas-hezbollah-iran.

[10] IMEU. n.d. "Fact Sheet: The Palestinian Authority | IMEU." Imeu.org. https://imeu.org/article/fact-sheet-the-palestinian-authority.

[11] Jamal, Urooba. n.d. "The Beginning of the End? The Hypothetical Future of Palestinian Politics." Al Jazeera. Accessed November 29, 2023. https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/11/28/the-beginning-of-the-end-the-hypothetical-future-of-palestinian-politics.

[12] Knutson, Jacob. 2023. Review of What to Know about U.S. Aid to Israel. Axios, November 4, 2023.

[13] "Palestine Economy Portal." n.d. www.palestineeconomy.ps. https://www.palestineeconomy.ps/donors/en.

[14] Magid, Jacob. 2021. Review of US State Department Reiterates Commitment to Two-State Solution. The Times of Israel, August 31, 2021.

[15] Asrar, Shakeeb, and Mohammed Hussein. 2023. "How the US Has Used Its Veto Power at the UN in Support of Israel." Al Jazeera. October 26, 2023. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/26/how-the-us-has-used-its-veto-power-at-the-un-in-support-of-israel.

[16] Batrawy, Aya. 2023. "Freeing Hostages, Hosting Hamas: Qatar's Influence in Israel-Gaza War, Explained." NPR. November 2, 2023. https://www.npr.org/2023/11/02/1210110109/qatar-israel-gaza-hamas-war.

[17] Jeffery, Jack, and Madgy, Samy. 2023. "Why Egypt and Other Arab Countries Are Unwilling to Take in Palestinian Refugees from Gaza." AP News. October 18, 2023. https://apnews.com/article/palestinian-jordan-egypt-israel-refugee-502c06d004767d4b64848d878b66bd3d.

[18] Center for Preventive Action. 2024. "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." Global Conflict Tracker. Council on Foreign Relations. March 13, 2024. https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/israeli-palestinian-conflict.

[19] Schecter, Anna. 2024. "Inside the Effort to Create a Far-Reaching U.S.-Saudi-Israeli Pact to End the War." NBC News. January 18, 2024. https://www.nbcnews.com/investigations/effort-create-far-reaching-us-saudi-israeli-pact-end-war-rcna134396.

[20] United Nations. 2023. "DAY ONE: UN General Assembly Convenes Emergency Meeting on Gaza | UN News." News.un.org. October 26, 2023. https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142847.

[21] Tocci, Nathalie. 2023. "Europe's Chaotic Response to the Israel-Hamas War Reveals How Weak It Is – to Its Enemies' Delight." The Guardian, October 30, 2023, sec. Opinion. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/oct/30/europe-war-middle-east-conflict-israel-eu.

[22] Iran Action Group. 2020. Review of Outlaw Regime: A Chronicle of Iran's Destructive Activities. U.S. Department of State.

[23] Lane, Ashley. 2021. "Iran's Islamist Proxies in the Middle East | Wilson Center." Wilson Center. May 20, 2021. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/irans-islamist-proxies.

[24] Brandenburg, Rachel. 2010. "Iran and the Palestinians." Usip.org. 2010. https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-and-palestinians.

[25] "Amid Renewed Protests and Political Maneuvering, the Odds of Early Elections in Israel Are Rising." n.d. Middle East Institute. Accessed May 7, 2024. https://www.mei.edu/publications/amid-renewed-protests-and-political-maneuvering-odds-early-elections-israel-are-rising.

[26] "Meet the Knesset Member Who Revived the Two-State Solution." n.d. The New Republic. Accessed May 7, 2024. https://newrepublic.com/article/176867/meet-knesset-member-revived-two-state-solution.

[27] Hill, Fiona, and Kevin Huggard. 2024. "What Is Russia's Role in the Israel-Gaza Crisis?" Brookings. January 31, 2024. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-is-russias-role-in-the-israel-gaza-crisis/.

[28] IMEU. 2009. "Comparison of Military Strength of Israel and the Palestinians | IMEU." Imeu.org. January 5, 2009. https://imeu.org/article/comparison-of-millitary-strength-of-israel-and-the-palestinians.

[29] Kershner, Isabel, and Patrick Kingsley. 2023. "What's next for Israel's Judicial Overhaul?" The New York Times, September 12, 2023, sec. World. https://www.nytimes.com/article/israel-judicial-overhaul-vote.html.

[30] The New York Times. 2022. "Israel Election Exit Polls Show Netanyahu with Edge in Israel's Election," November 1, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/11/01/world/israel-election.

[31] "2023 Corruption Perceptions Index - Explore Israel's Results." 2024. Transparency.org. January 30, 2024. https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023/index/isr.

[32] "The Corruption and Autocracy Nexus: The Case of 'King Bibi.'" n.d. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-corruption-and-autocracy-nexus-the-case-of-king-bibi/.

[3333] Review of The State of Integrity and Combating Corruption in Palestine 2022. 2022. The Coalition for Accountability and Integrity (AMAN).

[34] Review of Global State of Democracy Initiative- Palestine. 2022.

[35] "ל הודעה תקשור ת." n.d. https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2023/424/11_23_424b.pdf.

[36] CIA. 2022. "Israel - the World Factbook." www.cia.gov. CIA. 2022. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/israel/.

[37] CIA. n.d. "Gaza Strip - the World Factbook." www.cia.gov. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/gaza-strip/.

[38] CIA.gov. 2015. Middle East and North Africa: Religious Affiliation by Country. Pdf.

[39] Starr, Kelsey Jo, and David Masci. 2016. "In Israel, Jews Are United by Homeland but Divided into Very Different Groups." Pew Research Center. March 8, 2016. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/03/08/in-israel-jews-are-united-by-homeland-but-divided-into-very-different-groups/.

[40] "West Bank - the World Factbook." n.d. Www.cia.gov. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/west-bank/.

[41] CIA. n.d. "Gaza Strip - the World Factbook." www.cia.gov. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/gaza-strip/.

[42] CIA. 2022. "Israel - the World Factbook." www.cia.gov. CIA. 2022. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/israel/.

[43] "Israeli Settler Population in West Bank Surpasses 500K." 2023. AP News. February 2, 2023. https://apnews.com/article/politics-israel-government-palestinian-territories-west-bank-e5660155117bf5d3a713efe45888b4d5.

[44] "West Bank - the World Factbook." n.d. Www.cia.gov. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/west-bank/.

[45] CIA. n.d. "Gaza Strip - the World Factbook." www.cia.gov. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/gaza-strip/.

[46] "Israel Population Density 1950-2024." n.d. Www.macrotrends.net. Accessed May 7, 2024. https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/ISR/israel/population-density.

[47] Moriarty, Dylan, and Bonnie Berkowitz. 2023. "Visualizing the Size of Gaza City Compared with U.S. Cities." Washington Post. October 17, 2023. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/10/17/gaza-size-population-comparison/.

[48] CIA. 2022. "Israel - the World Factbook." www.cia.gov. CIA. 2022. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/israel/.

[49] "OECD Family Database, Oe.cd/Fdb 1." n.d. Accessed May 7, 2024. https://www.oecd.org/els/family/SF_2_1_Fertility_rates.pdf#:~:text=Across%20almost%20all%20of%20the%20OECD%2C%20current%20fertility.

[50] CIA. 2022. "Israel - the World Factbook." www.cia.gov. CIA. 2022. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/israel/.

[51] "West Bank - the World Factbook." n.d. Www.cia.gov. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/west-bank/.

[52] CIA. n.d. "Gaza Strip - the World Factbook." www.cia.gov. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/gaza-strip/.

[53] 2019. Tradingeconomics.com. TRADING ECONOMICS. December 5, 2019. https://tradingeconomics.com/israel/inflation-cpi.

[54] "Palestine Inflation Rate | 1998-2020 Data | 2021-2022 Forecast | Calendar | Historical." n.d. Tradingeconomics.com. https://tradingeconomics.com/palestine/inflation-cpi.

[55] Ziady, Hanna. 2024. "Israel's Economy Slumps 19.4% in the Fourth Quarter as War Takes a Toll | CNN Business." CNN. February 19, 2024. https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/19/economy/israel-gdp-war-economy/index.html.

[56] "PCBS | PCBS&PMA: The Performance of the Palestinian Economy for 2023, and Economic Forecasts for 2024." n.d. Www.pcbs.gov.ps. Accessed May 7, 2024. https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=4672.

[57] CIA. 2022. "Israel - the World Factbook." www.cia.gov. CIA. 2022. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/israel/.

[58] "West Bank - the World Factbook." n.d. Www.cia.gov. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/west-bank/.

[59] CIA. n.d. "Gaza Strip - the World Factbook." www.cia.gov. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/gaza-strip/.

[60] CIA. 2022. "Israel - the World Factbook." www.cia.gov. CIA. 2022. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/israel/.

[61] "Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)." n.d. Accessed May 7, 2024. https://pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_WorldHealthDay2023e.pdf.

[62] CIA. 2022. "Israel - the World Factbook." www.cia.gov. CIA. 2022. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/israel/.

[63] CIA. n.d. "Gaza Strip - the World Factbook." www.cia.gov. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/gaza-strip/.

[64] OCHA. 2019. "United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory." Ochaopt.org. 2019. https://www.ochaopt.org/.

[65] "GAZA STRIP: Hostilities Leave the Entire Population Highly Food Insecure and at Risk of Famine | IPC - Integrated Food Security Phase Classification." n.d. Www.ipcinfo.org. https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/alerts-archive/issue-94/en/.

[66] "United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory | Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel - Reported Impact | Day 114." 2024. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory. January 29, 2024. https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-114.

[67] "Water in Crisis - Spotlight Israel, Palestine & Jordan." n.d. The Water Project. https://thewaterproject.org/water-crisis/water-in-crisis-israel-palestine-jordan.

[68] "Home." n.d. Www.oecd-Ilibrary.org. Accessed May 7, 2024. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/0175ae95-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/0175ae95-en#section-d1e1322-f1598b11ad.

[69] Baker, Aryn. 2023. "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Is a Looming Climate Crisis." Time. January 11, 2023. https://time.com/6242238/climate-change-israeli-palestinian-politics/.

[70] Hass, Amira. 2022. "Israel Holds up Vital Spare Parts for Gaza's Water and Sewage Systems." Haaretz, January 9, 2022, sec. Israel News. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-01-09/ty-article/.premium/israel-holds-up-vital-spare-parts-for-gazas-water-and-sewage-systems/0000017f-e7eb-d97e-a37f-f7efd5c50000.

[71] Narea, Nicole. 2023. "How the US Became Israel's Closest Ally." Vox. October 13, 2023. https://www.vox.com/world-politics/23916266/us-israel-support-ally-gaza-war-aid.

[72] "About Unrwa." 2013. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/documents/dplc/dv/about_unrwa-/about_unrwa-en.pdf#:~:text=Over%20time%2C%20UNRWA%20schools%20have%20built%20a%20reputation.

[73] "Statement on UNRWA Allegations." n.d. United States Department of State. https://www.state.gov/statement-on-unrwa-allegations/.

[74] Amt, Auswärtiges. n.d. "Joint Statement on UNRWA by the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development." German Federal Foreign Office. Accessed May 7, 2024. https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/-/2641762.

[75] US Department of State. 2020. "The Abraham Accords." United States Department of State. 2020. https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords/.

[76] "A Mixed Report Card: The Abraham Accords at Three." n.d. Middle East Institute. Accessed November 28, 2023. https://www.mei.edu/publications/mixed-report-card-abraham-accords-three.

[77] Williams, Michael. 2024. "Biden Directs US Military to Establish Aid Port in Gaza as Israel-Hamas War Looms over His State of the Union | CNN Politics." CNN. March 8, 2024. https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/07/politics/us-military-aid-port-gaza-biden/index.html.

[78] Www.bbc.com. 2024. "ICJ Says Israel Must Prevent Genocide in Gaza," January 26, 2024. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68108260.

[79] www.bbc.com. 2024. "UN Team Says Hamas Likely Carried out Sexual Violence in Israel on 7 October," March 4, 2024. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68474899.