

“The Day After”: The Development of the War Requires Brave Decisions

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Preface

In the six months since October 7, despite the considerable operational achievements on the battlefield in the Gaza Strip, none of the war's objectives have yet been fully achieved. A total of 133 hostages are still being held in Gaza, and Hamas has not yet been decisively defeated. The war against Hamas is waning, as was expected at this stage, and even an operation in Rafah will not significantly change this trend. This decline in the war can lead to weariness, accompanied by discouragement, disappointment, and frustration. At the same time, however, this situation may present a series of opportunities—detailed and nuanced in this document—that will improve Israel's security situation over time.

The document, written by researchers at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), recommends a series of strategic decisions that the political echelon should adopt to improve Israel's strategic situation and prevent significant potential damage. INSS recommends exploiting the tactical-operational fatigue in the war to achieve strategic gains, with an extensive and long-term view of Israel's status in the world and in the Middle East in particular. This should be done while demanding substantial concessions in exchange for the price Israel has been paying since the beginning of the war—currently without any reciprocity.

Admittedly, these are not the recommendations we would have made had the State of Israel not been in the complex situation it finds itself in. The recommendations in this document were formulated in the absence of other good alternatives. They are not perfect, and we recognize their shortcomings.

The challenge for Israel's leaders at this time is to do the right thing for Israel's history, not to achieve immediate short-term tactical gains. At this point in time, we must do everything in our power to improve the country's strategic situation, seize the opportunities at hand, and act according to the priorities of Israel's national security and its citizens.



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Abstract/Main Recommendations

The state of Israel stands at a crossroads.

The current path we are treading along leads to damage to Israel’s resilience and status, while presenting a set of serious risks:

1. Halting the operational momentum in the Gaza Strip and losing the initiative, while slipping into a long war of attrition in both the southern and northern arenas;
2. Damaging the resilience of Israeli society while delaying the rehabilitation of civilian life;
3. Diminishing the reputation of Israel’s military strength and the deterrence against Iran and its axis, in addition to facing a violent outbreak—worse than the current one in Judea and Samaria, while strengthening Hamas’s position there;
4. Transforming Israel into an isolated state in the international arena, losing American backing, and severely damaging relations with Arab states, particularly Jordan and Egypt, in addition to increasing antisemitism;
5. Missing out on the historic opportunity for normalization with Saudi Arabia.

It is crucial to end the ambiguity and confusion resulting from the gap between a significant reduction in fighting and the pursuit of an undefined “total victory.” Realistic goals must be defined within a specified timeframe to end the war. Therefore, Israel should pursue an alternative path that achieves the war’s objectives and substantially improves Israel’s strategic balance. This includes:

1. Restoring security and a sense of security in the border regions;
2. Reducing damage in the international arena and working toward reinstating Israel’s standing worldwide;
3. Initiating the rehabilitation process of Israeli society and healing its wounds;
4. Designing a regional system to counterbalance the axis of resistance led by Iran and to serve as an infrastructure for Israel’s integration into the region;
5. Opening a political horizon in the Palestinian arena that could eventually lead to conflict mitigation.

Choosing this path entails implementing strategic recommendations, with the main ones being:

1. Pursuing **a hostage deal** that includes a (seemingly unlimited) ceasefire;
2. Acknowledging that an (**“upgraded”**) **Palestinian Authority**, with potential support from an inter-Arab and international coalition, is the preferred pragmatic solution for addressing civilian control in the Gaza Strip;

3. Taking advantage of the ceasefire accompanying the hostage deal to reach **an arrangement on the Lebanese border** and eliminate the threat of infiltration and direct fire;
4. Transferring **massive humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip**, including from Israeli territory, to be distributed by the Palestinian Authority under the auspices of the Arab and international coalition;
5. Developing a plan for the **hermetic closure of the Philadelphi Corridor**, in close cooperation with Egypt and the United States. A **military operation in Rafah** will occur at a later date as part of the postwar stabilization efforts.

Summary of the Recommendations:

1. Relations with the United States—The war has led the United States to become actively involved in the Middle East once again, and it has strengthened its ties with Israel. INSS previously pointed out the risk to the special relationship between the two countries, stressing that it was a serious threat. While the current US support for Israel has not substantially altered this threat, American support for Israel sharply contrasts with the distancing from Israel and the criticism of the war and Israeli policies among large segments of the American public. However, maintaining the current situation increases the danger to the stability of the special relationship, stemming in part from long-term sociopolitical trends within American society itself. Therefore, it is imperative to stabilize relations and, at the same time, strengthen the reengagement of the United States in the Middle East as a **geostrategic opportunity** of utmost importance for the security of the State of Israel. **Implementing the recommendations detailed in this document will enhance relations with the United States and even help prevent further deterioration of Israel’s international relations.**

2. Regional architecture and an alternative government in the Gaza Strip—Local Fatah entities connected to the Palestinian Authority, which will undergo reform processes, should be established as the civilian alternative to Hamas. Their organization will be facilitated with the assistance of an international-Arab coalition within the framework of a new regional order, which will include normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia and regional defense alliances with the United States.

3. Returning the hostages—A deal for the hostages should be quickly pursued, despite the heavy price involved in the release of prisoners in exchange for a cessation of fighting and for a renewed preparedness of forces around the Gaza Strip. The cessation included in the deal should be used to solve other challenges of the war (concentrating efforts in the northern arena to eliminate threats, solidifying the new situation in a memorandum of understanding,

carrying out extensive humanitarian efforts in the Gaza Strip, transferring responsibility for civilian matters to the Palestinian Authority/Fatah, preparing the ground for a military operation in Rafah by returning the displaced to the northern Gaza Strip, and accelerating diplomatic efforts to promote normalization with Saudi Arabia). It is doubtful whether such a deal is possible without Israel's willingness to declare, at any stage, an end to the fighting, and we must be prepared to make such a declaration as part of a comprehensive deal.

4. The humanitarian issue in the Gaza Strip—The humanitarian problem must be reduced by providing food supplies, treatment for epidemics, and sanitation in the Gaza Strip. It is crucial that Hamas is not involved in the distribution of aid. To ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches its intended recipients, a responsible entity for public order and aid distribution is required. We should leverage humanitarian aid to cultivate an alternative civil authority to the Hamas government, capable of establishing public order. Currently, the available alternative is the local Fatah (affiliated with the Palestinian Authority), which will receive assistance from a regional organization (Arab and international coalition) and will serve as a source of legitimacy for Israeli action. This will guarantee that the aid reaches its intended destination and prevent it from falling into the hands of Hamas.

5. The military effort/Rafah—The operational effort to block the border with Egypt and dismantle Hamas battalions there must be completed. It should be emphasized that the main goal of this operation is to block the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip to prevent arms and weapons smuggling. This should be carried out with a different operational method, and the timing can be postponed until the diplomatic moves with Egypt and the United States are completed, which will create the optimal conditions for Israel to carry out the operation.

6. The return of evacuees from the northern settlements—Residents from the northern part of the country should be allowed to return to their homes as quickly as possible. If feasible, this should be achieved without engaging in a full-scale war against Hezbollah. Therefore, it is necessary to design an improved border regime, based on removing threats (especially Hezbollah's Radwan force) in accordance with Resolution 1701. This will require effective monitoring of its implementation by the international community, while being ready for Israeli enforcement in case of violation as well as reinforcing the international forces present in southern Lebanon.

Such an arrangement is only possible in the event of a prolonged cessation of fighting in the Gaza Strip (likely within the framework of a hostage deal), and a stable reality in the north is only feasible with powerful counterweight force—against not only Hezbollah but the entire “axis of resistance”—which is most likely possible based on a broad regional coalition with the support of the United States.

The implementation of these recommendation will enable the initiation of a normalization process with Saudi Arabia under American auspices, while forming a broad front with moderate Arab states and under the leadership of the United States against Iran and the axis of resistance. This will dramatically improve the State of Israel's strategic balance.

Chapter 1: Strategic Framing

The Strategic Problem:

Slipping into a prolonged and static war of attrition, which reduces the chances of returning Israeli hostages held by Hamas and replacing Hamas's rule in the Gaza Strip, also jeopardizes the special relationship with the United States, undermines the security of the country's borders, and leads to Israel's isolation in the regional and international arena.

Objectives:

1. Restoring the sense of security and safety to Israeli citizens while rehabilitating settlements in the western Negev and along the northern border, and bolstering Israel's internal resilience;
2. Eliminating the Hamas threat;
3. Establishing an alternative civil government to Hamas in the Gaza Strip;
4. Maintaining Israel's security responsibility in the Palestinian arena;
5. Weakening the Shiite axis led by Iran;
6. Improving Israel's regional standing (economic, security, and geopolitical);
7. Preserving and strengthening Israel's special relationship with the United States.

The Alternatives Considered During the Fighting:

1. Military government in the Gaza Strip—placing responsibility and authority of the region in Israel's hands;
2. Transfer of responsibility for the Gaza Strip to Egypt (strong Egyptian opposition);
3. Creation of a local entity composed of tribes and clans to govern the Gaza Strip as separate "cantons" (failure in implementation will lead to anarchy);
4. Management of the Gaza Strip by an interim international/Arab administration (not viable without a governing component of the Palestinian Authority);
5. Establishment of a Palestinian interim government that is not affiliated with the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah;
6. Returning the (renewed) Palestinian Authority to control the Gaza Strip, with the assistance of an international coalition, including Arab and Western countries.

The Recommendation to Choose the Sixth Alternative Is Based on Two Considerations:

- The lack of Israeli interest in returning to control the Gaza Strip, both due to the internal/military implications of such a move and its international ramifications (isolation, sanctions, and so forth).
- Any solution whose purpose is to strengthen Israeli social resilience, as well as to integrate the international and Arab community in rehabilitating the Gaza Strip or in taking responsibility for the civilian governance in the region, necessitates the involvement of the Palestinian Authority. Despite the controversy within Israel's political arena regarding the reliance on the Palestinian Authority, no better solution has been found at this time, when compared to the other alternatives.

The Central Idea:

The rapid achievement of the goals of the war by pursuing a quick hostage deal (while being willing to stop the war) and taking advantage of the cessation included in such a deal for the following purposes:

1. Establishing a civil management mechanism in the Gaza Strip, connected to the Palestinian Authority, supported by the international community, and linked to the regional arrangement.
2. Delivering a massive influx of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip and distributing it through local Fatah entities, connected to the Palestinian Authority and supported for their protection by Arab and international coalition forces.
3. Implementing a ceasefire in the northern arena, which will be stipulated in understandings regarding the withdrawal of the capabilities of the Radwan force from the border region and effective international monitoring (with an emphasis on the removal of infiltrating forces and anti-tank missiles).

A declaration of an end to the state of war does not restrict the State of Israel from taking action to remove threats and protect its citizens, including continued efforts to dismantle the governmental and military capabilities of Hamas.

Chapter 2: “The Day After”—An Alternative to Hamas in the Framework of a New Regional Architecture

It is recommended that the Palestinian Authority, renewed following comprehensive reforms, be the civilian alternative to Hamas.

Security responsibility will remain in the hands of Israel. Without a replacement for Hamas’s rule, a vacuum will be created, to be either filled by Hamas itself or develop into chaos, from which Hamas will reemerge. Failure to take advantage of the military achievement by not encouraging the establishment of an alternative governing entity means a loss of opportunity and a serious mistake. Alternately, it is possible to adopt the option of installing an Israeli military government in the Gaza Strip for an interim period. However, this choice will exacerbate Israel’s international predicament and, in addition, may lead to a prolonged presence in the Gaza Strip, during which civilian responsibility will also be placed on Israel’s shoulders. Therefore, it is an alternative of secondary priority.

As for a new regional architecture: To achieve victory in the war in the full sense of the definition of victory—that is, improving Israel’s security situation over time while inflicting significant loss on Hamas and Iran—a broad regional arrangement is required. For a long time, the United States has been leading the idea of creating a new regional architecture against the resistance front led by Iran and the expansion of China’s influence in the Middle East. The response formulated by the American government is to promote an initiative that will include normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia and the establishment of a defense alliance between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Separately, the establishment of a defense alliance between the United States and Israel should also be positively examined. It should also be agreed that Saudi Arabia, together with the countries that have peace treaties with Israel, Egypt and Jordan, will form an Arab coalition that will lead the process of rehabilitating the Gaza Strip while enforcing necessary reforms in the Palestinian Authority.

Israel, for its part, will commit to a diplomatic process toward separation from the Palestinians, one that does not compromise its security interests. At this stage, the definition formulated by the American administration is sufficient: “a two-state horizon”—a definition that was accepted by the government led by Benjamin Netanyahu upon acceptance of President Trump’s Deal of the Century plan.

Such a regional arrangement will serve as a response to Iran’s attempt, through its proxies and Hamas, to thwart the regional normalization process and will improve Israel’s security situation in a substantial and historical manner. The parties involved in the initiative—the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and most of the international community—all see the Palestinian Authority as the official and exclusive representative of the Palestinian people. Therefore, a civilian entity in the Gaza Strip in the form of the Palestinian Authority will improve the chances of reaching such an arrangement. Alternatively, any civilian entity that does not include the Palestinian Authority and instead is based on complex, difficult-to-implement, and unstable solutions over time may disrupt the progress toward

realizing the initiative and postpone it. Under the current circumstances, this postponement would represent a missed opportunity—an opportunity that the war in the Gaza Strip provides—and it would also thwart Israel’s effort to translate military achievements into political advantages for itself.

A Renewed Palestinian Authority:

In the context of the Gaza Strip and with a long-term perspective, the optimal solution for Israel’s security is the “renewed” Palestinian Authority, which would serve as an alternative governmental entity to Hamas. To be recognized as “renewed,” the Palestinian Authority should undergo a process in which it fulfills the following conditions:

1. Recognize the State of Israel;
2. Cease violence, education for radicalization, and support for families of terrorists;
3. Ensure that Hamas is no longer a legitimate factor in the Palestinian political system, does not run as a party in future elections, and is not a force with military capability;
4. Allow security responsibility to remain in Israel’s hands, similar to the situation in Judea and Samaria;
5. Halt the legal proceedings against Israel in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Given the political attitude and the public position in Israel toward the Palestinian Authority, coupled with the current weakness of the Palestinian Authority, progress can be made toward establishing the Palestinian Authority as a governing entity in the Gaza Strip as a part of an intermediate stage. There are two options (bridge programs) for this stage:

1. Initially, the move can be implemented as a pilot in a defined geographical area. It is possible to start with local Fatah entities, aided by the forces and administrative bodies of the Palestinian Authority, connected to the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah and the Civil Committee in the Gaza Strip. The actions of these entities can be protected by members of the Palestinian security forces, who will be trained in Egypt or Jordan in coordination with the Palestinian Authority and under the guidance of the American Security Coordinator (USSC).
2. Another intermediate option is the appointment of a local governor for the Gaza Strip, who is seemingly unrelated to Ramallah, such as Mohammed Dahlan. It is estimated that Dahlan has an effective control mechanism, which is supported financially by the United Arab Emirates; local security forces in the Gaza Strip; and external security contractors that he can bring with him. He could come to an arrangement with Hamas

that would spare the fighting between them, in exchange for some degree of survival of Hamas and a promise of future influence (an agreement surrounding individuals on a wanted list, or the surrender of the remainder of Hamas's military power to the Palestinian security forces). The disadvantages of this alternative are: (1) it is likely that the current leadership of the Palestinian Authority will oppose Dahlan's return to the Gaza Strip; (2) The need for coordination between Dahlan and Hamas. Therefore, this alternative as an interim stage is secondary in terms of preference.

It is clear that a magical substitute for Hamas's rule will not emerge, nor is the Palestinian Authority the one. And yet, the desired situation is similar to that which exists in Judea and Samaria: a Palestinian Authority managing civil life with limited ability to threaten Israel, while the IDF is allowed operational freedom to thwart terrorism and its infrastructure throughout the area.

Chapter 3: Returning the Hostages

We must strive for a deal that will lead to the release of the hostages, and quickly, even at the price of declaring an end to the war.¹

Unlike the other issues, in this case, Israel's decisions are not independent since the consent to the hostage deal is also in the hands of Hamas. Even if Israel is flexible in its positions, there is no guarantee that a deal will be reached. However, breaking down the deal into its components indicates areas of flexibility. This is subject to the following assumptions:

1. Any concession that is reversible is a tactical concession, and there is no problem in agreeing to accept it. In this context, redeployment in the northern Gaza Strip is temporary, ceasefire is always temporary, and the validity of statements is also temporary. Therefore, Israel has ample room for flexibility as part of negotiations. Agreements in these contexts are not "red lines."
2. Civilians must be distinguished from soldiers and the fallen. The State of Israel has failed to fulfill the basic obligation of a state toward its citizens. Therefore, the return of the civilian hostages is not only a matter of "saving a soul," but, in fact, an exercise of sovereignty and an important step toward restoring trust in the state's governance.
3. There is no choice but to release prisoners to complete the deal. However, the Palestinian prisoners are not all the same. Among them are terminally ill individuals and those who did not commit murder, but rather assisted in murder or incited terrorism. The bottom line is that, even if they are released, the State of Israel remains strong enough to deal with any potential new threats posed by these released terrorists.
4. The security consideration involved in the release of the more serious Palestinian prisoners must be examined not only in the narrow context of the price for each released hostage, but also in relation to improving Israel's regional status and advancing the normalization process with its neighbors, as well as the restoration of trust of Israel's citizens in the security system and the government. Within the broader strategic context of improving Israel's security situation, this comes at a heavy and difficult price.

¹ Any ceasefire in the Middle East is temporary, and it is likely that Hamas will give Israel enough reason to resume fighting (if it chooses to do so).

Chapter 4: Settling the Humanitarian Issue in the Gaza Strip

A humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip must be avoided, and the regulation of humanitarian aid should be integrated into the process of establishing an alternative civilian entity to Hamas while preventing the aid from falling into the hands of the organization.

The Gaza Strip must be flooded with aid brought in directly from Israel. This move will lower the skyrocketing food and medicine prices in the Gaza Strip and reduce the risk of anarchy, looting, and epidemics. However, flooding alone will not help create an alternative governing entity and may even create a civil dependency on Israel. Therefore, control over the distribution of humanitarian aid must be transferred to the local Fatah entities connected to the Palestinian Authority. To ensure the success of this process, assistance should be sought from international/Arab forces to maintain public order and security. Distributing humanitarian aid through local alternative entities will give the alternative governing entity authority vis-à-vis the population as well as public legitimacy. The ongoing absence of a decision regarding the alternative civilian entity will result in Hamas distributing the aid and rebuilding its strength. Alternatively, chaos will ensue, which will be attributed to Israel and have negative repercussions on it.

Airdropping aid by foreign countries and the construction of an American pier, partly financed by Qatar, are signs of a loss of control and initiative. A simpler solution is to transfer the aid through the port of Ashdod and bring it into the Gaza Strip via land crossings. This solution will spare Israel from having to build a port in Gaza, which could become a fact without Israel being able to use it later as a bargaining chip for coordinating the future of the Gaza Strip with Israel. Even worse, the dock could eventually become a symbol of Hamas's sovereignty.

Chapter 5: Completing the Military Effort to Dismantle Hamas’s Capabilities

The recommendation to cease the current campaign and transition to a different operational mode does not prevent action in Rafah but requires adopting a different course of action and timing that serves the guiding strategic concept. Therefore, it is advisable to complete the operational effort that will ensure there is no looming threat from Rafah to the settlements in the south of Israel, and that the border between Israel and Egypt will not become a channel for smuggling, particularly of weapons, into the Gaza Strip. To this end, a coordinated solution with Israel is necessary, to be executed by Egypt and the Americans, while Israel should be kept informed.

Alternative conditions for action in Rafah (When do we not have to act there?):

1. Surrender, destruction, or exile of Yahya Sinwar and Mohammed Deif;
2. Surrender of the Hamas battalions.

If these conditions are not met, the required operational achievements are:

1. Targeted elimination of the commanders;
2. Demolition of underground infrastructure (strategic, operational, economic);
3. Destruction of combat infrastructure: tunnels, firing positions, operational facilities, launching infrastructure;
4. Blockade of the Philadelphi Corridor and sealing it above and below ground.

These objectives can be advanced through various methods, including a different combination of ground maneuver, aerial fire, and special operations. Cooperation with the United States and Egypt is also necessary in all matters related to closing the border axis and the Rafah crossing.

The timing of the action is less urgent than other issues mentioned in this document (as long as a hostage deal has been reached and, as part of the cessation of fighting, normalcy has returned to the northern region—as detailed in the next chapter). This is an important operation, albeit complex and limited, that can be implemented in the future as well.

Chapter 6: Strengthening Israel's Civilian Front and its National Resilience

The strengthening of Israel's national resilience will enable the continued functional continuity and rapid recovery from the collective trauma toward prosperity and growth. This will occur, in particular with the return of the hostages, caring for the evacuees from the communities in the southern and northern regions, renewal of periphery communities, and a systemic change in relations between the government and the public.

Objectives:

1. Quick return of all hostages to their homes;
2. Rehabilitation of the periphery communities to enable the rapid and safe return of evacuees to their homes;
3. The realization of the basic agreement between a citizen and the government in light of the noticeable erosion of public trust in the governing establishment.

Recommendations:

1. Continuous and close contact with the affected populations is required, including compassion, generosity, and consideration of their unique needs.
2. A unified administration should be established for the overall return of evacuees or, at least, a separate administration in the north parallel to that of the Takuma administration associated with the communities of the south. To this end, bureaucratic and regulatory barriers must be completely removed.
3. The citizens' sense of security must be strengthened as well, in addition to the effort to strengthen security.

Chapter 7: Weakening Iran and the Axis of Resistance

The formation and cohesion of the resistance front composed of the Iranian Shiite axis and the Palestinian resistance organizations eroded Israeli deterrence and increased the sense of dangerous self-confidence among Israel's enemies. Therefore, a correct definition of victory in war entails weakening the axis led by Iran, cracking its cognitive cohesion, and challenging its sense of achievement.

Hezbollah: In order to ensure the safe return of the residents in the north to their homes and to provide them with a sense of security, the threat of a widespread attack by Hezbollah on Israeli territory must, at the very least, be removed. A reality must be created in the region bordering Lebanon, which will resemble the period after the Second Lebanon War and before the Radwan force was deployed in the north and along the border.

This security reality necessitates pushing the military capabilities of the Radwan force away from the border and stabilizing the new situation through a framework of understandings with the state of Lebanon, and indirectly with Hezbollah, based on agreements that will be achieved through American mediation and oversight. Even if these agreements are reached, the IDF will prepare for a strong defense of northern communities against the threat of a surprise attack, and the working assumption should be that the agreements will not hold up over time.

Supervision and monitoring (international and Israeli) of the implementation of the agreements must be renewed, namely, the widespread deployment of Lebanese military forces (including close supervision by the United States and France) and a renewed deployment of UNIFIL along the border. While these forces will not engage in combat with Hezbollah, their presence in the area will limit Hezbollah's ability to return to the border area and its freedom of action.

The IDF's readiness for war in the north must be enhanced. Although continuing the policy of the current use of force and diplomatic pressure could lead to renewed stability, preparations must be made should the effort fail. If this happens, and if Hezbollah thwarts a planned course whose purpose is to remove the threats from the border area, Israel will be required to launch an attack on Hezbollah and Lebanon to remove the threat. Therefore, Israel must prepare its home front and its population for the consequences and the complexities of an extensive war against Hezbollah.

Iran: Pressure must be exerted on Iran (American support is essential!) to compel it to restrain the pro-Iranian militias, thereby influencing Hezbollah and curtailing its activity. Thus far, Iran is paying a small price for its involvement in Hezbollah's (and Hamas's) actions.

The war has exposed the weaknesses in Iran's approach, which must be exploited to undermine its regional strategy:

1. Constraints on controlling the militia forces;
2. The danger of strategic escalation as a result of their tactical action;

3. The limitations on being able to influence Israel's behavior and deter it from action;
4. Wearing down of the strength of Hezbollah and the militias in Syria, to an extent that jeopardizes their role as defenders of Iran;
5. Strengthening the strategic connection between Israel and the United States through the action of envoys.

The Nuclear Project:

Parallel to its war against Israel, Iran continues to develop its nuclear project. While it may not be on the verge of building a bomb, it is advancing toward the nuclear threshold. However, its progress in the field receives no response from the United States, the international community, or Israel. The international approach toward Iran is that of containment. In order to divert Iran from the dangerous path it is taking, Iran must face international consequences. All of the following steps require close coordination with the United States:

1. Sanctions in the UN Security Council in response to Iran's violation of the agreements it has signed;²
2. Increased monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency of Iran's nuclear program and discussion of Iranian violations in the next quarterly Governor's Committee meeting (June 2024);
3. Advancement of a proposal for a new nuclear deal that will permit the rolling back of capabilities, alongside a diplomatic process that will allow for the partial lifting of sanctions;
4. Increasing readiness for military action against Iran's nuclear facilities, also as a signal to the American government (requires coordination with the United States and cooperation with it).

² This necessitates a reversal by one of the European countries, as there is no veto power.

Chapter 8: Preserving and Strengthening the Special Relationship with the United States

The American stance alongside Israel in the “Swords of Iron” war is unprecedented, except perhaps for the support the United States provided to Israel during the Yom Kippur War. The United States shares the goal of eradicating Hamas and creating a new security reality in the Gaza Strip. The American role thus far has been manifested in three main characteristics: an unequivocal political stance behind Israel, while providing continuous and significant military aid and ongoing strategic backing, and at the same time increasing efforts to shape “the day after” the war. Furthermore, it has once again been proven that, in times of security and crisis, the United States rushes to stand by Israel’s side, and Israel, for its part, is largely dependent on this support. When faced with the conduct of the rest of the international community, the strategic necessity of preserving the special relationship with the United States as a central pillar in safeguarding Israel’s national security has once again been proven.

The American government is currently focusing its efforts to promote a deal for the return of the Israeli hostages held by Hamas, which will include an extended cessation of the war in the Gaza Strip. During this period, the government will focus on steps toward ending the war and shaping a new regional order, based on the establishment of a Palestinian state, normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and the creation of a front against Iran. However, Israel’s reluctance to formulate a vision for the “day after” and its opposition to the US government’s vision, coupled with Israel’s current intention to expand military operations in the Gaza Strip to the Rafah area, have become central points of contention between the Israeli government and the American administration.

A real crisis in relations is unlikely to occur until the presidential elections in November 2024. However, the tensions are mounting and a crisis could erupt during a second term, for either Joe Biden or Donald Trump, who harbors a certain resentment toward Prime Minister Netanyahu and Israel, in general. Moreover, it is important to consider Israeli conduct in the long term, given the demographic, economic, and social processes taking place in the United States. These processes could contribute to the erosion of the long-term American commitment to Israel even if they are not directly related to Israel. Israel is losing the support it had among many American publics, and recent polls indicate growing opposition to President Biden’s policy during the war in the Gaza Strip—particularly among supporters of the Democratic Party, but not exclusively. Criticism of Israel is also increasing among Jewish communities in the United States, which are currently facing increasing waves of antisemitism.

Disregard for these risks could have disastrous consequences for Israeli interests, as they have the potential to damage, sooner or later, the special relationship between the two countries. INSS has previously highlighted the risk to the special relationship with the United States and emphasized it as a serious threat. The current support for Israel has not fundamentally changed this threat; on the contrary, the American government’s

support for Israel stands in stark contrast to the criticism among large segments of the American public regarding the war and Israel's policies. The continuation of this situation accelerates the same long-term negative trends in American society, which endanger the special relationship.

We must strive to strengthen and stabilize the return of the United States to the Middle East, a trend that intensified following the war in the Gaza Strip. This is an extremely important geostrategic opportunity for the security of the State of Israel. The Israeli government's public skirmish with the US administration could accelerate problematic processes from Israel's point of view and contradict its interests. To prevent this, the security and diplomatic discourse must be enhanced through a professional, accurate, reliable, and discreet dialogue that also addresses the government's interests and maintains its attention toward the security concerns and needs of the State of Israel.

Conclusion

The State of Israel is facing one of its most challenging periods, both in terms of its international standing and domestic situation. It is difficult to envision an improvement in this reality without taking decisions for action, in response to the array of challenges it faces. At the same time, continued indecision will hinder the achievement of the objectives of the war and erode military accomplishments. Politically, decision making is not an easy task, but it must be faced by adopting courses of action in response to the current challenges. By doing so, the costs of the war can be translated, in every sense, into diplomatic achievements and the strengthening of Israel's national security and position.

Victory in the war is not far off, but it will never be absolute after the October 7th massacre. However, from a historical perspective, implementing initiatives in the spirit of the detailed and nuanced policy recommendations presented in this document will improve Israel's situation over time. It is evident that, in addition to accepting and implementing decisions, a strenuous and prolonged diplomatic recovery effort will be required. This effort will include a coordinated legal and diplomatic framework to protect Israel's position and restore its international image. Nonetheless, as long as the process continues, Hamas will no longer pose a threat, the resistance front led by Iran will be curtailed, Israel's strategic alliance with the United States will be secured and reinforced, the domestic Israeli arena will be strengthened, and a diplomatic process ensuring the preservation of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state will be set in motion.