



Israel's War with Hamas Brings Consequences for NATO

Wojciech Lorenz

Israel's war with Hamas has increased terrorist threats to NATO members. Although some allies are ready to provide political and practical assistance to Israel, the Alliance itself will not engage in the fight against Hamas. Its role will be limited to intelligence cooperation and detection of terrorist threats to allies. However, the Alliance's role may increase in the event of further escalation, especially by Iran.

On 12 October, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant participated remotely in a meeting of NATO defence ministers, during which he presented information on the Hamas attack on Israel that killed 1,400 people. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg supported Israel's right to self-defence, while emphasizing the need to protect civilians. French President Emmanuel Macron, during his visit to Israel, proposed the creation of an international coalition to fight Hamas, following the example of the coalition to fight ISIS which involved NATO.

Threats to NATO States. Israel's war with Hamas has led to increased social tensions in NATO countries, demonstrations of support for the Palestinians, intensified anti-Israeli sentiments, manifestations of anti-Semitism, and an increase in the terrorist threat. The threats to the troops of NATO countries stationed in the Middle East have also intensified. Since the outbreak of Israel's war with Hamas, U.S. troops stationed in Iraq and Syria have been the target of dozens of attacks by Shiite militias supported by Iran. The targets of such threats may also include troops from the countries participating in the international coalition to fight ISIS as part of *Operation Inherent Resolve*, the NATO training mission in Iraq, the UNIFIL mission in Lebanon, in which 15 NATO member states participate, and the international mission in Sinai (MFO) supported by eight NATO countries.

There is a risk of intensification of threats if the conflict continues and escalates. A massive attack on Israel by Iran-backed Hezbollah would trigger a U.S. military response. The terrorist threat would then further increase, including in connection with the activities of Hezbollah and other organisations supported by Iran in Western countries. The

threat of Iran closing the Strait of Hormuz, through which about 20% of the world's petroleum products are transported, and attacks on U.S. bases and allied troops in the Middle East would also increase. If NATO countries joined the anti-Iran coalition, the threat of Iranian missile attacks on Alliance countries would also increase.

Challenges to NATO Political Cohesion. According to the new strategy, the main military threat to NATO allies is Russia and the priority is to strengthen defence and deterrence capabilities. At the same time, the Alliance recognises terrorism as the main asymmetric threat and has developed cooperation with regional partners (primarily Jordan, Iraq, and Israel) to increase stability in the Middle East. Because member states have different threat perceptions, the strategy formulated in this way is intended to facilitate NATO's ability to respond to major threats simultaneously and ensure Alliance political cohesion. Although Israel is one of the Alliance's most important partners in the Middle East, coordinating actions in the face of Israel's war with Hamas is a challenge for the Alliance. Turkish President Erdogan took a clearly anti-Israel stance, stating that Hamas is not a terrorist group but a national liberation organisation. Most NATO member states supported Israel's right to defend itself during the 27 October vote on the UN General Assembly resolution on a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, which the Israeli government viewed as an attempt to limit its ability to fight the terrorists. Croatia, Czechia, the U.S., and Hungary were against the resolution. Albania, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom abstained.

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Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and Turkey supported it. Countries voting against and abstaining demonstrated support for Israel, emphasising Hamas' responsibility for the current crisis. However, they are under growing pressure from public opinion to defend Palestinian civilians and demand that Israel respect humanitarian law. Their calculations also include the safety of their citizens caught in the war in Gaza and others taken hostage by Hamas, as well as relations with Arab countries.

Possible Actions within NATO. Members are unlikely to use NATO to exert political influence on the parties to the conflict due to the risk of political tensions within the Alliance. If an international coalition is formed to fight Hamas, it is also unlikely that NATO as an organisation will formally join it. Although the Alliance joined the coalition fighting ISIS in 2017, most of the allies treated this terrorist organisation as a direct threat to their security. The Alliance's participation in the U.S.-led coalition was also seen as essential to strengthening NATO political cohesion.

Cooperation within NATO will be used mainly to monitor the terrorist threat in the Alliance countries and for their troops in the Middle East. For this purpose, these allies can use, among others, joint surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities (Allied Ground Surveillance System, AGS) and enhanced intelligence cooperation mechanisms (NATO Intelligence Fusion Cell).

In the event of a possible escalation of the conflict and confrontation between the U.S. and Iran, which may lead to the creation of an anti-Iran coalition with the participation of other allies, the importance of the NATO anti-missile defence system will increase. The system is to ensure the ability to combat missiles launched from the Middle East. Its last element, a base with interceptors in Poland, is to be completed this year, while the entire system is to become fully operational in 2024. Even if the system is not fully operational, it will strengthen the sense of security and political cohesion in the Alliance and could facilitate the formation of a coalition of the willing under the leadership of the U.S., for example, to maintain freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.

NATO countries will provide support to Israel mainly on a bilateral basis. The U.S. announced that it would provide Israel with extensive political, intelligence, and military assistance. It has sent two aircraft carrier groups to the Middle East to demonstrate strong support for Israel, but also to deter Iran and Hezbollah from entering the conflict.

The U.S. is also sending additional air and anti-missile defence systems to the Middle East, which are intended to strengthen the security of American troops and increase the ability to respond to escalation by Iran. A gesture of support was Germany's consent to Israel's use of two Heron combat drones, which are leased by the Bundeswehr and used to train German operators in Israel. Most countries, however, will not highlight the practical assistance they provide to Israel. The scope of such support may include satellite reconnaissance and the exchange of intelligence data. Political support will primarily include emphasising that Israel was the victim of the Hamas attack and has the right to defend itself.

Conclusions and Perspectives. The war between Israel and Hamas and the intensification of terrorist threats indicate the accuracy of the assumptions on which NATO's new strategy is based. While the Alliance's priority is to adapt to threats from Russia and strengthen its defence and deterrence dimension, it also needs the ability to detect and combat terrorist threats and missile attacks from the Middle East. The increased intensity of such threats should not negatively impact the process of NATO's adaptation to threats from Russia. However, it may distract attention from Russian aggression against Ukraine and give arguments to opponents of providing support to Ukraine. In the event of escalation and growing U.S. military involvement in the Middle East, it may also increase the risk of political tensions in NATO. A challenge for the Alliance would be, for example, an attempt by Iran to block the Strait of Hormuz. In the event of U.S. military intervention, there would be increased pressure on European allies to join an international coalition aimed at ensuring freedom of navigation, in accordance with international law.

Even before the outbreak of the war, the Alliance recognised the need to strengthen its ability to respond to threats coming from Europe's southern neighbourhood and established a group of independent experts to present recommendations on this matter. The Alliance will have to adapt, among other things, its policy of regional partnerships to new strategic realities and threats. It may be necessary to supplement or replace the Mediterranean Dialogue, which includes Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia, with formats of enhanced cooperation with selected partners ("31+1"). It would be particularly beneficial for Poland to deepen the NATO partnership with Israel based on intelligence and technological cooperation and combating asymmetric threats.