

Peace Through Strength – Israel’s Version: Abandoning Diplomacy for a Military-Only Strategy

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*“President Trump and I often say: peace through strength – first
comes strength then comes peace”
PM Benjamin [Netanyahu](#), 22/06/2025*

The massacre of October 7th and the ensuing military campaigns in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran did not merely reshape the Middle Eastern political landscape — they also redefined Israel’s role within it. Nearly two years after that dreadful day, Israel has consolidated its status as a regional military power capable of shaping political reality through force. At the same time, however, these events have underscored Israel’s acute paralysis in the political-diplomatic arena. The current hawkish right-wing leadership has been unwilling to offer acceptable plans or constructive steps to resolve the conflicts it is engaged in, resulting in a failure to translate temporary military achievements into viable political change.

Far beyond a missed opportunity, the pursuit of a “decisive victory” in Gaza has given the extreme right in Israel’s government a platform to advance a destructive and immoral agenda of annexation and forced displacement. The quest for an illusive, undefined victory over Hamas has fuelled further military escalation, while the government refuses to discuss viable political alternatives to Hamas’ rule. This approach has left Israel in a growing strategic, moral and diplomatic overstretch—one that deepens as the devastating war in Gaza drags on.

The aftermath of October 7 ended Israel’s decade-long “conflict management” approach — a strategy of passivity and avoidance of long-term solutions to national security threats, notably including the buildup of Hamas and Hezbollah. This failure of initiative is widely seen in Israel as a core factor leading to the October 7th disaster. To remedy past mistakes, Israel has adopted a proactive approach aimed not at containing threats but “decapitating” them — eliminating sources of danger and their leaders. This shift has defined Israel’s military campaigns against Hezbollah, Iran, and Hamas in Gaza.

Yet this proactive approach remains almost entirely military. There is virtually no parallel political or diplomatic initiative to complement or justify these military operations. Beyond ties with the Trump administration, the Netanyahu–Smotrich government offers very little on the diplomatic front; its core extreme positions preclude meaningful political engagement. Reviewing Israel’s recent decision-making highlights the stark imbalance between short-term military-centric policy and near-total political-diplomatic inertia.

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Peace through Strength: the convergence of military and political considerations

As we mark two years since the October 7th massacre, Israel's policy toward its adversaries, potential partners, and uneasy allies appears driven by three main factors:

1. Short-term military imperatives: Israel is focused on confronting immediate security threats, a response to the trauma of October 7th and the public's need to regain the feeling of tangible security by pre-empting emerging dangers.
2. Netanyahu's political survival: Domestically, the prime minister pursues two interconnected goals: delivering a military victory over Hamas—a visible and undeniable defeat—and preserving his fragile coalition. This requires placating far-right partners like Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir by rejecting any move that could legitimize the Palestinian Authority, opposing an end to the war in Gaza, and supporting annexationist ambitions in Gaza and the West Bank.
3. A two-level game with President Trump: While Netanyahu seeks to leverage close ties with the Trump administration to shape U.S. Middle East policy, its relations with his close ally are not always harmonious. Israel's recent intervention in Syria (July 2025) and its refusal to pursue an end to the war in Gaza have clashed with Trump's efforts to advance his own policy goals in the region. Netanyahu's domestic political constraints, alongside his reluctance or inability to propose constructive measures, are poised to exacerbate strategic friction with Washington.

The convergence of these three factors has given rise to a new Israeli strategic mindset — articulated even more bluntly since the military campaign in Iran — a doctrine of **peace through strength**.

First [articulated](#) by U.S. President Ronald Reagan and later fully [embraced](#) by President Trump, the concept of "Peace through Strength" reflects a realpolitik belief that projecting military power can deter aggression and preserve peace. After October 7th, Israeli decision-makers appear to have adopted a far more radical version — one assuming that military force alone can reshape political reality, rendering diplomacy marginal or even irrelevant. This doctrine now underpins Israeli policy across three strategic arenas: the war in Gaza; its approach toward Iran, Syria, and Lebanon; and efforts to advance normalization with the Arab World.

Peace Through Strength: Israel's Campaign Against Iran and Its Allies

Israel's military campaigns in Lebanon, Syria, and Iran — the product of two decades of meticulous planning — have become regional game-changers. Hezbollah's collapse, once considered the Middle East's [second-strongest army](#), triggered the downfall of the Assad regime and unraveled Iran's network of allies and proxies, painstakingly built over two decades. This removal of Iran's deterrence architecture paved the way for Israel's strike on Tehran's nuclear program six months later. While it remains uncertain whether Israel achieved its goal of significantly delaying Iran's nuclear ambitions, the operations cemented its status as a regional military power — showcasing its ability to hit Iran's core infrastructure with precision, dominate its airspace, coordinate closely with the U.S., and deter retaliation from Tehran's proxies.

However, while Israel managed to weaken its enemies, it lacked the initiative to translate these military gains into political agreements or even informal security arrangements. Rather than leveraging battlefield success to foster long-term stability or end hostilities, Israel has largely ignored the diplomatic track. The lack of initiative is reflected by Israeli policies in Syria and Lebanon in the aftermath of the military campaigns. Instead of treating diplomacy as "war by other means," Israel

has focused solely on “operational maintenance” - preserving operational achievements through continued military measures.

A central element of this approach is the creation of buffer zones inside Syrian and Lebanese territory near the former armistice lines. These incursions aim to prevent another October 7th-style attack by keeping hostile forces away from the border through demilitarized zones. Yet their broader strategic purpose remains undefined. Without a clear vision, such zones risk becoming new flashpoints, offering Hezbollah, pro-Iranian militias, or Daesh affiliates a pretext to reignite conflict under the banner of resisting occupation.

Israel's policy has focused on neutralizing immediate threats rather than shaping the deeper political dynamics that produce them. In Lebanon, it has been missing the opening created by the new Aoun-Salam government's willingness to challenge Hezbollah's right to maintain an armed force. Rather than bolstering this government's legitimacy—such as through tactical concessions toward a land-demarcation deal—Israel has concentrated on eliminating Hezbollah operatives currently rebuilding the group's depleted capabilities.

In Syria, Israel responded to A-Sharaa's march on Damascus with large-scale strikes on Syrian military and non-conventional assets—logical given the uncertainties surrounding the former HTS regime. Yet these operations were followed by no coherent political initiative. Discussion in Israeli strategic circles about the desired future political landscape in Syria—particularly regarding minority autonomy and post-war governance—has been almost absent. This vacuum has fuelled misunderstandings, exemplified by clashes over protecting the Druze minority that culminated in Israel bombing Syria's Defense Ministry (July 2025). Rather than using this moment of regional transformation to define long-term arrangements with former enemies, Israel remains fixated on reacting to short-term military threats.

The perception that military strength can substitute for diplomacy in achieving strategic goals carries even sharper implications for regional security in the case of Iran. The joint Israeli-U.S. campaign against Iran has not been followed by diplomatic efforts to establish mutually agreed limits on Iran's nuclear program. Israel itself has yet to articulate clear conditions for such negotiations, and some within its leadership still [entertain](#) regime change in Iran as a policy objective. Instead, Israeli thinking rests on the belief that Iran has been militarily deterred from rebuilding what it lost. As a result, Iran and Israel remain locked in a perilous “ceasefire without rules.” Regional and international actors fear that if Iran attempts to reconstruct its nuclear facilities, Israel could respond with renewed strikes inside Iran—risking another cycle of escalation.

The Politics of ‘Decisive Victory’: Peace Through Strength in Gaza

In Lebanon, Syria, or Iran, Israel's military-first approach stems largely from narrow operational thinking — or at times, outright hubris. In Gaza, however, the embrace of “peace through strength” is driven by deeper political and ideological factors. Central to the government's strategy is the pursuit of an elusive “decisive victory” (*Hanitzachon Hamuchlat*) over Hamas. Yet Israeli decision-makers have never defined what such a victory would entail. As the war has dragged on — marked by military setbacks, a worsening humanitarian crisis, and growing public pressure to end the fighting — the notion of “decisive victory” has shifted from a vague strategic objective, once presented alongside goals such as securing the return of Israeli hostages, into little more than a slogan. It now serves chiefly to justify the war's continuation and the escalation of IDF tactics.

By setting the objective of forcing Hamas to capitulate through military means alone, Israel has locked itself into an ever-escalating cycle of tactics in Gaza — including measures that openly breach international law. These include the large-scale destruction of residential areas and severe restrictions on humanitarian aid, which Hamas has repeatedly intercepted and exploited to strengthen its control over the population. While wielding unprecedented military force, the Israeli government has refused to discuss promoting a Palestinian political alternative to Hamas, let alone involving the PA in Gaza's political future. Netanyahu's insistence on avoiding what he calls "[replacing Hamastan with Fatahstan](#)" has pushed Israel to the extreme of backing questionable [local Palestinian militias](#) to challenge Hamas' control.

Clinging to the goal of "decisive victory" unites Netanyahu and the extreme right wing of his government, though each is driven by different motives—the former domestic-political, the latter ideological-messianic. Nevertheless, their shared strategic goal at the current phase remains — the continuation of the Gaza war.

For Smotrich and the settler movement, the motivation is ideological. They see October 7th as a "[great miracle](#)" enabling their messianic agenda of Gaza resettlement and annexation. Aligning with Trump's plan to rebuild Gaza without its population, Smotrich pushed to turn the immoral and illegal idea of "encouraging" Palestinian forced displacement into official policy, backed by a newly founded "[Voluntary Migration Authority](#)." He has devoted his term to preparing the ground—both practically and conceptually—for annexing these territories and erasing any chance for a two-state solution. For Netanyahu, continuing the war is essential for political survival. This is the main reason for his preference for a temporary ceasefire over an all-out deal. His political lifeline depends on remedying the October 7th failure through military victories. Ending the war would expose the failure of his "decisive victory" approach and shift public focus to the lethal flaws of his decade-long Hamas policy. More so, ending the war through an agreement with Hamas would likely end the Netanyahu-Smotrich coalition and trigger new elections.

Currently, the main obstacle to Smotrich's plan is international reaction, particularly the US's uncertain willingness to curb some of his moves in Gaza. However, the Trump Administration's ambivalent stance on [annexation](#) and forced displacement, combined with Netanyahu's reliance on Smotrich to maintain the coalition, gives Smotrich an effective platform to push his extreme agenda for Gaza.

Normalization through Strength: Israeli post-Iran war regional outlook

In the aftermath of the Iran campaign, a growing sense has emerged among Israeli leaders that military victories over Hezbollah and Iran will push Arab states toward normalization and accelerate Israel's regional integration. This belief is captured by Smotrich's [remark](#): "We live in a neighborhood where everyone flees the weak and sides with the strong."

Yet this concept—"normalization through strength"—confuses deterrence with the building of long-term relations. It overestimates the appeal of military might while ignoring the deep motivations that have historically led Arab states to normalize relations with Israel. Many in Israel assumed a shared top-priority: containing Iran. In reality, Gulf calculations are far more complex. Their oil infrastructure and shipping lanes remain perpetually vulnerable to Iranian attack, regardless of Tehran's strength. These states cannot afford to be drawn into a zero-sum confrontation between Israel and Iran. For years, they pursued a strategy of risk-hedging—deepening ties with Israel while maintaining cautious

relations with Iran. The recent escalation shattered that delicate balance. Israel's strike on Iran brought the region to the brink of full-scale war, even raising the prospect of closing the Strait of Hormuz. In the Gulf's eyes, Israel now appears volatile and unpredictable.

For the Gulf, normalization serves two core goals: stabilizing the region and strengthening ties with Washington. Normalization with Israel has often been a diplomatic bridge to the U.S., particularly for Saudi Arabia, which linked normalization to a possible defense pact.

In this relation, from Gulf capitals, Israel's record looks mixed. Its victory over Hezbollah is seen as a major achievement that reshaped Lebanon and Syria, curbed drug smuggling from Syria to the region, and rolled back Iranian influence—creating a new, more advantageous reality for Gulf countries' involvement. By contrast, the confrontation with Iran appears only the beginning. Gulf leaders fear Israel may apply its “mowing the lawn” doctrine—recurring military strikes aimed at limiting Iran's rebuilding—turning the Gulf into a permanent conflict arena.

The Iran campaign also brought U.S.–Israel military cooperation to an unprecedented level, marking their first joint strike on a sovereign state. This boosts Israel's appeal as a U.S. partner, but Washington's direct outreach to Gulf monarchies has reduced Israel's unique role as their diplomatic bridge. Israel has lost its exclusivity as the gateway to Washington.

Crucially, the Gaza war has driven normalization's political costs sharply upward. Public hostility toward Israel is high, and Gulf leaders see no credible Israeli exit strategy or willingness to engage politically. Without progress on the Palestinian issue, normalization risks stalling entirely—and Israel's image as a destabilizing and dangerous regional actor continues to deepen.

Summary

“Peace through strength” was meant to mark a profound shift — a break from the paralysis and missed opportunities of the decade preceding October 7th. Yet less than two years later, the dangers of grounding Israeli strategy solely in military might are evident on every front.

In normalization efforts, Israel's power paradoxically undermines diplomacy: Arab states may acknowledge its strength, but they also see it as destabilizing — radioactive in political terms. In Syria and Lebanon, the absence of follow-up diplomacy has squandered a rare chance to transform former enemies into potential partners. And in Gaza, the obsessive pursuit of a “decisive victory” has become the pretext for a horrific and aimless war — one that jeopardizes Israel's moral legitimacy and the very possibility of resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Never has the choice between diplomacy and militarism been so stark — or so consequential — for Israel's long-term security and resilience. The nation now stands at a crossroads: between a potential diplomatic breakthrough — ending the war in Gaza, forging internationally backed limits on Iran's nuclear program, and advancing normalization with the Arab world — or a messianic march into a spartan future, condemned to live by the sword and on the sword.

As the dominant doctrine of Israeli strategy since October 7th, “peace through strength” has evolved from a security approach into a political shield for prolonging the Gaza war. Its embrace by the extreme right reveals how seamlessly it serves not only their policy framework, but also their ideological ambitions. A change in course, therefore, will require more than a policy adjustment — it will demand new leadership.