

Israel's long wars - bracing for civilizational conflict in the Mideast

written by David M. Weinberg | 14.01.2026

Israelis snicker a bit when US President Donald Trump declares with self-congratulatory assurance that peace in the Middle East has been achieved after 3,000 years of conflict.

They know, alas, that Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis have not been sufficiently defanged or deterred. They know that would-be hegemonies in the region like Turkey, Qatar, and Iran are driven to conflict by long-term ideological goals and are in fact fighting a civilizational war against America, the Western world, and Israel.

But Trump does not do ideology. He holds an exceptionally transactional approach to political and foreign affairs – thinking that money, dealmaking, and the force of his personality can fix things and lead to swift peace everywhere. He prefers not to see the civilizational battles ahead.

Israel is appreciative of Trump's dealmaking and is willing to partner with him to some extent – such as his buttering-up of the new Syrian president Ahmed al-Sharaa (aka, Mohammed Al-Jolani) – in order to peel Syria away, perhaps, from Russia and Iran.

But because Israel doubts that Sharaa is a reliable partner, it must also be prepared for renewed conflict. (Jihadis with deep roots in Al-Qaeda like Sharaa do not vacate their eliminationist beliefs very often or so suddenly.)

After the October 7, 2023, assault on Israel by Hamas, Israel cannot brook illusions about the dawn of regional peace, nor can it return to the “containment” policies of recent decades that prioritized diplomacy over decisive military triumphs against jihadist adversaries.

Israel can no longer accept policies that emphasize “quiet for quiet” and prioritize “restraint” because this allowed enemies to develop attack capabilities under the

cover of diplomatic breathing time; what some Western officials mistakenly call periods of “stability.”

That approach failed. It blew up in Israel’s face, with terror and invasion from the West Bank and Gaza and from Syria and Lebanon, and with the march of Iran’s nuclear bomb program to near completion.

Therefore, Israel is gearing up for extended conflict at varying degrees of intensity, basing itself on a more aggressive mix of diplomacy and the use of force to scuttle enemy threats. Israel intends to act like a superpower, proactively asserting dominance along its borders and strategic ascendancy against threats farther away.

To this end, the Israeli government last month approved its largest-ever military budget –about US\$35 billion for 2026 – with US\$100 billion in direct military expenditures expected over the coming decade, alongside other investments in advanced military technology and indigenous weapons production capacity.

A superpower mindset takes shape

In this regard, expect Israel to continue to make fierce, overwhelming, and surprise strikes against enemy assets and strongholds from Khan Yunis to Isfahan. It needs to keep its enemies off base with pager blasts and bunker-busting airstrikes.

Israel wants to be feared, militarily dominant, and even “hegemonic” – not loved. Jerusalem knows that its neighbours will seek true reconciliation only when Israel is strong.

In short, Israel intends to project its strength to definitively neutralize adversaries, and in so doing to lead the region – to gather a coalition of truly peace-seeking nations. Israel intends to “stabilize” the region but not through reliance on hackneyed diplomatic templates and failed formulas that ooze weakness. More Abraham Accords-style peace treaties (even with Saudi Arabia) are possible and desirable, but these will be based on strength and clear strategic thinking.

Again, all this is based on a clear strategic prism that stems from a realistic perspective on the region. Israelis and their leaders – all leaders, from current

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to opposition leaders like former prime ministers Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid – understand that the algorithms by which the worst actors in the Middle East operate are ideological, attritional, and genocidal. They are not accommodational or transactional. The jihadists are informed by violent eschatological visions of crushing victory over Israel that have not ebbed.

For example, Israelis understand that beyond whatever security accords might be possible with the new regime in Syria and the Aoun government in Lebanon, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) itself must and will continue to regularly interdict threats to Israel over the borders with these countries. Israel will not sit back for a decade or two, merely gathering intelligence on emerging threats until they reach monstrous proportions (as Israel unfortunately did versus Hezbollah for three decades, and Hamas for two).

It means that to some extent Israel will intervene on behalf of the non-jihadist Druze community in Syria, which holds a zone of strategic importance in the southeast of that country along Israel's northern border. Israel will not wait for American mediators to calm the situation or rely on UN peacekeepers to protect the Druze and secure the border.

The same goes for Judea and Samaria. Nobody is under the illusion that any Palestinian "authority" can or will counteract the build-up of Iranian-backed Islamic terrorist armies in these areas that directly threaten Jerusalem and central Israel. Only the IDF can and will. Thus, brigade-level Israeli military operations in places like Jenin, Tulkarm, and Nablus will continue to resolutely root out such threats. This is likely to be a permanent feature of Israeli policy.

Why Israel will not outsource its security

On the Palestinian front, it is important to note that Israel has no confidence whatsoever in the ability of Canada, the EU, or the US to substantially reform the Palestinian Authority to make it into a "democratic, transparent, efficient, and sustainable governance system" – as the "international community" keeps pattering on.

Thirty years and billions of dollars and euros later, the return on Western investment in Palestinian independence is abysmal. There is no democracy, no rule of law, no transparency, no sustainability, no investment in economic

stability, and no peace education in the Palestinian Authority (PA). There are only nepotism and corruption, “pay-for-slay” handouts (meaning the incentivizing and rewarding of terrorism against Israel), violent propagandizing against Israel (including support for Hamas’s October 7 invasion and massacres), and diplomatic assaults on Israel in every possible international forum.

And not one single new hospital in the West Bank has been built with those Canadian, European, and American funds. Only one sewage treatment plant. Not a single refugee has been resettled.

As for Western “security assistance” to the PA, well, over US\$1 billion in training and equipment for PA security forces (including over US\$40 million in 2025) and hundreds of millions of dollars and euros in Canadian and European funds – has produced mixed results, at best. PA security personnel have repeatedly participated in or facilitated terror attacks against Israeli civilians and IDF soldiers. PA security personnel account for 12 per cent of all Palestinian terrorists held by Israel.

This explains why it is so nonsensical of France, Canada, and others to resuscitate delusions of Palestinian statehood, specifically now. This is a recipe for devastating disappointment and escalated conflict; and of course, for the isolation of Israel.

Alas, that may be the entire point of the French-led exercise to “recognize” faux Palestinian statehood. The point is to weaken Israel, to prevent it from growing too strong, too “hegemonic” in its ambitions, too “aggressive” in its military actions, too “dominant” in resetting the regional strategic situation. Too successful in defending itself, including the prevention of runaway Palestinian statehood.

According to President Emmanuel Macron of France, Israel must not be allowed to win so much – especially after its game-changing, successful strike on Iran’s nuclear bomb program. Instead, Israel needs to be constrained, hemmed-in, humbled, and dictated to. “No discussion!” he declared regarding “the need to urgently recognize” Palestinian statehood. It “must” happen, Macron declared – over the protests, and if necessary, over the dead bodies of Israelis.

The situation regarding Gaza is similar. Israel still intends to thoroughly end the military threat from Gaza. This means that beyond whatever temporary truce has

been blessedly reached, mainly to secure the release of Israeli hostages held savagely by Hamas, there are no long-term accommodations with that terror movement. It must be rooted out from Gaza.

Certainly, there must not be any reconstruction of Gaza without complete demilitarization of the enclave, which may mean years of additional warfare at varying degrees of intensity.

Do not expect Israel to rely on Egypt or any other Arab/Muslim state to bring security or stability to Gaza. For years, Egypt turned a blind eye to the massive smuggling of weapons from the Egyptian-controlled Sinai Peninsula into Gaza, and of course it did nothing to stop Hamas from staging a coup against the Fatah-controlled PA and making Gaza into a Muslim Brotherhood mini-state. Nor will Israel abide a “technocratic” Palestinian government in Gaza that is but a flimsy cover for de facto Hamas rule.

The long war’s defining front

The Israeli superpower mindset applies, of course, to Iran. Iran must be prevented from rebuilding its nuclear bomb and ballistic missile programs and be deterred from rebuilding its network of proxy armies across the Middle East.

Any attempt at a cosmetic boondoggle with Iran, say another insubstantial P5+1 nuclear accord with the ayatollahs, will force Israel to again act against Tehran. The same goes for a situation in which Iran rebuilds its ballistic missile array. (The IAEA recently warned that Iran is rapidly doing exactly this, apparently with Chinese-supplied materials.) Israel will apply its updated defence doctrine, its regional superpower prism, of preventively downgrading enemy capabilities and preempting enemy threats.

In short, Israel intends to soldier on and maintain its upper hand. Israelis understand the long-term ideological and civilizational nature of the battles ahead. They gird themselves for these battles with the superpower mindset described here, intending to be a proactive regional power – the only true Western ally – reshaping the Middle East for the better.

Get used to a revamped Mideast strategic situation anchored by a very strong Israel.

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