



## **A Regional-Political Perspective on the Gaza Campaign**

### ***100 Days of War***

**The Gaza campaign is not a local conflict. The fighting is taking place in a confined geographical area, but it has ignited additional conflicts in the region, and the United States and regional powers involve in shaping the war and will be so in shaping its aftermath. Understanding the attitudes, interests, sensitivities and capabilities of each country in the region vis-a-vis 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 first 100 days 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](#) outlining the regional-political perspective on the Gaza campaign.**

### **A Regional Perspective**

*Dr. Roei Kibrik, Director of Research, Mitvim*

After nearly three months of an intense offensive, Israel changed the nature of its fighting in Gaza, shifting from extensive ground maneuvers to slower, more surgical operations in accordance with international demands to protect non-combatants. The shift also corresponded with growing international impatience with the war and calls for efforts to stabilize the region, even amid growing realization that such a goal was a long way off.

The Biden administration vented its impatience with the Israeli government's steadfast refusal to discuss the "day after" the war, its continued undermining of the Palestinian Authority and failure to rein in settler violence in the West Bank, and the belief that it was not doing enough to free the abductees held by Hamas due to political considerations. Secretary Blinken and White House officials made no secret of their dissatisfaction.

The declining intensity of the fighting in Gaza shifted attention to the intensifying exchange of blows between Israel and Hezbollah along the Lebanon border. Despite the escalation, both sides attempted to adhere to levels of violence falling short of all-out war. The United States, in cooperation with France, continued diplomatic efforts to implement UNSC Resolution 1701 that would push Hezbollah forces north of the Litani River.

The violence in the Red Sea arena, initially an expression of Houthi commitment to stand with Hamas in its fight against Israel, has gradually become a separate regional and global struggle disconnected from Gaza. While developments in this arena affect Israel, the struggle against the Houthis is being led by the United States and is taking shape in the context of the regional and global campaign against Iran, as well as in the context of other

regional conflicts, such as the one developing in the Horn of Africa between Ethiopia and Somalia.

Yet, another Gaza related arena has opened in The Hague at the International Court of Justice, where Israel faces charges of genocide brought by South Africa. Israel is also facing other international legal challenges relating to the nature of its occupation of Palestinian territories and violations of international law. The legal arena has thus become an additional tool in the hands of the regional and international community to bring an end to the war and promote a political process.

## **A US Perspective**

*Nadav Tamir, J Street, Mitvim Board Member*

Ahead of his fifth visit to Israel and the region (4-11.1), Secretary of State Blinken set out three goals: preventing the spread of the conflict, increasing humanitarian aid to Gaza's Palestinians, and discussing "the day after" the war. In Ankara, Blinken said Turkey could play a useful role in post-war Gaza by preventing the conflict from spreading. During his visit to Israel, he reiterated that the United States opposes the relocation of Gaza residents away from the strip, as urged by some Israeli politicians, and called for increased humanitarian assistance to Gaza. He also called on Israel to take measures to facilitate the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank, and transfer Palestinian tax revenues it is holding to the Palestinian Authority. Blinken also urged countries in the region to use their ties with relevant parties to prevent further escalation. He described the lawsuit against Israel in The Hague as baseless and a distraction from efforts to promote peace and security in the region.

According to various reports, the visit was more confrontational than previous ones in terms of disagreements with the Netanyahu government, especially on the regional level. The United States sees Oct. 7 not only as a disaster for Israel, but as a tectonic turning point in the structure of the Middle East. The United States is trying to formulate an "axis of stability" under its leadership with the participation of Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Blinken stressed during his visit that regional stability is a supreme US interest that rests on the future establishment of a Palestinian state.

US and UK fighter jets, naval vessels and submarines attacked dozens of Houthi targets in Yemen with the support of Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands. Biden threatened that he would not hesitate to order further measures to protect Americans and international maritime trade.

Regarding Israel-Hezbollah fighting, Blinken said the United States, as well as the Israeli government, prefers a diplomatic solution, but the efforts of US envoy Amos Hochstein have so far not borne any fruit.

## **An Egyptian Perspective**

*Prof. Elie Podeh, Hebrew University, Mitvim Board Member*

The Gaza war presents Israel-Egypt relations with serious challenges. The first of these is Egypt's concern about the influx of Palestinians from Gaza to Sinai through the Egyptian

border. The second is the question of humanitarian aid passing from Egypt to Gaza through the Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings. The third, which has arisen in recent days, is control of the Philadelphi Route – a 14-kilometer-long road that forms the border between Egypt and Gaza.

Prospects of thousands of Palestinians pouring into Sinai is of deep concern to Egypt's leadership, which keeps voicing vehement opposition to the idea. Even the Chinese foreign minister, who visited Egypt on January 14, was mobilized to express his condemnation of such a move. Irresponsible and unnecessary statements by Israeli officials have fuelled Egyptian suspicions about the existence of a secret Israeli plan to expel Palestinians from Gaza. Three issues underlie Egypt's concerns in this context: fear of Hamas terrorists entering their territory under civilian guise; ideas for annexing Egyptian territory to Gaza following the exodus of its Palestinian residents; and Arab accusations that by doing so, Egypt is actually helping Israel to obliterate the Palestinian problem.

The second issue is humanitarian aid to Gaza. The Egyptian media frequently reports on the number of trucks and the quantity of equipment transported daily into the Gaza Strip, in order to demonstrate Egypt's sincere dedication to the Palestinian cause. However, the media reacts harshly to implied Israeli criticism of Egypt for hampering and delaying the passage of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Finally, the issue of the Philadelphi Route control surfaced in recent days after Netanyahu declared that the road "must be in our hands." The route was evacuated by Israel as part of its disengagement from Gaza in 2005. It was a controversial decision made, to a large extent, by Defense Minister Mofaz without consulting the military. Israel's decision to vacate the road took Egypt by surprise, eventually leading to an amendment of the peace treaty that allowed Egypt to deploy 750 border police personnel (rather than the 650 policemen permitted under the 1979 peace agreement) to guard the border along the Philadelphi route.

After Hamas took over Gaza in the summer of 2007, smuggling increased through the tunnels built under the route. Israel complained to the Egyptians and provided concrete information about the smuggling, but the Egyptians did not rush to act. Israel therefore appealed to the United States to exert pressure, but the problem was not resolved satisfactorily. In one Wikileaks document, Shin Bet chief Diskin is quoted as prophesizing in 2008 that sooner or later Israel would have to invade Gaza to dismantle Hamas's terrorist capabilities, take over the southern part of the Gaza Strip and put an end to the smuggling.

In fact, it took three Israeli military operations against Hamas (Cast Lead, 2009; Pillar of Defense, 2012; and Protective Edge, 2014) for President Sisi to seriously address the tunnel threat. But the measures failed to seal off the passages hermetically, as evidenced by the quantity of Hamas weapons and ammunition discovered by Israeli forces during the war.

Israel's discovery of the extent of Hamas tunnels along hundreds of kilometres under Gaza troubles Egypt and would likely spur its cooperation with Israel in preventing smuggling. Various sources report that behind-the-scenes talks on the matter are underway between Israel, Egypt and the United States. The main problem, however, lies in the fact that Egypt's government cannot afford to be portrayed as having withdrawn from Philadelphi or conceded to Israel, especially after Israel ceded control of the route in a 2005 agreement. One Egyptian parliamentarian has already slammed Netanyahu's remarks as a "blatant attack on the peace agreement." Both Israel and Egypt have a strategic interest in peace. The two states, as the Wikileaks document stated back in 2009, "have a common enemy:

Hamas." Despite hostile public opinion towards Israel and occasional inflammatory political statements, Sisi has led a moderate and sober policy vis-à-vis Israel, even refraining from recalling his ambassador from Israel, unlike Egypt's reaction during the 1982 Lebanon War and the 2000-2004 Intifada. Israel must therefore be attentive to Egyptian sensitivities, avoid inflammatory statements and resolve the issue of Philadelphi Route control in agreement, behind closed doors, with Egypt and the United States.

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## **A European Perspective**

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

The 100th day of the war saw a deepening of the split within the European Union (EU) over the Israel-Hamas fighting. The split prevents a required consensus within the EU on amending its official policy on the war, leaving in place the initial decisions adopted after the Oct. 7 massacre. But the EU is also struggling to make new decisions about its own interests, such as launching a naval operation against the Houthis to combat trade disruptions that make shipping by sea more expensive for Europe and the region. While unity among the 27 member states allowed the EU to take strong action against Russia in favor of Ukraine, the split over the Israel-Gaza war paralyzes the EU and makes it a slow and ineffectual actor, at best, and irrelevant at worst.

In a speech in Lisbon (3.1), EU Foreign Minister Josep Borrell called for international intervention in the war and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, saying the parties would not be able to reach agreement on their own. According to Borrell, peace will be sustainable if the international community, led by the United States, Europe and pragmatic Arab countries intervenes intensively to impose a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the outside. Borrell joined the strong American condemnation of remarks by hardline ministers Smotrich and Ben-Gvir on encouraging Palestinian emigration from the Gaza Strip, describing them as "inflammatory and irresponsible statements." "We were clear, consistent and unequivocal when we said that Gaza is Palestinian land and will remain Palestinian land even when Hamas no longer controls it. This is the future we are looking for, for the benefit of Israelis and Palestinians, the surrounding region and the world," Borrell said. Following the Arouri assassination (2.1), he warned of escalation and expressed concern that the entire Middle East could go up in flames. Borrell visited Lebanon and Saudi Arabia (9-10.1) to promote a political arrangement in Lebanon that would prevent escalation and advance his political vision.

Germany announced (12.1) that it would join Israel's case against South Africa's petition to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, rejecting the "baseless" accusations of genocide by Israel, opposing the politicization of the international convention against genocide and saying Hamas is the one striving to eliminate Israel. Italy, Britain, Austria, the Czech Republic and Hungary also expressed opposition to South Africa's accusations. So far, no EU country has joined South Africa's side. Ireland's prime minister expressed his hope that the ICJ would order Israel to cease fighting in Gaza but rejected calls to join South Africa's petition, the Belgian prime minister expressed support for such a move, but her government did not discuss the matter, and the Spanish government declined to join South Africa despite an appeal by 250 lawyers to the government to do so. This split explains why EU foreign policy spokesman Peter Stano said the EU had no position on the issue.

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German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock arrived in Israel (8.1) for her fourth visit since 7.10, assuring her hosts of her country's support against Hamas, but urging Israel to do more to protect civilians in Gaza. She also visited Lebanon to discuss implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (Hezbollah's withdrawal north of the Litani). The German government granted 200 export licenses for armaments, air defense and communications equipment to Israel, 10 times the number it issued last year. France continued to straddle the fence, expressing deep concern about Israel's plan to intensify the fighting in Gaza, and called on Israel to take concrete steps to protect the lives of the civilian population there. It also joined calls to urgently facilitate full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza. At the same time, France called for the release of all the abductees (three of them French citizens) and expressed a desire to achieve a ceasefire. In a conversation with Netanyahu, Macron called for all necessary steps to stop "settler violence and stop any settlement project in the West Bank." After Arouri was assassinated, Macron called on Israel (2.1) to avoid escalation, especially in Lebanon. David Cameron, Britain's Foreign Secretary, wrote an op-ed published in Haaretz (12.1) and The Guardian calling for additional humanitarian pauses to allow more aid to enter Gaza to prevent hunger, without stopping the war against Hamas until a permanent solution is achieved assuring Israel's security.

The numerous threats of jihadist terrorism ahead of the holidays raised the level of vigilance across the continent and a Hamas network was exposed in several countries (Denmark, Germany and Holland) planning terrorist attacks on European soil. The threat of terrorism and war, as well as fear of additional immigration from the Middle East to Europe, are turning some voters toward the extreme right. Polls reflect growing concern that the European Parliament elections scheduled for June will reflect this sentiment. A rise of the far-right and/or populists in the European Parliament will negatively influence the European integration process.

A Spanish veto (28.12) overrode the EU decision to join the American mission in the Red Sea against the Houthis. Spain initially voted to expand the mission. However, Foreign Minister Yolanda Diaz from the left-wing Sumar party explained the reversal by arguing that Western protection of business interests would be hypocritical without support for a ceasefire in Gaza. Given the Spanish veto at EU level, it remained for member states to act bilaterally. Six European countries (Germany, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, and the non-EU UK) joined a White House statement (3.1) calling for an immediate end to the illegal Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and warning of future consequences. However, only the UK participated in the attack (12.1) launched by the US against the Houthis. A proposal to form an EU force of three warships to help protect Red Sea navigation will be raised at the next EU foreign ministers' meeting, but its adoption would require a unanimous decision by the 27 members (while abstentions do not sink a resolution, a "nay" vote by even one foreign minister is enough to overrule it).

### **A Jordanian Perspective**

*Prof. Ronen Yitzhak, Western Galilee Academic College*

Jordan's leadership, including King Abdullah, Prime Minister Bisher al-Khasouna, and Foreign Minister Ayman Al-Safadi kept up consistent efforts to bring about an end to the war in Gaza. Abdullah met in Cairo with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in late December to discuss the war and the humanitarian crisis. They declared that a decision was needed to increase aid and agreed to oppose "the expulsion of Palestinians from their territories".

The two leaders have met several times since the start of the war, coordinating positions and expressing opposition to the expulsion of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip for fear that it would undermine political stability in their countries. Jordan hosted Mahmoud Abbas (10.1) for what Arab media described as the “Aqaba Summit”, which was intended to demonstrate support for the Palestinian Authority leader and present a united Arab front against the ongoing war in Gaza. In addition to calling for the cessation of hostilities and increased humanitarian aid, the participants called for the resumption of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians on the basis of the two-state solution. Jordanian commentators assessed that the remarks were intended for American ears in order to pressure Israel and obtain a commitment to renew the Middle East peace initiative at the end of the war.

Indeed, the need to jumpstart the Middle East peace process came up in a conversation Abdullah had with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Amman (7.1), expressing concern about the continuing war and its "catastrophic" consequences unless it ended immediately. The monarch reiterated that the two-state vision is the only solution that can guarantee peace and stability in the region.

Jordan supported South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. Khasouna explained that not only does Jordan support the prosecution, as do the other Arab League members, but it would also provide the evidence needed to convict Israel of genocide. "We have the honor to do our part and provide our knowledge and experience in service to the Palestinian people," Khasouna declared. It should be noted that the Jordanian House of Representatives encouraged the government's decision to support South Africa's claim. Al-Safadi has claimed several times that Jordan is collecting evidence of Israel's crimes in Gaza and will present it when the time comes. Jordan's support for the lawsuit does not appear intended to harm Israel, but rather a measure that Jordan sees fit to use in order to end the war.

King Abdullah received a phone call (11.1) from UN Secretary-General Guterres. The two discussed the role of international organizations in the war in Gaza and the need to mobilize them for increased humanitarian assistance to the residents. King Abdullah urged Guterres to demand the return of Palestinians to their homes and provide them with humanitarian assistance as required. Jordan, for its part, has taken in dozens of cancer patients for treatment. It has also raised money for the Palestinians through media campaigns and continued to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza. A Jordanian Air Force plane delivered (10.1) food and medicine to Egypt, from where it was transported into Gaza.

The damage caused by the war is beginning to take its toll in Jordan. The World Bank has warned in recent days that the continuation of the war will adversely affect the Jordanian economy in general and the tourism industry, in particular. State revenues from the tourism industry account for about 16% of Jordan's GDP. According to Jordanian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Makram al-Qasi, the impact of the war on Jordanian tourism is already being felt, with a clear decline in the number of visitors to tourist sites in Petra and Mount Nebo and a commensurate drop in hotel and restaurant activity throughout Jordan. Jordanian attempts to encourage domestic tourism (as it did during the coronavirus period) by lowering hotel prices have not succeeded for the time being in light of Jordanian identification with the Palestinians and desire to remain near the sites of anti-war demonstrations.

Economic concerns also appear to explain Khasouna's rejection of trade union requests to hold a general strike in solidarity with the Palestinian cause, warning that it would "harm livelihoods and worsen people's economic situation." The cost of such a strike is estimated at tens of millions of dollars a day – a high sum in terms of the Jordanian economy.

### **An Iranian Perspective**

*Dr. Gil Murciano, CEO Mitvim*

Iran has increased its level of direct and indirect friction (with operational support/guidance from its supporters/satellites) vis-à-vis Israel and the West in recent weeks. Key in this context is the missile attack launched by Iran against what the Iranian claimed to be a Mossad headquarters in Iraqi Kurdistan. In addition, Iran increased its military involvement in the maritime arena where it believes it can exert geopolitical influence through the IRGC. Iran apparently provides operational-intelligence support for increased Houthi attacks on maritime traffic heading to Israel. At the same time, the Iranian navy forcibly retook control of an oil tanker previously confiscated by the US Navy in the Gulf of Oman. The growing friction is also evident in increased attacks by pro-Iranian militias against American targets in Iraq and Syria. Iran has also authorized increased Hezbollah attacks on Israel from Lebanon, and the activity (so far limited) of pro-Iranian militias from Syria.

The heightened friction along the Lebanon border is also the result of increased Israeli retaliations to Iranian actions, including Israeli and American assassinations last month of prominent commanders in Iran's resistance axis, among them senior officers in the IRGC's Quds Force in Syria, senior Hamas figure Salah al-Arouri in Beirut and a senior commander of Iraq's pro-Iranian militias. These killings, compounded by the ISIS attack during the annual memorial for Soleimani, have provoked anger and a sense that Iran must project strength vis-à-vis its enemies. The assassination of senior Quds Force figures in Syria, in particular, triggered internal pressure from hawks in Tehran for a harsher Iranian response against Israel. In this sense, the Houthi attacks allow Iran to appear as it is striking back at the Israeli enemy without drastically escalating the current tense situation. Iran therefore supports these attacks despite risking damage in the international level.

The basic motivations of Iran on the one hand, and of Israel and the West on the other, have not changed, and neither side seeks all-out war. However, events have their own dynamics, and the risk of regional escalation is increasing. International involvement in the direct friction with Iran and its proxies is also growing and is expected to pose broad dilemmas for Iran. In this context, Iran risks a clash of interests with its partners in China and Russia over the attacks by its Houthi allies against maritime trade (the UN Security Council resolution condemning the attacks did not trigger a Chinese or Russian veto).

### **A Gulf Perspective – Qatar and the UAE**

*Dr. Moran Zaga, Research and Policy Fellow, Mitvim*

On the 100th day of the war, there is little doubt that **Qatar** is the most influential Gulf state in critical aspects of the war, particularly concerning the issue of hostages and the management and transfer of aid and messages. In the first months of the war, Qatar mainly hosted diplomats and intelligence personnel for hostage talks. However, on

January 5, 2024, it also opened its doors to six hostages' families, achieving several significant milestones: a diplomatic achievement in echoing its messages for the success of the negotiations through engagement with the families themselves, a public perception achievement in eroding the ambivalence of those who see Qatar as part of the problem rather than the solution, and a status achievement in stabilizing Qatar for visits by foreign officials, security personnel and, now, also civilians. Under an agreement Qatar negotiated in recent days with Hamas, and in collaboration with France, medicines are now being transferred to the Israeli hostages in Gaza. By doing so, Qatar seeks to bolster its image as a country capable of delivering tangible solutions on the ground, distinguishing itself from actors who have proven unable to do so, such as the Red Cross. Qatar's actions also demonstrate a commitment to the humanitarian aspects of the war for all sides.

Recently, there have been increasing reports of Amos Hochstein's involvement as an American mediator in the region. Hochstein, renowned for his important role as a mediator in negotiations over the maritime border between Israel and Lebanon, came to the region in order to find a diplomatic solution to the escalation on Israel's northern front. Hochstein's connections and capabilities in negotiating the maritime border in 2021 extend to Qatar and Qatari influence in Lebanon. It is plausible that these ties could contribute to fostering a peaceful solution with the aim of pushing Hezbollah beyond the Litani River. However, Israel's stance on the matter is not yet clear.

Qatar's importance is becoming clearer as Israel struggles to find military solutions for Gaza and its northern front. Qatar has carefully cultivated this position over many years, taking advantage of the regional dynamic in which Saudi Arabia was excluded from day-to-day diplomatic processes in the Palestinian arena, and the UAE maintained a distance from the leadership of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. After proving its ability as a mediator in the hostage release negotiations, and navigating a subsequent stalemate in the talks, Qatar is now, once again, at the center of diplomacy.

**The UAE's** role in the war has primarily manifested in placing the issue on the international agenda as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. In this context, the UAE attempted to find concrete and workable solutions, such as the successfully-passed Resolution 2712, which promoted increased humanitarian aid to Gaza. With the end of its UNSC membership, it remains to be seen which diplomatic levers the UAE will now use to influence the war and its outcome. In the first two weeks of 2024, the UAE was preoccupied with domestic affairs, mainly government reorganization and ministerial changes, while its actions and statements on the war were limited. The UAE continues to strengthen ties with neighboring Qatar, which may indicate a trend of cooperation in the future, given Qatar's dominant influence in Gaza.

## **A Red Sea Perspective**

*Dr. Moshe Terdiman, Guest Research Fellow, Mitvim*

The past three weeks have been marked by a further escalation in Houthi attacks against Red Sea shipping, mainly by ballistic and cruise missiles, drones and, for the first time, explosive boats. On Dec. 26, the US Central Command reported that the destroyer *Lavon* and the F/A-18 aircraft carrier *Eisenhower* shot down 12 drones, three anti-ship ballistic missiles, and two cruise missiles launched by the Houthis in the southern Red Sea within ten hours. In some cases, the Houthis even approached merchant ships in small boats and tried to board them. On Dec. 31, the Houthis attacked a vessel of the shipping giant *Maersk* with four boats and tried to board it. American helicopters responded to the ship's



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distress calls and Houthi forces opened fire on them. The helicopters returned fire, sinking three of the four boats and killing the crews, while the fourth boat managed to escape. In response, Houthi Shura Council member Abdeslam Jahap said that "the price of Yemeni blood is high and that American aggression means a declaration of war." Indeed, the US and UK navies intercepted 21 Houthi missiles and drones launched from Yemen (9.1). Two days later, the Houthis increased their range of operations to the Gulf of Aden and fired a ballistic missile at a merchant ship. So far, the Houthis have attacked about 30 merchant vessels.

This escalation prompted US measures against the Houthis. On Dec. 28, the Treasury Department imposed sanctions on the head of the Sana'a Money Exchange Association and three money exchange houses in Yemen and Türkiye involved in transferring Iranian funds to the Houthis and financing their operations, including attacks on vessels. Then, on the night of Jan. 11-12, the Americans and British attacked Houthi targets in Yemen twice. In the first wave, they attacked 60 targets, and in the second wave, they attacked 12 additional ones, mainly in the cities of Hodeida, Sana'a, Parade and Ta'iz, using more than 100 precision missiles fired from fighter planes, warships and submarines. The Houthis said five fighters were killed and six wounded in the strikes. In this context, it is important to note that the airstrikes were carried out after the Americans informed the Houthis and Iran of their intention. As a result, the Houthis evacuated all the sites they thought would be attacked, and Iran ordered the Iranian intelligence ship Behshad, which was in the southern Red Sea, to return home. On the night of Jan. 12-13, a US warship launched Tomahawk missiles at a Houthi radar site in Yemen, prompting an American and British response (14.1) in the Hodeida area.

Arab and Gulf states have refrained from publicly supporting the US and British airstrikes although Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Egypt have allowed the warplanes to pass through their airspace. Oman announced that it would ban such overflights.

Major shipping companies, such as Danish shipping giant Maersk and German shipping company Hapag-Lloyd have stopped sailing in the Red Sea. As a result, according to Suez Canal Authority Chair Osama Rabia, profits from the passage of ships through the Suez Canal would drop 40% from the beginning of January 2024 compared to the same period last year. Since Jan. 1, 544 ships have crossed the Suez Canal, compared to 777 during the same period last year.

Many companies have also raised their shipping rates from the east as a result of Houthi attacks and the need to circumnavigate the African continent. The Israeli shipping company ZIM announced (4.1) a doubling in the price of a container from the East. Shipping giant MSC, one of the two largest companies in the world, announced an increase in prices to Israel from about \$3,500 for a 20-foot container and about \$6,000 for a 40-foot container to about \$5,000 and \$7,000, respectively. Other companies hiked shipping prices of goods from Asia to northern Europe to about \$4,000 and the Mediterranean to \$5,175 and even over \$6,000.

The Houthi attacks have also forced some companies to suspend operations, damaging supply chains. Tesla and Volvo have plan to suspend some vehicle production in Europe due to material shortages caused by supply chain damage.

Merchant ships that have decided to continue sailing through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the southern Red Sea announce in advance that they have no connection to Israel or, alternatively, that they have no connection to China. In this context, it should be noted that

the Chinese state-owned shipping giant Cusco, the fourth largest company in the container market, announced that it is ceasing to visit Israeli ports.

At the same time, there has also been an escalation in the western Indian Ocean. The Indian Navy deployed guided missile-carrying destroyers in the Arabian Sea following an Iranian-launched drone that hit the partially Israeli-owned merchant ship Chem Pluto off the coast of India (23.12). A week later (31.12), the government of India announced that the navy had increased monitoring activities in the central and northern Arabian Sea through the deployment of task forces including destroyers, frigates and air surveillance. The Indian Navy rushed to the aid of the Liberia-flagged MV Lila Norfolk (4.1), which was hijacked off the coast of Somalia. The Iranian army seized the tanker St. Nikolas (11.1) flying under a Marshall Islands flag while sailing in the Gulf of Oman. It should be noted that the vessel was taken over by US forces a few months ago because it was transporting Iranian oil.

## **A Turkish Perspective**

*Dr. Nimrod Goren, Founder and President Mitvim, Diplomeds*

Turkey's involvement in the Gaza war has been reflected in recent weeks in continued harsh criticism of Israel, an attempt to play a role in international planning of the "day after" the war, and fleshing out its proposal for a "guarantor states" model to promote Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Turkey has maintained the stand it adopted at the outset of the war, condemning Israel and refusing to recognize Hamas as a terrorist organization. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan argued that Israel should be punished for its actions in Gaza, which he defined as a violation of international law. He called Israel a "terror state" and compared Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Hitler. Subsequently, Turkey expressed support for the case South Africa brought against Israel at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, prompting strong backlash from Israel's new Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz. "We have not forgotten the Armenian Holocaust and the massacres of the Kurds," he said in remarks directed at Erdoğan. "You are the ones who committed genocide."

Turkey said it had arrested a network of alleged Mossad spies accused of operating on its soil, in a move Erdoğan described as a first step against Israel on the intelligence level. In the wake of Al-Aroui's assassination in Beirut, some in Turkey argued that Israel would not have dared conduct such an assassination on Turkish soil despite its threat to assassinate Hamas leaders wherever they were found.

Turkey's hostility towards Israel was also reflected in the Turkish Foreign Ministry's denial of a reported increase in Israeli-Turkish trade during the war and claims that most of Turkey's exports to Israel were intended to benefit the Palestinians, both those in the Palestinian Authority and those who are Israeli citizens. This coincided with calls in Israel to boycott Turkish products.

The brief arrest of Israeli football player Sagiv Jehezkel over a gesture of solidarity he made with Israeli abductees in Gaza during a game he played for a Turkish team highlighted the wide gap between the countries and provoked harsh statements by Ministers Yoav Gallant and Amichai Shikli against Erdoğan and Turkey.

Turkey, which was not perceived as a significant player in the early stages of the war, is also trying to assume a role in political moves concerning the future of the Gaza Strip. US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken included a stop in Ankara on his early January trip to the region, declaring that Turkey is among the countries of the region who are ready to consider contributing to the planning for post-war realities, along with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates.

Meanwhile, the Turkish Foreign Ministry was attempting to flesh out the proposal Ankara put forward in the first days of the war regarding a model of states that will serve as guarantors of Israeli-Palestinian agreements and thus promote an end to the conflict. The proposal, which has so far attracted no international attention and does not seem realistic, was the focus of two policy papers published by the Turkish Foreign Ministry's Center for Strategic Research (SAM) in December 2023 and January 2024.

### **An Iraqi Perspective**

*Dr. Ronen Zeidel, Research Fellow Dayan Center, Mitvim*

The Shiite militias, the government, and the Iraqi public (including Sunnis and Kurds) each have distinct positions on Gaza and the war.

The group pushing most strongly for involvement in the war are the pro-Iranian Shi'ite militias, especially the Kataeb Hezbollah and Nujabaa militias under the umbrella of a body known as the Islamic Resistance in Iraq. Since Oct. 7, they have resumed missile and drone attacks on military bases where American advisers are deployed in Iraq and eastern Syria. Since December, they also claim to have launched attacks on Israel, but this has not always been verified. At the beginning of the war, there was talk of sending fighters to Israel's northern front in Lebanon and Syria, but this has not yet been implemented, apparently due to the refusal of the countries bordering Israel – Jordan and Syria – to the passage and stay of the Iraqis in their territory (Iraqi militia fighters are already in Syria). The American response to the militia attacks has been painful at times. A senior commander of the Nujabaa militia was recently assassinated. However, this has not deterred the militias' continued attacks, and recent announcement that they would respond to any Israeli and American attacks against their allies in Yemen and Lebanon.

The Iraqi government (Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al-Sudani) finds itself in a bind. On the one hand, its general tendency is pro-Iranian and the militias exert strong pressure on it. On the other hand, some in government disapprove of the militias and are reluctant to anger the United States or turn Iraq into a battlefield once again. Thus, the government tries to prevent the militia launches but does not always succeed. It condemns US responses to such attacks and raises anew the "need" to discuss the continued presence of 2500 American military advisers on Iraqi soil, even though the government is not interested in their departure.

Iraqi public opinion demonstrates solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza and their suffering. A mass demonstration in solidarity with the Gazans was organized at the start of the war by Muqtada al-Sadr's movement. Since then, however, there have been no demonstrations, and identification with the Palestinians is mainly limited to social networks. Public opinion strongly disapproves of the militias and Iran, and is very concerned about the war spilling over into Iraqi soil. Iraqis are also concerned that the United States will

take economic punitive measures against their country that could create severe inflationary pressures.

The Sunnis and Kurds find themselves in a weak position vis-à-vis the militias and the government in Baghdad, and is therefore keen to maintain the American presence that protects them against ISIS, and especially against the militias and Iran. It should be noted that the targeted US bases are located in Sunni and Kurdish areas (the al-Assad airbase in western Iraq and Harir base near the Erbil airport), and thus threaten the residents there.

Nevertheless, the Americans are the only ones in Iraq capable of preventing launches and stopping the militias. While the nature of the new phase of the war promised by the militias is unclear, they are very likely to continue attacking American targets in Iraq in order to accelerate their departure.

### **A Hellenic Alliance Perspective**

*Former Ambassador Michael Harari, Policy Fellow, Mitvim*

On the 100th day of the war, the two countries continued to emphasize the need to ensure the supply of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, as well as the need for negotiations and a political agreement to resolve the Palestinian problem. The Greek foreign minister visited Riyadh last week, and in an interview with Al-Arabiya (11.1) again condemned acts of violence and terrorism. He called for the immediate release of the abductees and stressed the importance of bolstering the Palestinian Authority and imbuing it with greater legitimacy. He also announced plans to visit Jordan and Egypt in the coming days, as well as to host the Palestinian foreign minister in Athens. He also mentioned that he had spoken by phone with newly installed Israeli Foreign Minister Katz. At the same time, US Secretary of State Blinken visited Crete as part of his visit to the region and met with Prime Minister Mitsotakis.

As expected, the attack (11.1) by British jet fighters taking off from their bases in Cyprus against Houthi targets drew criticism from the Communist Party and peace organizations. As is well known, the British bases are under British sovereignty, and the British government is not obligated to consult with the government in Nicosia prior to its operations. President Christodoulides responded to the criticism by saying he could not go into too much detail for reasons of "national security," but that the government was working hard to "safeguard Cyprus' interests."