

Riqueza, guerra sucia y declive de la superioridad militar occidental: el caso de la guerra de Israel del 7 de octubre

Welfare, Lawfare, and Western military superiority decline: the case of Israel's October 7 war

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Resumen: Este artículo explica por qué el Ejército israelí, a pesar de su poder económico y superioridad material, lucha por convertir su éxito en el campo de batalla en una victoria decisiva, en marcado contraste con 1967. La afirmación principal es institucional: en las últimas décadas, la economía política del Estado de bienestar, la difusión del poder real a actores jurídico-burocráticos no electos y la internalización de "normas internacionales" expansivas (en particular, la proporcionalidad, tal como la entienden los juristas militares) han reconfigurado los incentivos, la selección de líderes y las reglas de enfrentamiento, priorizando la legalidad, que evita el riesgo, sobre la victoria. El artículo concluye con la sugerencia de reformas para centrar la victoria en la derrota territorial y la sustitución de regímenes/infraestructuras sociales hostiles, así como para redefinir el alcance del derecho militar y su aplicación. El artículo también sugiere reconsiderar la actitud hacia los rehenes y reducir la dependencia de actores extranjeros.

Palabras clave: Estado de bienestar; justicia social; justicia militar; derecho internacional; derecho humanitario.

Abstract: This article explains why the Israeli Army—despite Israel's economic strength and material superiority—struggles to translate battlefield success into decisive victory, in stark contrast to 1967. The core claim is institutional: over the past decades a welfare-state political economy, the diffusion of real power to unelected legal-bureaucratic actors, and the internalization of expansive "international norms" (notably proportionality as understood by military lawyers) have reshaped incentives, leadership selection, and rules of engagement in ways that privilege risk-averse legality over victory. The paper concludes with suggestion of reforms to re-center victory on territorial defeat and replacement of hostile regimes/social infrastructures, to re-scope military law and enforcement. The paper also suggests to reconsider attitude to hostages and reduce dependence on foreign actors.

Keywords: welfare state; social justice; military justice; international law; humanitarian law.

I have a problem with myself that I let the IDF win too much
Aharon Barak (2019), ex-president of Israel Supreme Court

In this war, lions are led by donkeys
"The Times" newspaper describing the British Army during the Crimean War

1. INTRODUCTION

On 7 October 2023, Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, launched an attack on southern Israel during which about 1,200 people were killed and 251 others were taken hostage. In response, Israel launched an offensive in Gaza that is still ongoing.

The principal goal of this article is to provide a clear explanation for the contemporary IDF's inability, in economically strong Israel, to achieve decisive victories—not merely in individual battles, but in war as a whole—contrasted with the decisive victory achieved by economically weaker Israel in 1967. Specifically, the article investigates why the IDF, despite

overwhelming advantages in all means and resources, has failed to eliminate Hamas.

This article does not aim to refute claims of “genocide” or “hunger” in Gaza. Interested readers are referred to the compilation by Yanovski and Zatskovetsky (2025) which provides evidence demonstrating the falsehood of such allegations. The concurrent wars with *Hezbollah* and Iran are also not dealt with in this paper since they deserve special consideration.

This article also does not aim to describe the cultural and historical connection of the Jewish people to the Gaza Strip. We merely note that Jews lived there from biblical times (Genesis 20:1) until 1929, when they were expelled following pogroms. For example, a copy of a mosaic from Gaza’s synagogue is exhibited at Ben-Gurion Airport, Israel’s main international airport. It is important to understand that, at least among soldiers in the national-religious camp (comprising perhaps 50% of combat soldiers and, correspondingly, of the casualties), there is a belief that the Gaza Strip is part of the Holy Land, to which the Jewish people are bound by centuries-old ties. Not coincidentally, soon after October 7, significant Jewish movements emerged calling for Jews to be allowed to resettle in Gaza. There were even attempts by civilians to enter, despite the danger and the risk of arrest.

The Israeli-Hamas war is seen by us in the general context of the challenges faced by the Western civilization. Back in the 14th century, Ibn Khaldūn noted that when a society becomes a great civilization, its peak is followed by a period of decay and conquest by barbarians.¹ Gustave Le Bon, who is considered to be the father of social psychology, provided a concise explanation:

When a people reaches that degree of civilisation and power at which it is assured that it is no longer exposed to the attacks of its neighbours, it begins to enjoy the benefits of peace and material well-being procured by wealth. At this juncture the military virtues decline, the excess of civilisation creates new needs, and egoism increases. Having no ideal beyond the hasty enjoyment of rapidly acquired advantages, the citizens abandon to the State the care of public affairs, and soon lose all the qualities that had made their greatness. Then barbarian or semi-barbarian neighbours, whose needs are few, but who

¹ Ibn Khaldūn. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Translated by Franz Rosenthal, edited and abridged by N. J. Dawood. Princeton University Press, 1967.

*are strongly attached to an ideal, invade the too civilised people, and proceed to form a new civilisation.*²

Finally, we would like to cite another researcher, the historian H. Graetz:

*[We] admit, however, that in this work [we] have been constantly guided by love for the people to whom [we] belong by birth and conviction. Readers, [we] hope, will be convinced that this love has by no means led [us] to aberrations and exaggeration.*³

2. CULTURAL CONTEXT

Prevailing interpretations of the cultural context⁴ surrounding the events of October 7 often presume a set of shared, fundamental moral values across civilizations. The available evidence, however, does not support this assumption. A careful observer cannot ignore the profound moral and cultural divide between societies grounded in the “Judeo-Christian” or “European” tradition—rooted in the Sinai revelation and the idea of divine commandments as the basis of universal morality, due process, freedom, and individual responsibility—and societies in which the principle, or even the valorization, of brute force is culturally dominant.

² G. Le Bon, *Psychology of the Peoples*, G.E. Stechert & Co 1912 NY (Les lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples, 1895) pp. 109-110.

³ From the Preface to “The History of the Jews” (1875, in German). Unfortunately, this preface does not appear in the English translation.

⁴ On cultural wars see A. Sánchez-Bayón, *Estudios de cultura política-jurídica*, Madrid: Delta Publicaciones, 2010. A. Sánchez-Bayón, Conocer y gestionar las esferas sociales en la globalización, *ICADE.*, 2010; (81), 103–146. A. Sánchez-Bayón, *Filosofía Político-Jurídica Global*, Saarbrücken: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing GmbH & Co./Editorial Académica Española (EAE), 2012. A. Sánchez-Bayón, *Derecho Eclesiástico Global*, Madrid: Delta Publicaciones, 2012. A. Sánchez-Bayón, Revelaciones conceptuales y lingüísticas de la posglobalización. *Carthaginiensia*, 2017; 33(64): 411-58. A. Sánchez-Bayón, Renovación de la Teología política y Sociología de la religión en la posglobalización, *Carthaginiensia*, 2019; 35(68): 485-510. <https://hdl.handle.net/10115/32205>. A. Sánchez-Bayón, Impacto del factor religioso en la acción social y desobediencia civil frente a las políticas migratorias en EEUU: el Movimiento Santuario. *Anuario de Derecho Eclesiástico del Estado*, 2020; 36: 235-87. Ref.: ANU-E-2020-10023500287. A. Sánchez-Bayón, C. Fuente, G. Campos. *Vindicatio Historia Philosophiae*: estudio de caso de los programas culturales estadounidenses. *Bajo Palabra*, 2017; 17: 457-76. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15366/bp2017.17.023>. J. Valero & A. Sánchez-Bayón, *Balance de la globalización y teoría social de la posglobalización*, Madrid: Dykinson, 2018.

In this framework, successful violence may be interpreted as a sign of divine—or otherwise supreme—approval. This logic is prominent in modern Islamism (a comprehensive analysis of the Islamic component of the present war is beyond the scope of this paper). Secular variants—most notably communist and socialist ideologies—reproduce a similar orientation while omitting theological justification – see, e.g., Lenin (1920). In this light, Hamas’s decision to record atrocities on body cameras and disseminate the footage functioned not only as reporting to the sponsors of terror but also as a recruitment strategy aimed at sympathetic audiences, both Islamist and secular-left, including in the West.

For observers formed within a European moral framework, the simultaneous justification of atrocities (“from the river to the sea ... by all means necessary”) and denial of those same atrocities appears paradoxical, even absurd. Yet this duality is internally coherent for actors who reject universal, God-based moral values. As Lenin (1920) famously asserted:

We reject any morality based on extra-human or extra-class concepts. We say that our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the proletariat’s class struggle.

Within such a worldview, contradiction, falsehood, and moral inversion can be legitimated so long as they are framed as serving a righteous cause.

It is therefore plausible that policies resembling “denazification”—as reportedly floated in discussions of former U.S. President Donald Trump’s postwar plans for Gaza—would be condemned as an “assault on Gaza’s cultural heritage.” Some critics might even invoke Article II of the Genocide Convention (1948) concerning “causing serious ... mental harm to members of [a religious] group.” The analogy to postwar Germany, however, is inexact. Denazification operated within a cultural framework already anchored in Judeo-Christian European values. Gaza’s case—shaped by institutions that glorify and perpetuate the primacy of force—is categorically different. Any genuine transformation would likely require either a prolonged occupation or a comprehensive relocation strategy to dismantle the social and ideological infrastructure that sustains a culture of violence.

3. WELFARE STATE VS. DEFENSE: A POLITICAL-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

In the early millennia of human civilization, so-called “savage” peoples were not necessarily militarily or technologically inferior to more advanced

agricultural societies. When strong incentives to enrich themselves through pillage existed, raids on wealthier polities often succeeded. By the late eighteenth century, however, the economic and technological advantages of Western Europe and North America had become undeniable, as noted by Adam Smith (Smith 1776).

States characterized by relatively free institutions, limited government, and protections for personal liberty and private property—developments traceable to the seventeenth century—gradually laid the groundwork for modern economic growth, that is, sustained gains in per-capita output. The Industrial Revolution then amplified both the economic and military advantages of these “civilized,” or in modern terms liberal, states. Their resulting superiority became overwhelming; the era of paying tribute to, and being raided by, less developed societies effectively ended (London, 2005).

The rise of the welfare state, however, altered this trajectory. A consolidated, authoritarian regime of “coercive care” (totalitarianism) can be—and has been—highly militaristic (e.g., Nazi Germany, the USSR, Communist China). By contrast, a non-consolidated welfare regime must purchase the support of multiple social groups (not least through entitlements), and is therefore more inclined to prioritize political accommodations over military solutions.

Since World War I, universal suffrage has spread across Europe and North America. Combined with the growing autonomy of an expanding civil service—an “army” of tax-spenders empowered at the ballot box—this produced a formidable political force. Politicians advancing a vision of government as a Great Caregiver naturally aligned with bureaucratic interests, forming a durable political machine. The expansion of public education and later public media further entrenched that coalition. Regular budgetary transfers cultivated electorates dependent on state provision. Historically, advocates of global redistribution and social care opposed the “night-watchman” conception of the state (Lassalle, 1862). For generations, the political left promoted reducing defense expenditures—despite the fact that such cuts cannot realistically fund universal health care or mass education—while rapidly increasing spending on “social services” (education, health care, pensions, and more). The relative weight of defense spending and, accordingly, the influence of the military bureaucracy declined within the welfare-state framework (Yanovskiy & Zatcovetsky, 2018).

Victorious generals are often celebrated and may translate popularity into political power—as in the cases of Ulysses S. Grant or Dwight D.

Eisenhower. Such trajectories can challenge the established welfare bureaucracy. The most durable response is to reshape military education and promotion, thereby privileging conformity over battlefield effectiveness. In crises, authorities may also “weaponize” justice—deploying legal mechanisms against talented officers to limit their influence early.

Contemporary military justice can facilitate this shift, at times appearing to prioritize protections for enemy populations over the lives of one’s own citizens. Successful commanders, by definition, neutralize more enemy combatants; collateral damage typically scales with operational success. Under certain legal interpretations, the war hero can be reframed as a war criminal.

A pivotal development was Additional Protocol I (8 June 1977) to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which codified the principle of **proportionality**—requiring commanders, prior to attack, to weigh expected civilian harm against the anticipated concrete and direct military advantage (Protocol I, 1977). In practice, such comparisons are nearly always infeasible given uncertainty. Worse, the rule’s application can incentivize the use of human shields by non-state actors and totalitarian regimes. Despite these shortcomings, proportionality has been broadly embraced, including by the military legal communities of U.S. and Israel—two leading military powers of the Free world that did not sign the Additional Protocol. Such adoption, while initially puzzling, significantly expands the authority of military lawyers without corresponding responsibility for operational outcomes.

In Israel, for example, the application of unratified norms against one’s own soldiers became noticeable under Military Advocate General (MAG) Amnon Straschnov (1986–1991). When challenged at the conference “Towards a New Law of War” (4 May 2015), he argued: “*Not everything not prohibited by law is worth doing*” (Yanovski, Zatzovetsky, 2015). Straschnov, following Chief Justice Aharon Barak, does not speak about law, about any clear distinction between what is legal and what is prohibited. Both spoke instead of desirable and undesirable outcomes and, in fact, about their own discretionary power to decide. Thus, this is not about the rule of law, but about the rule of lawyers. Such a stance helped institutionalize a law-enforcement approach that curtailed numerous military careers and, at times, lives.

Officers ungifted as battlefield leaders but adept at complying with newly imposed legal and ethical principles have been indirect beneficiaries of proportionality and the expanded ambit of “military justice.” As “victory”

is reinterpreted as an outdated concept and military solutions are deemphasized, these bureaucratically proficient leaders face fewer competitive challenges from hard-nosed commanders capable of defeating the enemy and thereby restoring deterrence—a public good that ultimately lowers the long-run cost of defense.

Accordingly, a natural class of beneficiaries of intensified legal-bureaucratic oversight is a new cadre of military leaders—often telegenic, “inclusive,” and highly politicized—whose principal deficiency is a lack of combat effectiveness. They rarely demonstrate the capacity to fight and win, and thus fail to establish or sustain credible deterrence.

4. ISRAEL: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Secular Zionism provided an answer to the Jewish community's pressing problems: how to survive physically and spiritually, how to avoid disappearing or assimilating, how to preserve their dignity and Jewish community. The persecuted found hope for refuge, the prosperous found purpose. The survivors of the Holocaust found it a substitute for belated justice. But this Zionism addressed the problems of its century; it aspired to no more and looked no further. In 1944, Ben-Gurion formulated “the tasks of the Jewish revolution” as follows (Ben-Gurion, 1959):

We must take our destiny into our own hands and achieve independence.

The first task is to jealously guard independence, inner moral and intellectual freedom...

The second essential task of the Jewish Revolution is the unity of its driving forces...

The third task is to pave the way for new immigrants from all countries where Jews still survive...

After this, we can move on to man's great mission on earth—the conquest of the forces of nature and the development of his creative genius.

All three of these goals were achieved. And like any temporary, practical idea, upon reaching its zenith, classical Zionism began to rapidly disintegrate. Thus, in a crisis, Israel discovered a syndrome familiar to psychologists: the syndrome of an achieved goal. Having concentrated all their energy on a particular goal—a career, accumulating money, or solving an important scientific problem—upon achieving it, if people cannot regain

perspective, they fall into depression and often die of illness or even commit suicide.

This self-destructive syndrome manifested itself in a turn away from Zionist doctrine: from the principle that Jews must be responsible for their own security to a pact with terrorists (the Oslo Accords), and from the conquest and settlement of the Land of Israel to its handover to the Arabs.

In contrast to secular Zionism, whose goals were limited and which fell into depression and self-destruction, religious Zionism aspires to fulfill the unique task of the Jewish people: to fix the world under the kingdom of the Almighty. This mission should be the primary goal of the Jewish state. To address our many problems, we must return to this primary mission. Very different figures, such as the father of religious Zionism, Rabbi Kook, and the philosopher Martin Buber, spoke of this goal well before the creation of the State of Israel. For example, in his 1934 speech "The Jew in the World," Buber said:

The prophets knew and foretold that, despite all maneuvering and compromise, Israel was doomed to destruction if it wished to exist merely as a political entity.

Israel can survive... if it stubbornly clings to its unique calling, if it manages to translate into the language of reality the divine words spoken at the hour of the Covenant. When the prophets say that Israel has no support other than God, they do not mean something ethereal, something 'religious' in the sense understood throughout the world; they mean the realization of the truly social life that Israel pledged to lead by entering into the Covenant with God, a life that it was called to embody in history in a way that only it could. (Buber 1959)

It is precisely this theme that should have become the central subject of public debate after the country has resolved its first pressing problems of existence. But the universities were filled with theoreticians, followers of the Ahad Ha'Am and Buber, who froze at the point where their teachers spoke of a binational state. Whether the students were untalented or the teachers taught them poorly, the followers didn't hear the "what", only the "how": how to strive to engage in equal dialogue with representatives of other faiths, how to strive to respect other beliefs, how to appeal to the international community. For Buber, this "how" didn't play a decisive role in his consistently Zionist philosophy. His students turned this "how" into a goal and began to retreat, not noticing that Buber's "how" was a distant memory, even before the creation of the state. Likewise, the politicians who

followed Ben-Gurion no longer held power for the sake of building and defending the state, but only for the sake of power itself, and for the sake of it they were ready to enter into an alliance with the Arabs against the Jews as described below.

Prior to 1977, Israeli elections did not result in a transfer of power from one political party to another. In addition to holding a majority in the Knesset, the left-wing coalition led by the Labor Party controlled all levels of executive authority, including the state bureaucracy. This control extended to appointments within the judiciary, police, public mass media, and the education system. Such a monopoly—amounting to de facto state capture—created what can be described as an “encompassing interest,” with the state perceived as a party’s asset (Labor Party) that required protection not only from external enemies but also from domestic opposition, particularly the so-called National Camp or right-wing factions (Zatcovetsky et al., 2014). While rare, this phenomenon is not unique; a parallel can be found, e.g., in the case of Sweden’s 1990-1991 tax reform initiated by the Social Democratic Party (Santesson, 2013).

5. THE REAL GOALS OF THE ARCHITECTS OF THE OSLO PROCESS

Demographic trends, overconfidence and strategic errors, and intramural rivalries within the left-wing elite—most notably between Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres—gradually eroded the left’s political dominance in Israel. In 1977, for the first time since statehood, the left lost a national election, ending nearly three decades of continuous rule. This defeat was neither accidental nor isolated; it signaled a consequential realignment of Israel’s political landscape. Against this backdrop, the left-liberal camp capitalized on the tenuous parliamentary majority of 1992—due largely to several small right-wing parties failing to cross the electoral threshold and to a pivotal reversal by Shas (a sectoral party representing Sephardic Haredim)—to consolidate its position. Post-Cold War foreign-policy conditions further facilitated this development.

One of the architects of the Oslo Accords and the Oslo process (1992–1995), Ron Pundak, stated candidly that beneath the political and security justifications lay a deeper aim:

Peace is not an end in itself, but a means to move Israel from one era to another, to the era of what I consider a normal country. The ‘Israelization’ of society instead of its ‘Judaization’.

The invitation extended to Fatah militants, the re-arming and training of their militia as a new “police,” and the groundwork for uprooting Jewish settlements in the territories liberated in 1967 together created favorable conditions for altering the national landscape. Many of these settlements housed the most active supporters of the national-religious camp. The implementation of these policies aimed to paralyze the opposition by rendering it politically weak and ideologically obsolete. Also, the transfer of historically significant territories—sites central to the biblical narratives of the Prophets—to enemy control was intended to deliver a decisive blow to the national-religious coalition, signaling the left’s willingness and capacity to render the biblical roots of the Jewish state irrelevant, to repeal God’s repeated promises to give all this land to the People of Israel—to the forefathers and to their descendants.

The effects were far-reaching, even if the project did not wholly succeed. The most consequential outcome of the 2005 “Disengagement” was the transfer of Gaza to enemy control and the expulsion of the Jewish population from the Strip, thereby creating a beachhead for the attacks carried out on October 7, 2023 – see Elliot (2013 p. 89) and “Depth of Deportation as a depth of investigation” in Yanovskiy and Zatzovetsky (2025). Opponents of the Disengagement repeatedly warned, as early as 2004–2005, about the likelihood of such developments. Additional details and numerous primary-source links are provided in the compilation of Yanovskiy and Zatzovetsky (2025). E.g., there is evidence that Shimon Peres—while serving in government prior to the 1977 elections—demonstrated a clear understanding of the incentives shaping terrorist organizations, the understanding he somehow lost during the Oslo process.

6. REAL POWER IN ISRAEL ON THE EVE OF AND AFTER OCTOBER 7, 2025

One cannot understand developments on the eve of, and following, October 7 without at least a basic grasp of the real—rather than merely constitutional—distribution of power in the State of Israel. That distribution diverges significantly from the principles set forth in the Basic Laws; it reflects path dependencies formed through prolonged political struggles reaching back to the British Mandate. The means of struggle have included direct and organized violence against opponents and the strategic use—or “weaponization”—of the judiciary, police, and security services (specifically

the General Security Service, GSS/Shin Bet). This ongoing conflict may be aptly described as a “**cold civil war**.”

This designation is warranted not only by the violent confrontations between leftist and revisionist militias during the Mandate period—notably “The Season”⁵—but also by recent events. These developments suggest a willingness among left-leaning elites, who retain substantial influence over the judiciary and the GSS, to deploy these institutions against the national camp.

There is further evidence of this dynamic, including claims that elements within the political left, retaining influence over the General Security Service (GSS), came to perceive the Israel Defense Forces (IDF)—a central national institution—as a hostile entity allegedly “captured” by the National Camp. The rationale behind such an extreme stance appears to be the interest in discrediting the IDF, the most respected (if not revered) institution in Israeli society, as it was increasingly drifting out of leftist control due to demographic trends—specifically, the rising proportion of religious soldiers and officers in the IDF. See chapters regarding the dismissal of cases against Netanyahu and the alleged *Sde Teiman* fabrication in Yanovski and Zatzovetsky (2025).

The mainstream left’s strategic positioning—centered on the Labor Party—underwent a marked transformation. During the Mandate, including the Arab Revolt (1936–1939), Labor emphasized maximum restraint and rejected deterrence-based policies. Jabotinsky’s supporters (Etzel/Irgun) were routinely vilified by Mapai as “fascist” for advocating a tit-for-tat strategy. This “dovish” stance shifted dramatically with the War of Independence. Labor’s monopoly on power created strong incentives to defend the country as a partisan asset against all challengers, including Arab adversaries. Both Labor and its pro-Soviet rival Mapam (with a kibbutz base) moved from near-pacifist positions to distinctly hawkish ones. For analysis of the left’s post-1982 rebalancing between defense and “social justice,” see Zatzovetsky et al. (2014).

As late as the 1981 electoral campaign, prominent left-wing public figures actively highlighted their military service as a mark of personal and

⁵ “The Season” (hunting season), from November 1944 to March 1945, was a campaign in which the official Jewish leadership of Mandate Palestine attempted to suppress the insurgency of the rival *Irgun* against the British Mandatory government. Hundreds of *Irgun* members were kidnapped and tortured; many were handed over to the British. In addition to the kidnappings, dozens of *Irgun* members and supporters were fired from their jobs, and their children were expelled from schools.

political accomplishment – see, e.g., Dudu Topaz’s speech (Yanovskiy and Zatzovetsky 2025). The turning point occurred when the Labor Party leadership reversed its initial support for the 1982 “Peace for Galilee” operation, which had aimed at the defeat of the PLO in Lebanon. This strategic U-turn was motivated less by the aftermath of the Sabra and Shatila massacre than by Labor leaders’ concerns that a decisive military victory would produce a durable shift in public support toward Likud – see the account by Yossi Sarid (Yanovskiy and Zatzovetsky 2025) and the work of Zatzovetsky et al. (2014). Notably, Shimon Peres not only attended a “Peace Now” rally, organized by a far-left group, but provided significant support for the planning and execution of the first mass event of its kind in Israeli history—presenting himself in a manner unprecedentedly close to pacifism.

From the 1980s onward, a re-alignment with the international left’s mainstream contributed to Labor’s gradual abandonment of traditionally visible Zionist symbols and causes: support for new settlements, insistence on Jerusalem’s indivisibility as Israel’s capital, and high rates of military service—where participation among younger leftists declined even as religious Zionist commitment remained robust (Inbar, 2010).

The left-wing coalition’s reach extended beyond elected bodies (Knesset, government, ministries) to the judiciary, the prosecution, and the police. Shimon Peres maintained extended influence over law enforcement, a point Yitzhak Rabin criticized in his memoirs (Rabin & Goldstein, 1979). The monitoring of opposition by law-enforcement and intelligence services became routine. Professor Aryeh Eldad—a physician, former IDF chief medical officer, former Knesset member, and son of a Lehi leader—recounts that when his family moved to Jerusalem, a telephone line was installed immediately—while others waited years—and that the “operator” all but disclosed his GSS affiliation (Eldad, 2020).

In an effort to preserve an illusory “national unity,” the first non-socialist prime minister, Menachem Begin, initiated far-reaching concessions to the left, including the abandonment of meaningful civil-service reforms and the effective retention of left-leaning control over the army, the judiciary, and law-enforcement institutions. The so-called “**judicial revolution**” associated with Aharon Barak—launched a few days after Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination—was, de facto, approved, if not actively supported, by the acting prime minister, Shimon Peres. The result, according to this view, was a strategic shift of real power from the elected sovereign—the Knesset—to unelected bodies under Supreme Court supervision (Yanovskiy, 2025a; Yanovskiy, 2025b).

Therefore, considering Israel as a unitary actor is misleading. In practice, the situation has long been—and remains—nearly the opposite. Left-leaning elites within the IDF and GSS have functioned as components of a broader coalition led by the Supreme Court, comprising segments of the judiciary and the executive bureaucracy (unelected bodies). This coalition frequently challenges the authority of the elected government, which is accountable to the Knesset. Its determined resistance to the modest judicial reforms proposed in 2023 included threats—despite the prospective costs to IDF readiness and effectiveness—to block any change to the existing institutional balance (Yanovskiy, 2025b; Yanovskiy and Zatcovetsky 2025).

A state in which centers of real power are unaccountable to voters and disavow responsibility for policy outcomes (as critics argue occurred in connection with the October 7 disaster, followed by the “*ata harosh, ata ashem*” [Hebrew: “you are the leader, you are guilty”] campaign) is not merely morally problematic; it is institutionally fragile and **dangerously inefficient**.

7. OCTOBER 7 AND BEYOND

7. 1. Military justice versus victory

In her March 9, 2024 interview with the business daily *Globes*⁶ – the Military Advocate General (MAG), Major-General Yifat Tomer-Yerushalmi, described how she and approximately 100 other lawyers established decisive control over every significant IDF operation and target beginning early on October 7, 2023. According to that account and several complementary sources (Yanovskiy and Zatcovetsky, 2025), legal oversight produced an immediate battlefield prohibition on the use of heavy weapons—artillery, tanks, combat jets, and helicopters—until a formal government decision was issued around 16:00. The ensuing delay contributed directly to excessive casualties and a dramatic increase in the number of soldiers and civilians taken hostage.

The existence and exercise of such legal control, critics contend, contradict—or at minimum seriously impedes—the achievement of military victory at reasonable cost and with effective deterrence.

In February 2024, Tomer-Yerushalmi circulated formal guidelines to the IDF titled “Fighting and Victory According to Law,” reinforcing this

⁶ <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001472972> (Hebrew)

approach.⁷ As MAG, she has actively advocated the extension and practical enforcement of disputed “international norms” as binding standards, reporting this stance at a July 2024 conference at the University of Haifa.

Jewish tradition (Pirkei Avot 2:4) teaches: “*Do not judge your fellow until you have reached his place.*” The perspective of a chief prosecutor whose career has been conducted exclusively within the military judiciary—most recently including service as the Chief of Staff’s advisor on gender affairs—does not directly convey the operational demands faced in combat. Yet, from this vantage point, prosecutors can assume authority over life-and-death decisions facing operational commanders.

Intensive intervention by military lawyers in operational decision-making has impeded the army’s ability to fight effectively. A further structural problem is the erosion of unity of command: the empowerment of legal authorities dilutes commanders’ direct responsibility for outcomes. Historical precedent illustrates these risks. In the Red Army, communist political commissars were authorized to override officers’ orders to maintain total political control. The practice proved so detrimental to effectiveness that it was largely abandoned in the early 1920s. After Stalin’s purges crippled the officer corps in 1937–1938, the system was briefly reinstated in 1941, only to be repealed again because it undermined command coherence and battlefield performance. Hard experience ultimately demonstrated that total political control could not be reconciled with the requirements of survival in war.

7. 2. Voluntary dependence on the United States

Shared responsibility for wartime decision-making—often a substitute for unified command—is inherently problematic. A salient example is Israel’s voluntary reliance on U.S. military assistance. This dependence has strengthened Benjamin Netanyahu’s domestic position, as he is widely viewed as the most experienced and capable politician in managing relations with Washington. Even so, such reliance is counterproductive even under friendly U.S. administrations and, given Israel’s current level of development, is difficult to justify—if it ever was.

⁷ https://ynet-pic1.yit.co.il/picsserver5/wcm_upload_files/2024/02/21/rJ4IL4XhT/.pdf
(Hebrew)

A frequently cited case is the U.S. emergency airlift (“Operation Nickel Grass”) during the Yom Kippur War. Anticipation of American assistance, critics argue, contributed to critical misjudgments: Prime Minister Golda Meir—the era’s most prominent figure in U.S.-Israel relations—delayed mobilization and rejected proposals for preemptive strikes against Egyptian forces in order to secure American support. It is instructive to recall that during the Six-Day War Israel enjoyed no special alliance commitments and nevertheless achieved decisive battlefield success.

This culture of dependence among Israeli political and military elites, the argument continues, has materially contributed to operational failures. It is corrosive and should be dismantled. U.S. military assistance programs ought to be replaced by ordinary arms trade and routine defense information-sharing among allies (see Yanovski, 2014). The ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine has likewise prompted parts of the European political class to recognize risks associated with a “junior-ally” mindset and dependency culture.

7. 3. The problem of the hostages

Historically, the Jewish tradition is extremely sensitive regarding captives. Redemption of captives is considered one of the main commandments. That said, traditional Jewish law prohibits paying an excessive price to redeem captives—that is, paying a price that provides an incentive to an adversary to capture more Jews (Maimonides, n.d.).

In modern Israel, however, this prohibition has effectively been ignored. After the Yom Kippur War in 1973, which claimed more than 2,500 dead, Israel essentially handed over most of the conquered lands, in addition to nearly 9,000 enemy prisoners of war (POWs), in exchange for 293 of its own POWs. The “captives-at-any-price” ethos culminated in the Shalit exchange (Harel and Issacharoff, 2011), when 1,027 Arab prisoners who had carried out attacks against Israeli civilians (many of them convicted of multiple murders) were released in exchange for a single corporal, Gilad Shalit.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas took 251 captives, some of them already dead. In broad terms, three positions then emerged in Israel regarding the desired end state of the war.

1. **Hostages first, at any cost.** Return all hostages even at the price of Israeli capitulation on all other fronts. This position had a small number of sincere advocates.
2. **Hostages with partial victory.** Return all hostages while achieving a limited defeat of Hamas. Almost all Israeli political actors publicly endorsed this position; however, with the exception of Prime Minister Netanyahu, few articulated a concrete path to achieve it, and Netanyahu's own approach relied on uncertain assumptions and entailed significant obstacles.
3. **Complete victory, even without hostages returned alive.** Pursue the total defeat of Hamas, accepting the possibility of concluding the war without recovering hostages. In the Knesset, this view was represented chiefly by Smotrich (with some reservations and exceptions), Ben-Gvir, and a small number of Likud members.

In practice, PM Netanyahu accomplished something politically remarkable: he appeared to deliver the outcome most of the Israeli public preferred—returning the hostages while retaining control of the Gaza perimeter and the Philadelphi Corridor, with Hamas ostensibly “standing down” and “transferring power.” Many on the Israeli right regard this as either the realistic maximum or, in some cases, a satisfactory outcome in itself.

Israel embarked on the longest and most difficult war in its history partly because it had internalized a “hostages-at-any-price” ethos, that culminated in the abovementioned Shalit deal. That deal contributed to the subsequent October 7 massacre not only because it freed Yahya Sinwar to become Hamas chairman and the chief organizer of the massacre, but because it signaled the price Israel was willing to pay for a single captive, from which Sinwar drew strategic conclusions.

Israel now exits the war believing it remained faithful to its hostage-centric values and nevertheless prevailed. Netanyahu secured the hostages' return while achieving what many perceive as a reasonable victory on other metrics.

This is, however, a profound moral tragedy: it artificially revives and entrenches a hierarchy of values centered on hostage recovery. The substantive criteria of victory appear increasingly distant from Israeli public consciousness. For most Israelis, classic components of decisive victory—seizing and holding territory, expelling the enemy, and establishing settlements—are no longer self-evident, even against a brutal adversary.

Many do not sense the tangible price paid, nor do they fully grasp why the enemy ultimately folded. The enemy folded because Israel was within reach of complete victory—a concept the enemy understands more readily than we do.

7. 4. The reason for cautious optimism: Our young lions

Young voters in Israel—including the majority of military personnel—traditionally (for decades) support national camp parties such as Likud and its coalition partners (Yanovskiy 2025a, Dahan, 2025). This voting pattern reflects Israel's unique political landscape, where the values rooted in Judeo-Christian (namely, Jewish) tradition and a conservative stance on key policy issues maintain robust support among younger generations, contrary to trends observed in many other Western nations. This phenomenon is partly attributable to the relatively limited effectiveness of socialist influences within Israel's educational system compared to those in other Western countries (Yanovskiy 2025a). Furthermore, Israel's demographic trends continue to favour conservative politics—particularly among the Jewish population (JPPI, 2025) —making Israel unusual among developed nations in sustaining population growth within its law-abiding communities⁸ of ready-to-fight responsible citizens.

8. WHY HAVE MANY RIGHT-WING CONSERVATIVES DRIFTED FROM THE PRO-ISRAEL CAUSE SINCE OCTOBER 7?

Our analysis also suggests an answer to the question many people ask: “Why did so many conservatives become anti-Israel after October 7?” Our answer is the opposite of what is usually claimed: they did not leave us because we were too cruel, but for precisely the opposite reason.

Historically, many Americans—especially conservatives—expressed strong enthusiasm for Israel's military successes. After the June 1967 victory, for example, public support remained high even in the wake of the USS Liberty incident, in which 34 U.S. Navy personnel were killed and 171 wounded (Oren 2000). One principal reason for this enthusiasm was a broadly shared cultural admiration for winners—an attitude that also helps

⁸ <https://www.cbs.gov.il/en/subjects/Pages/Population.aspx>;
<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-elections-future-far-right-youth-increasingly>

explain the limited sustained attention to episodes such as the Liberty tragedy. This was not the only factor, but it was significant.

From the vantage point of an external observer, developments since October 7, 2023, appeared to many conservatives as a departure from that earlier pattern. Israel and the IDF failed to protect civilians for much of the first day, and the government and General Staff did not immediately declare maximalist objectives—such as the complete destruction of Hamas, conquest of the Gaza Strip, deportation of hostile populations, or annexation and Jewish repopulation of Gaza. Because Islamist movements are comparatively insensitive to civilian casualties yet highly responsive to territorial loss, only military action that results in the forfeiture of territory (e.g., of what is viewed as *Dār al-Islām*) is read by their base as unequivocal defeat and thus generates strong deterrence. Instead, Israeli leaders initially promised a limited operation without intent to conquer or annex the Strip.

Some conservative voters—particularly those who valorize unambiguous demonstrations of strength—might have continued to view Israel as a resolute, victorious ally had Israel imposed a genuine siege (including strict controls on water and food), and retaliated with overwhelming force, inflicting heavy costs for each Israeli murdered or kidnapped. In their view, indecisive statements and actions after October 7 undermined Israel's image of resolve and contributed to a sense that Israel had become a weakened, high-maintenance ally.

Market-oriented conservative media figures (notably Tucker Carlson, Candace Owens, and others) appeared to recognize an opportunity to appeal to these disenchanted voters by distancing themselves from Israel and, at times, echoing narratives alleging “genocide” or “starvation.” Their claims of “academic neutrality,” critics argue, are secondary to this strategic repositioning.

It is also noteworthy that major U.S. Jewish donors—even those considered conservative—have generally not offered clear, public support for “decisive” end-states (e.g., conquest, annexation, deportation, and Jewish repopulation of Gaza). This donor reticence has reinforced perceptions among parts of the conservative base that political and financial elites favor policies unlikely to succeed.

Accordingly, “leaving the pro-Israel cause” does not necessarily imply abandoning Israel per se. Rather, it often reflects a break with particular politicians, donors, and advocacy networks perceived as advancing ineffective or untenable strategies. The reluctance of key donors to endorse forceful courses of action has become an important factor in the shifting

alignments and support structures for Israel within American conservative circles.

9. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, we can propose the following reforms that should be implemented in order to cope with present and foreseeable challenges.

A victory-oriented military culture should be rebuilt. Professional training and promotion should privilege combat effectiveness, initiative, and deterrence restoration over bureaucratic compliance.

Territorial defeat of the adversary should be clearly defined as a goal in any campaign. Against actors motivated by religious-territorial claims and insensitive to human cost, deterrence can be achieved only through the adversary's visible loss of control over land. Comprehensive relocation, or at least prolonged occupation, is necessary to dismantle the social-ideological infrastructure of violence.

Military justice should be reframed. The value of adversaries' lives is negative. The application of unratified norms whose battlefield effects are systematically exploited by adversaries (e.g., human-shield tactics) should be stopped immediately. *A priori* legal micromanagement should be replaced with *a posteriori* accountability focused on clearly defined, practicable standards.

Dependence on the U.S. should be reduced drastically. Israel should move away from receiving aid to a normal allied relationship based on arms trade and information-sharing. Independence improves freedom of action, the credibility of threats, and the clarity of internal decision-making.

Policy regarding hostages should be clearly formulated. Future policy must not price captives at the level of strategic self-binding. The release of hostages should be pursued primarily through victory-oriented campaigns rather than by trading away coercive leverage.

Governance should be reformed for accountability. The power of unelected legal-bureaucratic bodies that bear no responsibility should be transferred back to elected authorities.

Taken together, these steps realign Israel's institutions, command culture, and strategy with the timeless wartime objective: decisive victory that restores deterrence, lowers long-run costs, and secures the state and its citizens.

Implementing the aforementioned reforms, no matter how logical and well supported by historical experience, seems to depend entirely on a major change in Israeli society:

We should move beyond the “achieved-goal syndrome” by adhering to Israel’s foundational mission to fix the world under the kingdom of the Almighty.

The long-term trend of increasing representation of religious national-conservatives among young voters in Israel, driven by sustained demographic dynamics, is fostering growing support for the policy proposals discussed above. As Theodor Herzl (1902) famously wrote: “If you will it, it is no dream.”

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