



Israel Increasingly Divided after 200 Days of War Against Hamas

Michał Wojnarowicz

Israel is in a deep political crisis, both internally and externally, after more than six months of armed conflict. The protracted operation and the scale of destruction in the Gaza Strip are contributing to growing opposition from foreign partners, only temporarily tempered by the escalation with Iran. The consensus on domestic policy is continuously eroding, and intra-coalition and power-society disputes are taking an increasingly sharp form.

War Situation. Since the beginning of the year, the Israeli military has reduced the presence of [ground forces](#) in the Gaza Strip while maintaining a very high frequency of air and artillery attacks. The demobilisation of some units and announcements of greater operations reductions have contributed marginally to [reducing the intensity of fighting with Hamas](#). In addition to operations in the central and southern parts of the Gaza Strip, fierce fighting was again taking place in the northern part (including the Al-Shifa hospital complex). The army continued to demolish civilian infrastructure to create a buffer zone on the Palestinian side of the border with Israel. The declared goal remains an offensive on the city of Rafah near the Egyptian border, where the last organised Hamas forces are located along with around 1.5 million internal Palestinian refugees, concentrated there after the strikes in the north and central parts of Gaza. The parties have failed to negotiate a hostage exchange, on which Israel is making a possible cease-fire contingent but which Hamas wants a permanent truce and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip.

To date, the number of Palestinian casualties, according to the UN, based on the Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip, is about 34,000 killed (civilians and militants) and 77,000 wounded. The warfare and policies of the Israeli army have caused a humanitarian crisis through, among others, the maintenance of strict control over the inflow of external aid and the conflation with Hamas or blocking of cooperation with some aid organisations, for example,

UNRWA. The most challenging situation in the complicated distribution of aid is in the northern part of the Gaza Strip, where, according to UN agencies and the U.S., famine now is occurring. Criticism of Israel increased after the army attacked a World Central Kitchen (WCK) humanitarian convoy in early April this year, killing foreign volunteers, including a Polish citizen. As a result of diplomatic pressure, Israel loosened some of its restrictions on access to the northern Gaza Strip and the amount of resources to be delivered.

The situation in other parts of the conflict has also deteriorated. The confrontation with Iran over the Israeli attack on the [consulate in Damascus and the Iranian retaliatory rocket strike on Israel](#) has intensified. Clashes with [Hezbollah](#) remain at high intensity, forcing Israel to prolong the evacuation of people from the northern part of the country. Incidental attacks also continue by Yemen Houthis. Although the Ramadan period passed relatively peacefully (including in Jerusalem), [the situation in the West Bank remains very tense](#). A destabilising factor is the activities of Israeli settlers, [tolerated by the military](#). According to UN figures, there have been nearly 600 attacks of various kinds by settlers since [7 October](#), including attacks on nearby Palestinian settlements in early April after the murder of a Jewish teenager, in which dozens were injured and three Palestinians killed. Israeli authorities are also implementing [settlement expansion](#) decisions, including the largest takeover of land as state land since the 1990s,

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marking the first step in another round of expropriating the Palestinian population.

Political Crisis. A growing political rift is evident in the domestic situation, partly related to a return to the [normal functioning of state institutions](#) (including the overdue local elections, the resumption of the [PM's criminal trial](#)) and to pre-war disputes. There is a growing protest movement calling for the resignation of Benjamin Netanyahu. One of the accusations levelled against the prime minister is that he is obstructing hostage negotiations, and, as a result, some of the families of those kidnapped have incorporated their solidarity rallies into anti-government demonstrations. The strategy on Gaza and other fronts is a growing source of conflict within the government coalition. On the one hand, within the so-called war cabinet, formed by Netanyahu, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, and Benjamin Gantz, positions are clashing. On the other hand, the head of government is under attack from the far right, calling for the toughest possible action toward the Palestinians and Iran, and opposing policy softening (e.g., on humanitarian issues). As a result of the friction, the unity government lost the faction led by Gideon Sa'ar, while Gantz, in turn, officially called for new parliamentary elections in the fall.

A major crisis was triggered by another chapter in the dispute over exemptions from military service for the ultra-Orthodox population. The Supreme Court, which in 2017 declared special conscription regulations for this group unconstitutional, in March blocked the transitional provisions that the Netanyahu government had been using to maintain exemptions from recruitment and required the authorities to withhold some funding for religious schools attended by potential conscripts. This sparked fierce protests from religious parties opposing the change of the *status quo* and threatened to break the government coalition. Polls indicate that Netanyahu would lose his majority in the event of early elections, although at the same time, his party, Likud, has been regaining some support in recent weeks. Also in the prime minister's favour are disagreements among the opposition. In addition, for all the negative perception of Netanyahu's policies and persona, support among Israelis for continuing the Gaza war campaign remains high.

International Aspect. The crisis in the Gaza Strip and the growing number of casualties on the Palestinian side is influencing growing criticism from Israel's foreign partners, a trend further reinforced after the army's killing of the WCK volunteers. This was evident in the reaction of the United States, with pressured Israel to partially change its policy.

Antagonism between the Biden administration and Israel is growing, exemplified by, among other things, the lack of a U.S. veto on a UN Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire. So far, the sides have failed to agree on the attack on Rafah, with the United States pushing for protecting civilians and using a minimal amount of force. Increasingly strident positions are being taken by Western countries, among which demands are strengthening, for example, for the recognition of Palestinian independence (Spain), or the revision of arms cooperation with Israel (Canada). Both the EU and the U.S. have decided to sanction radical Jewish settlers, and [Turkey](#) is restricting exports to Israel. At the same time, Israel has received strong diplomatic support from foreign partners (especially the EU) over the attack by Iran. To a lesser extent, relations have changed with countries of the [Global South](#), which are calling for Israel's international isolation amid [genocide accusations](#).

Conclusions and Perspectives. The political and social conflict in Israel is set to worsen. However, despite high grassroots pressure and a weakened position, the chances of Prime Minister Netanyahu voluntarily leaving or calling early elections remain slim. Despite the image costs of the Gaza ground operation and divisions within the government over the next steps, a permanent cessation of hostilities at this stage would be politically too costly for the authorities. At the same time, the war will keep delaying investigations explaining the 7 October Hamas attack and its aftermath, which would be, to a far greater extent than the ongoing corruption cases, a political burden for Netanyahu. The Israeli government risks replacing international criticism and diplomatic pressure with permanent changes in its partners' foreign policies (including a review of economic contacts, recognition of Palestinian statehood, and a reduction in the level of relations) if current policies toward Gaza and the West Bank are maintained.

A key aspect remains the future of the Rafah operation. The most likely scenario is for Israel to carry it out in a limited form (preferred by the U.S.), which will prolong the conflict but might minimise civilian casualties. It remains unfeasible, however, at this stage of the conflict to fully push Hamas out of Gaza, and it is already shifting to urban guerrilla tactics. Foreign partners will, in addition to further increasing pressure on Israel on issues of protection of the Palestinian population, need to create conditions for the introduction of alternative political institutions into the Gaza Strip, for example, based on the structures of the Palestinian Authority.