



A Regional-Political Perspective on the Gaza Campaign

The Gaza campaign is not a local conflict. Although the fighting is confined to a specific geographic area, it risks spreading and turning into a regional campaign that involves the United States and its regional allies in shaping the war and its aftermath. Understanding the attitudes, interests, sensitivities and capabilities of each country in the region regarding the campaign, as well as the actions each is taking, is thus of great importance. Below is a compilation by Mitvim experts outlining the regional view of the Gaza campaign as it unfolds, summing up events of the third week and offering guiding principles for Israel's regional foreign policy. For a broader view of our experts' insights, we recommend Mitvim's series of [publications](#) on the regional-political perspective on the Gaza campaign.

Fourth week of the war

A Regional Perspective

Dr. Roe Kibrik, Director of Research, Mitvim

The fourth week of the war was characterized by the beginning of a significant IDF ground operation in the Gaza Strip and a commensurate increase in the number of Palestinian casualties. The scenes of death and destruction in Gaza further undermined public legitimacy for Israel's actions and generated increasing pressure on Middle Eastern and European leaders.

The countries of the region ramped up efforts to prevent a spillover of the Gaza campaign into other areas by working to achieve a ceasefire and deliver humanitarian aid into Gaza, while emphasizing the two-state solution as a future goal. These efforts were also reflected in a Nov. 4 meeting in Amman between the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as well as a representative of the Palestinian Authority and US Secretary of State Blinken.

In the meantime, Israel's military campaign remained focused on Gaza. Hezbollah leader Nasrallah stressed in his Nov. 3 speech that the war was "100% Palestinian", insisting his organization had known nothing about it in advance. However, rising tensions in the West Bank, ongoing Hezbollah attacks and Israeli retaliation along Israel's northern border, and the missiles and drones launched by the Houthis from Yemen at Israel, continue to threaten a spillover of the campaign to the entire region.

So far, Israel has chosen to sit out regional efforts to advance a political goal for the day after the war. Instead, it is focused on maintaining its independence to act against Hamas for as long as possible, while enjoying American political and military support for this

purpose. In the absence of Israeli willingness to advance a political solution to the Palestinian issue, Israel does not appear to even be considering a course of action that enlists the normalization countries and its veteran peace partners for joint action against Hamas and Iran.

An Egyptian Perspective

Prof. Elie Podeh, Board Member, Mitvim

Egypt continued its involvement in all diplomatic aspects of the war, seeking an end to the fighting, and promoting humanitarian aid to Gaza and hostage release negotiations.

Egypt initiated an international conference on Oct. 21 attended by some 12 prime ministers and foreign ministers from Western Europe and the Arab world, in an attempt to create an international consensus on ending the war and condemn Israeli suggestions to settle Gaza's Palestinian refugees in Sinai. However, due to disagreements among the participants over the wording of the final communique, the Egyptian government issued a statement calling, among other things, for an end to the war and warning of a humanitarian catastrophe. The announcement also called for long-term action to establish an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, with east Jerusalem as its capital. The Egyptian foreign minister also took part in a Nov. 4 conference in Amman aimed at achieving a ceasefire and increasing humanitarian aid. The event was attended by US Secretary of State Blinken, the foreign ministers of Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and the secretary general of the PLO.

Egypt was also deeply involved in increasing humanitarian aid to Gaza through the Rafah crossing. Deliveries only began on Oct. 21, after curbs were put in place to prevent them from reaching Hamas. Egyptian President a-Sisi is determined to demonstrate that his country is doing everything in its power, especially in coordination with the United States, to provide aid to the Palestinians in Gaza, while stressing that it will not accept them for resettlement in its territory. The refugee issue is highly sensitive and Israel should refrain from statements that imply such intent.

In the bilateral arena of Israeli-Egyptian relations, attention should also be paid to energy developments. A halt of production at the Tamar gas field due to the war reduced Israel's gas exports to Egypt by about 80%, exacerbating shortages there.

A US Perspective

Nadav Tamir, Board Member, Mitvim

Secretary of State Blinken landed in Israel on Nov. 3 for the third time since the war broke out on Oct. 7, bringing with him the somewhat newly appointed ambassador to Israel, Jack Lew. The United States continued to provide Israel with enormous political and security support, making a large leeway for Israel's decision-making. In return, the US demanded that Israel abide by international laws of war, increase humanitarian assistance to the Gaza civilians and strengthen the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

The flow of US assistance continued, with a significant portion of the 3,000 tons of combat equipment already delivered by airlift and sea. The House approved President Biden's request for \$14 billion in security aid for Israel, but the new House Speaker rejected some

\$60 million in aid for Ukraine that Biden piggy backed on the Israeli request. However, the Democratic majority in the Senate is expected to be able to restore aid to Ukraine and pass Biden's package.

Under US pressure, Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich released the Palestinian Authority's tax offset funds that he was holding back. The Americans now expect Netanyahu to support the two-state solution and promote measures toward that end vis-à-vis the West Bank. The administration expressed growing concern over the uptick of settlers' violence against Palestinians and the attempts by Smotrich and his political partners to weaken the PA.

The humanitarian crisis building up in Gaza, which has been generating pressure on Biden both domestically and from America's partners in Europe, led to the President's public call for a pause in the fighting, "in order to get the hostages out." At the request of the United States, Israel allowed more humanitarian supplies to enter the southern Gaza Strip this week.

Along with the desire to promote a lull in the fighting, The US put pressure on Netanyahu to define an "exit strategy" from the war. The Biden Administration has proposed handing control of Gaza to the Palestinian Authority after the war, with the support of a coalition of Arab countries. Blinken told the US Senate he was not sure the idea was feasible, but said it needed to be thoroughly examined and promoted.

The war will not only change the face of Gaza - the entire Middle East may need a new political map derived from its outcome. The United States will have a key role in laying out such a map and will seek widespread legitimacy. Its demonstrated support for Israel, its military and financial aid and Biden's political backing and personal solidarity with Israeli suffering are all a powerful lever that the US must use in order to put together an Arab coalition necessary for a temporary control of Gaza and for future political moves.

A Saudi Arabian Perspective

Shiri Fein-Grossman, Forum Dvorah

Saudi Arabia is a key player in the great power struggle that lies behind the campaign being waged in Gaza. The Saudi defense minister and full brother of Saudi Crown Prince Khaled bin Salman paid a quick visit to Washington this week, amid reports of renewed clashes between Saudi and Houthi forces that led to the deaths of four Saudi soldiers. On Oct. 25, Saudi Arabia reportedly intercepted a cruise missile launched by the Houthis at Israel. The Washington visit indicates growing Saudi concern about a regional war and the collapse of efforts to end the civil war in Yemen.

In a tweet after his meeting with National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, Khaled bin Salman stressed the need for "an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, protection of civilians, allowing humanitarian aid, and resuming the peace process." He also noted the Saudi effort to "end the crisis in Yemen and achieve peace." A press release published in the Saudi media reported that the defense minister and Sullivan spoke mainly about the relationship between their countries and the need to strengthen security cooperation. Israeli journalist Barak Ravid reported this week that the defense minister also conveyed his country's wish to continue normalization efforts with Israel.

It is important to stress that any deal between the Saudis and Americans stems first and foremost from Saudi Arabia's concerns about its security and the US's commitment to alleviate those concerns. In the wake of the murderous Hamas attack, The Saudis are clearly troubled not only about a spillover of the Gaza campaign into a regional war, but also about other terrorist organizations such as the Houthis studying the Hamas warfare doctrine and using it to attack Saudi Arabia and moderate Arab states. The United States, which is convinced that the normalization talks were among the main reasons for the Oct. 7 Hamas attack, understands that Saudi Arabia plays an important role in the struggle between the superpowers and is therefore trying to convey to the Iran-Russia-China axis that the attempt to sabotage a US-Saudi deal that includes normalization with Israel, will fail.

Hopefully, the magnitude of the Iranian threat through its proxies, headed by the Houthis who have returned to attack the Saudis, and Russia's support for Hamas, have generated sufficient concern in Saudi Arabia for it to signal to the US and the region that Iranian aspirations to drive a wedge between itself and Israel (and in fact between Saudi Arabia and the United States) have indeed failed.

Israel is at war and attention to political-strategic planning is low. Nonetheless, it must intensify such planning in order to achieve its military objectives and prepare the infrastructure to cope with additional arenas likely to develop as it continues to strike Hamas.

A European Perspective

Dr. Maya Sion-Tzidkiyahu, Director of the Israel–Europe Relations Program, Mitvim

The fourth week of the war saw a continued boost of the pro-Palestinian camp among EU countries. The official European Union position continued to back Israel's right to self-defense and condemn the criminal actions of Hamas. However, the EU also emphasized Israel's obligation to adhere to international law and amplified its criticism of civilian deaths in light of the terrible scenes in the Gaza Strip and the escalating humanitarian crisis.

The division in the European Union was reflected in the Oct. 27 UN General Assembly vote on a resolution calling for a ceasefire without condemning Hamas or mentioning the Oct. 7 atrocities. Eight EU countries voted in favor, including France and Spain; 15 countries abstained, including Germany, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Poland, the Nordic and Baltic states. Only four European countries backed Israel in opposing the resolution - Austria, the Czech Republic, Croatia and Hungary (the latter at odds with the EU on the issue of Russia anti-democratic policies).

The European Council, wrapping up the meeting of the heads of its 27 member states also issued a statement on Oct. 27 articulating Israel's right to defend itself, as well as strongly condemning the massacre perpetrated by Hamas and its use of civilians as human shields. The member states debated whether to call for a humanitarian ceasefire or humanitarian pause/s, while stressing the need to ensure the safety of civilians. Spain managed to insert a paragraph in the resolution offering EU help in reviving a political process based on the two-state solution, including convening an international peace conference soon. While lacking concrete content, this offer expressed a statement of intent.

Polls showed that European public opinion favored Israel's right to defend itself, and distinguished between Hamas and the Palestinians. For example, 65% in France said they support Israel's elimination of Hamas and 70% in Germany said Israel has the right to defend

itself. But the pro-Palestinian and partly pro-Hamas demonstrations in Europe also grew louder this week and overtook coverage of the opinion polls.

The German government adopted a series of unusual domestic measures prompted by the Israel-Gaza war. Chancellor Scholz emphasized Germany's commitment to Israel's security as being in Germany's national interest (a commitment that Angela Merkel introduced into the 2008 coalition agreements and has been maintained ever since). The government proposed denying citizenship to immigrants convicted of antisemitic remarks; the interior minister outlawed the Samidoun organization (linked to Islamic Jihad), and ordered its disbandment for disseminating antisemitic and anti-Israeli propaganda. Meanwhile, antisemitic incidents increased throughout Europe, including the markings of synagogues and Jewish centers in Germany and France.

An Iranian Perspective

Dr. Gil Murciano, CEO, Mitvim

Israel's attacks in Gaza continue to pose a dilemma for Iran: they can expand the conflict and lose strategic deterrence assets, or refrain from intervention and lose regional prestige, and possibly the trust of its proxies. Highlighting the problem, this week Hamas leaders criticized the limited support by the resistance network for their campaign against Israel. The Nov. 3 speech by Hezbollah's secretary general, along with statements by the leaders of Iran and Hamas, reinforced the impression that Iran and Hezbollah were not informed prior to the Oct. 7 attack and did not participate directly in its preparation.

In an attempt to deter Israel from its continued ground operation in Gaza and maintain its deterrence vis-à-vis the United States, Iran expressed readiness to expand the conflict against Israel along several fronts. Reflecting this multi-front approach, Iran used its Houthi allies for the first time to launch drone and cruise missiles at Israel - intercepted by US and Israeli forces - and its allied militias in Syria and Iraq against American bases. At the same time, Hezbollah continued its limited confrontation with Israel along the Lebanon border, while top Iranian officials met with representatives of resistance groups, among them the leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Iran also stepped up its political activity in the past week, possibly in an attempt to rope Turkey into a united axis against Israel and the United States. On Nov. 1, Iran's foreign minister met with President Erdogan in Turkey. At the same time, Iran's leaders stressed their desire for a role alongside Qatar and Turkey in Gaza hostage release negotiations.

A Jordanian Perspective

Former Knesset member Ksenia Svetlova, Policy Fellow, Mitvim

As the ground phase of Israel's military operation in Gaza expanded, so did concern in the Jordanian court about the spread of anti-Israel protests in Jordanian cities (following the massive protests over the mass-casualty Oct. 17 explosion at Gaza's al-Ahli al-Arabi hospital). Jordan continued its harsh condemnation of Israel, and recalled its ambassador on Oct. 31. The last time Jordan recalled its ambassador to Israel for consultations was in 2019, after Israel arrested two Jordanian citizens visiting their relatives in the Palestinian Authority, and before that, in 2015 amid tensions on the Temple Mount. Thus, while not unprecedented, this measure should be of great concern to policymakers in Jerusalem.

Given that Israel is unlikely to end its military operation to topple Hamas anytime soon, it must invest utmost efforts in preventing further violence, especially in Jerusalem. To that end, it must adhere strictly to the status quo at the city's holy sites, and prevent government hotheads from inflaming tensions, which could prompt rioting in Jerusalem and the West Bank and further erode relations with the Hashemite Kingdom.

A Turkish Perspective

Dr. Nimrod Goren, President of Mitvim and Senior Fellow for Israeli Affairs at the Middle East Institute

In the fourth week of the war, Turkey continued distancing itself from the relatively balanced approach it had adopted immediately after Oct. 7 (when it expressed a desire to mediate in hostage release negotiations and when a conversation between Erdogan and Herzog took place). Instead, it voiced support for Hamas. On the eve of Turkey's 100th anniversary, addressing crowds in Istanbul, Erdogan intensified his criticism of Israel, and of the West as a whole for its backing of Israel.

Turkey's concern for the fate of the Palestinian people is sincere and widespread, including among the secular opposition, explaining its harsh response to the pictures emerging from the Gaza Strip. Nonetheless, Erdogan's statement that Hamas is not a terror organization is controversial at home. Erdogan has maintained a close relationship with Hamas over the years, as reflected in the invitation of its leaders to visit Turkey after the 2006 Palestinian elections. However, many in Turkey were unhappy with this approach at the time, and dissatisfaction with this relationship continues today.

Erdogan's recent statements have prompted yet another crisis in Israel-Turkey relations. This has happened in previous escalations in Gaza, as well. On the formal level, however, Erdogan has not downgraded relations with Israel. He did announce the cancellation of planned visits to Israel, by him and the minister of energy. Turkey understands that despite its desire for cooperation with Israel on natural gas (which Israel was skeptical about even before October 7th), this will not happen under the current circumstances. After nearly a month since the outbreak of the war, Erdogan recalled Turkey's ambassador from Tel Aviv. However, he did not formally downgrade ties, and acknowledged that relations with Israel cannot be cut, and that his intelligence chief is holding talks with both Israelis and Palestinians. In Israel, Foreign Minister Cohen announced the recall of diplomats from Turkey for a reassessment of relations.

Israel has a vested national security, political and economic interest in maintaining functioning embassies in regional countries. The establishment of ties, including the rapprochement with Turkey, was achieved at considerable effort. At the same time, it should not ignore troubling statements by its neighbors, including Turkey, and is obliged to present its truth and condemn those who deny that Hamas is a terror organization. Ties with Turkey should be maintained, in a way that balances appropriate responses to Erdogan's verbal attacks with efforts to sustain the delicate fabric of bilateral relations (that have continued since 1949). This task should be entrusted to Israel's career diplomats. They were the ones who successfully led the restoration of relations with Turkey under the Bennett-Lapid government, and they must be trusted to continue their task, even as a new foreign minister is set to take office in Jerusalem within the next couple of months.

A Hellenic Alliance Perspective

Former Ambassador Michael Harari, Policy Fellow, Mitvim

The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip has been the focus of Cypriot political activity in recent days, in close coordination with Greece. The idea of opening a naval corridor from Cyprus for supplies to the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip, raised several times in the past, is gaining momentum. A senior Cypriot official said the proposal is backed by many EU countries, including France, Ireland, Spain and the Netherlands. The Cypriot foreign minister has held talks on the issue with his Jordanian and Palestinian counterparts, and according to the official, Arab countries are also on board. The details and timing of such a move are not yet clear, depending on the conditions on the ground, but the Cypriot official said Netanyahu did not object to the idea in his conversation with the Cypriot president last week.

Cyprus is also preparing for a possible wave of refugees/migrants, expanding the absorption camp currently operating on the island. Last weekend (on Oct. 28), 200 refugees from Lebanon reportedly arrived there by sea.

At the same time, opposition parties in both countries criticized the governments' policies on the war in Gaza and their total support for Israel. At a parliamentary debate, the Syriza party criticized Greece's abstention in the UN General Assembly vote on a Gaza ceasefire, and the Greek prime minister's failure to meet with Mahmoud Abbas during his last visit to Israel. The opposition in Cyprus, i.e., the Communist Party, strongly criticized the government's policy, and also criticized the Cypriot abstention in the UN vote. The party spokesman called the events in the Gaza Strip a "genocide" perpetrated by Israel.

Greece has begun to wonder, for the time being only as expressed by pundits, whether Turkey's unequivocal backing of Hamas and harsh criticism of the United States will also affect Athens-Ankara relations.

A Lebanese Perspective

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Since the outbreak of the conflict between Israel and Hamas on Oct. 7, the Israeli-Lebanese border has become an active conflict arena drawing considerable attention in Israel and generating great concern among both officials and civil society. In the fourth week of the Israel-Hamas war, Hezbollah continued to repeatedly challenge Israel, calling the shots in terms of the level of violence. It has allowed Palestinian elements, headed by the Hamas branch in Lebanon, to act against Israel, and taken an active part in the confrontation. This activity consists mainly of launching rockets, mortar shells and UAVs, along with repeated attempts to fire anti-tank missiles. Despite Israel's concern about facing an additional front, Hezbollah seems to continue operating within the set rules of the game, the essence of which is to limit its activity and direct it against military targets, in order to avoid a dangerous escalation into an all-out war. Beyond Hezbollah's fear of an expanded conflict, it is also frustrated with the failure of its anti-tank squads to penetrate Israel's defenses. These weapons were supposed to exact a heavy price from Israel, but the casualties on the Israeli side have been limited, compared with at least 60 dead on the Hezbollah side.

The reactions within Lebanon mostly express strong opposition to involvement in a war against Israel, and are shared by government officials and civil society alike. A poll

conducted by the Hezbollah-affiliated Al-Akhbar newspaper found a solid majority (68%) opposed to launching a front with Israel on the Lebanon border. These figures were even higher among non-Shiite respondents. Lebanon, mired in a severe economic-political crisis, seems to understand that its plunge into the conflict at this time risks unprecedented devastation. Lebanese Information Minister Ziad Al-Makary claimed in an interview that his government does not want war, and Prime Minister Najib Mikati also stated that he is investing great efforts to prevent a war between Hezbollah and Israel. Mikati even presented a three-stage peace plan to end the war in Gaza, but the decision whether to drag Lebanon into war is clearly not up to its government.

There is also strong opposition among civilian elements to Lebanon joining the war, as expressed on social networks. The hashtag #LebanonAgainstWar is trending strongly in recent weeks, as is a petition signed by nearly 10,000 Lebanese with an unequivocal demand "not to be dragged into another cycle of destruction and bloodshed that could cause unbearable damage to all Lebanese."

Hezbollah hears these voices, which intensify the dilemmas it faces in normal times. Firstly, between serving as a proxy of Iran and being a Lebanese organization vested in the country's success; and secondly, between being a resistance movement operating as part of a broad axis committed to exporting the revolution and liberating Palestine, and being the "defender of Lebanon." Hassan Nasrallah's Nov. 3 speech indicated that domestic Lebanese considerations currently prevail over others. Beyond understanding the disastrous effects of a large-scale confrontation on the organization and Lebanon, Hezbollah also ponders what it would achieve by such a confrontation, given Israel's readiness and high alert and the massing of US forces in the Mediterranean, which is of concern to both Beirut and Tehran.

Nasrallah seeks to present himself as a wise, sophisticated and rational leader - an image that would be at odds with any argument he could present to the Lebanese public favoring a destructive war. On the other hand, his commitment to the resistance axis does not allow him to sit on the fence, either. At this stage, Hezbollah will likely make do with its harassment of Israel along the border, but escalation stemming from developments in the Gaza fighting, or a mistaken consideration on the part of either side along the northern border, cannot be ruled out.