

Decision Points Podcast: Season 5

The Gaza War and Its Aftermath

by [David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Brief Analysis

Part of a series: [Decision Points Podcast \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/decision-points-podcast\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/decision-points-podcast)

or see Part 1: [Decision Points Podcast: Season 1 The U.S.-Israel Relationship \(/policy-analysis/decision-points-podcast-season-1-us-israel-relationship\)](#)

In this season of *Decision Points*, Institute Senior Fellow David Makovsky will examine the Hamas-Israel war and its long-term implications for Israeli society, U.S.-Israel relations, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and more.

The new season of *Decision Points* dives into the complex and consequential issues facing Israel, the United States, and the Middle East amid the Gaza war. In each episode, senior diplomats, expert analysts, and prominent scholars will join host David Makovsky—The Washington Institute’s Ziegler Distinguished Fellow and director of its [Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations \(/node/15981\)](#)—to unpack the Gaza war and assess the road ahead. Topics will include U.S.-Israel relations, the future of the IDF, the conflict with Hezbollah, and more.

Episode 1: Allies Under Pressure: The Gaza War and U.S.-Israel Relations

The ten months since October 7 have revealed profound strengths and strains in the U.S.-Israel partnership. Are the current tensions a temporary consequence of the Gaza war, or do they represent a new and enduring divide between the two allies? In this episode, [Dennis Ross \(/node/10670\)](#) joins David Makovsky on the eve of Prime Minister Netanyahu’s record fourth address to Congress to discuss the history of the bilateral relationship and its future trajectory. Ross is the Counselor and William Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute. He previously worked for every president between Reagan and Obama and was the point man for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in the Clinton and George H.W. Bush administrations. David and Dennis have co-authored two books on Israel: [Myths, Illusions, and Peace \(/node/7078\)](#) and [Be Strong and of Good Courage \(/node/1592\)](#).

Episode 2: A New Calculus for War? Understanding Israel-Hezbollah Dynamics

In recent weeks, Israel's mid-intensity conflict with the Iran-backed Lebanese terrorist Hezbollah has threatened to explode into all-out war. With Israel ramping up its targeted killings of top militia commanders and Hezbollah launching rockets and drones ever further across the border, is total war inevitable? What will it take to deliver peace or stability in the long term and restore a sense of security to border residents? In this episode, Amos Harel and Hanin Ghaddar join host David Makovsky to discuss the state of play on Israel's northern border, the probability of all-out war with Hezbollah, and options for diplomacy and de-escalation. Harel is a seasoned military analyst for *Haaretz* and a leading expert on Israeli defense and security issues. Ghaddar, a native of al-Ghazieh, Lebanon, is the Friedmann Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and co-creator of its [interactive map](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/mapping-clashes-along-israel-lebanon-border) (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/mapping-clashes-along-israel-lebanon-border>) tracking clashes along the Israel-Lebanon.

Episode 3: How Has Israeli Society Changed After 300+ Days of War?

Israeli society underwent a massive shock on October 7 that upended deeply held convictions about the army and the state. The horrors of the attack and the immediate demands of war unified Israelis at a time of deep division, but the intervening months have tested this cohesion. How has the attack and resultant war changed Israelis? What is needed to carry the country through this challenging period and build a stronger, more integrated society? In this episode, renowned author and journalist Yossi Klein Halevi joins host David Makovsky to discuss these questions and the path forward. Yossi Klein Halevi is a senior fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem and author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor* (<https://www.amazon.com/Letters-Palestinian-Neighbor-Yossi-Halevi/dp/0062844911>), among other books. He cohosts *For Heaven's Sake*, a podcast on sociopolitical trends in Israel, diaspora relations, and the collective consciousness of being Jewish.

Episode 4: Can the Gaza War Bridge the Secular-Haredi Military Draft Divide?

The wartime demands of Israel's longest military conflict since 1948 have strained the army, reopening the debate over the ultraorthodox draft and the country's broader secular-religious fault lines. The Haredim had enjoyed a

blanket exemption from military service since Israel's founding, but a June 25 Supreme Court decision overturned that status quo. In the weeks since then, 3,000 draft orders have been sent out to members of the Haredi community. Will the ongoing crisis create opportunity?

In this episode of *Decision Points*, two unique and prominent voices from the secular and Haredi communities—Yohanan Plesner and Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer—join host David Makovsky to discuss how the Gaza war could narrow this divide in Israeli society, finding points of divergence and common ground. Plesner is president of the Israel Democracy Institute and a former member of the Knesset with the Kadima Party. Pfeffer is editor-in-chief of *Tzarich Iyun*, a Haredi thought magazine, and former head of the Haredi division at the Tikvah Fund.

Episode 5: Middle East Crisis Moment: Stakes for the U.S.-Israel Security Relationship

The Middle East is at a crucial moment, with Iran and Hezbollah threatening dual retaliatory attacks against Israel that could tip the region into total war. Yet a breakthrough in the Gaza hostage-for-ceasefire negotiations in Doha, initiated by the United States, Qatar, and Egypt, may delay or avert those attacks and create a turning point in the Hamas-Israel war. In any scenario, this moment of crisis will test the resolve of the U.S.-Israel security relationship. Will it create opportunities as well?

In this episode of *Decision Points*, Dana Stroul and Amos Gilead join host David Makovsky to discuss the implications of this key moment for the bilateral relationship and the wider region. Stroul is the director of research and Kassen Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and former deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Middle East, the Pentagon's top civilian official with responsibility for the region. Gilead is executive director of the Institute for Policy and Strategy at Reichman University, former head of research for IDF Military Intelligence, and former director of policy and political-military affairs at Israel's Ministry of Defense.

Episode 6: Evolution of Hamas: Terror, Policy and Politics

When Hamas launched the deadliest terrorist attack in Israel's history last October, it was in keeping with the group's longstanding dedication to destroying the Jewish state. How has Hamas evolved over the past few decades, from its transformation into a Sunni Islamist military and sociopolitical movement, to its takeover of Gaza in 2006, and throughout the current war? On this episode, Ghaith al-Omari and Ehud Yaari join host David Makovsky to discuss the group's past adaptations, future prospects, and the rise of its current leader, Yahya al-Sinwar.

Ghaith al-Omari is the Gilbert Foundation Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute, former executive director of the American Task Force on Palestine, and former advisor to the Palestinian Authority, among other senior positions. Ehud Yaari is the Institute's Lafer International Fellow and a leading Israeli commentator, most recently

with Channel 12 television.

Episode 7: Back to School: Lessons from New Study on Israel and Campus Narratives

In the wake of rising campus tensions over the Hamas-Israel war, Jewish students have faced increasing hostility, with a reported 700 percent spike in antisemitic incidents since October 7. As colleges reopen for the fall, a recent survey found that almost one-third of students feel hostility toward Israel. What drives such animosity, and how do controversial academic theories shape and inform these movements? On this episode, host David Makovsky is joined by experts Leonard Saxe and Uriel Abulof, who use data-driven insights and research to answer these questions and give context to recent survey findings.

Leonard Saxe directs the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and the Steinhardt Social Research Institute at Brandeis University, where he coauthored its recent report on campus antisemitism. Uriel Abulof is an associate professor at Tel Aviv University and a visiting professor at Cornell University. His recent books include *The Mortality and Morality of Nations* ([https://www.princeton.edu/~uabulof/Abulof%20-%20The%20Mortality%20and%20Morality%20of%20Nations%20\(TOC,%20Introduction,%20Index\).pdf](https://www.princeton.edu/~uabulof/Abulof%20-%20The%20Mortality%20and%20Morality%20of%20Nations%20(TOC,%20Introduction,%20Index).pdf)) and *Living on the Edge: The Existential Uncertainty of Zionism* (<https://truman.huji.ac.il/publications/living-edge-existential-uncertainty-zionism>), which received the prestigious Bahat Prize.

Episode 8: Israel's Wartime Economy: Navigating Crisis and Beyond

Although Israel's economy has weathered crises before, the past eleven months of multifront war have pushed its resilience to the limit. Soaring military expenditures, plummeting tourism, and the costs of compensating reserve soldiers and displaced citizens have all taken a toll on economic growth. How much of this turbulence stems from the war itself, and to what extent have policy missteps worsened the situation? More important, what does the path to economic recovery look like?

In this episode of *Decision Points*, host David Makovsky is joined by Karnit Flug, the vice president of research at the Israel Democracy Institute and former governor of the Bank of Israel, where she earned recognition as one of the world's top central bankers. Together, they discuss Israel's wartime economy, the challenges ahead, and the resilience of the Israeli people.

Episode 9: Ring of Fire: Iran's Proxy Network Against Israel and How to Disrupt It

Since Israel's founding in 1948, it has never faced a reality quite like this: seven active combat fronts in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, the West Bank, Gaza, and Yemen. This multifront threat was the vision of Qasem Soleimani, the late Iranian general who referred to it as a "ring of fire" designed to suffocate Israel with proxy attacks on all sides. Now that this vision has been realized, how do Iran's broader regional ambitions align with the local interests of these proxies? And what can the United States and Israel do to counter the power and resilience of these groups?

In this episode of *Decision Points*, host David Makovsky welcomes three experts to help unpack Iran's proxy network and its broader geopolitical implications. Michael Knights is a senior fellow at The Washington Institute and co-creator of its Militia Spotlight platform. Zohar Palti is the Institute's Viterbi International Fellow and former head of the Israeli Defense Ministry's Political-Military Bureau. Patrick Clawson is the Morningstar Senior Fellow at the Institute and director of its Viterbi Program on Iran and U.S. Policy.

Episode 10: 30 Years of Peace Under Pressure: Israel and Jordan in Regional Turmoil

The Israel-Jordan peace treaty of October 1994 endures as a diplomatic achievement, but it has been tested like never before by the Gaza war. Although bilateral coordination continues on energy, water, and security issues, popular Jordanian sympathy for the Palestinians has highlighted cracks in the relationship.

In this episode of *Decision Points*, host David Makovsky welcomes former Israeli, Jordanian, and U.S. officials to discuss the complexity of these bilateral dynamics, whether relations can be salvaged under the current Israeli government, and what both parties can do to rebuild mutual trust. Merissa Khurma is head of the Middle East program at the Wilson Center and formerly held various diplomatic positions with the Jordanian government. David Schenker, the Taube Senior Fellow and director of the Rubin Program on Arab Politics at The Washington Institute, formerly served as assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs at the U.S. State Department. Efraim Halevy, former director of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, was a key negotiator in forging peace with Jordan.

Episode 11: Iran, Israel, and Missiles: The Roots of Enmity and Escalation

Iran's recent ballistic missile attack on Israel marks a significant escalation in their longstanding enmity. As

tensions peak, the strategic, political, and ideological dimensions of their regional rivalry take on even greater importance, with Israel's defensive responses and Iran's aggressive stance setting the stage for potential further clashes.

In this episode of *Decision Points*, host David Makovsky is joined by two leading experts, Ray Takeyh and Meir Litvak, who delve into the roots of Iran's ideological hostility toward Israel, the regime's internal dynamics, and the manner in which Tehran's anti-Zionism has shaped its foreign policy. Takeyh is a senior fellow for Middle East studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, specializing in Iran, U.S. foreign policy, and the modern Middle East. Litvak, a professor at Tel Aviv University and director of the Alliance Center for Iranian Studies, brings decades of expertise in the intersection of religion, society, and politics in Iran, with a focus on Shia Islam and nationalism.

Episode 12: Hezbollah Decapitated? The War with Israel and Lebanon's Future

The past few weeks have been some of the most pivotal in Israel's history with Lebanon. Intelligence and operational successes have delivered devastating blows to Hezbollah's leadership, decapitating its senior command, including the infamous Hassan Nasrallah. With thousands displaced across northern Israel and Lebanon due to the conflict, tensions are high and rising.

In this episode of *Decision Points*, host David Makovsky is joined by leading experts Hanin Ghaddar and Matthew Levitt, who discuss Lebanon's internal dynamics amid the crisis, what it means for the future of Hezbollah, and the strategic and operational factors that underpin these developments. Ghaddar, the Friedmann Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute, has written extensively on Hezbollah's role in Lebanon's political system and Iran's growing influence in the region. Levitt, the Institute's Fromer-Wexler Senior Fellow and director of its Reinhard Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, previously served as deputy assistant secretary for intelligence and analysis at the U.S. Treasury Department. He recently published a new version of his landmark book *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God* (https://info.washingtoninstitute.org/acton/ct/19961/s-2585-2410/Bct/l-0097/l-0097:3f/ct1_0/1/lu?sid=TV2%3ATmB9z3rJs).

Episode 13: Trump and Harris Senior Advisors Contrast Visions for U.S. Middle East Policy

On November 5, Americans head to the polls to make a decision that will shape U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East for years to come. With the region at a pivotal juncture, the outcome of this election will have lasting implications for U.S.-Israel relations, broader Middle East diplomacy, the "day after" in Gaza, and numerous other issues.

In this episode, host David Makovsky is joined by distinguished experts Tom Nides and Victoria Coates. Nides served as U.S. ambassador to Israel during the Biden administration. Coates served as deputy national security advisor for the Middle East and North Africa under President Trump. Together, they provide a comprehensive look at each candidate's position on these important issues. Join us for a timely discussion on how the next U.S. administration could influence the region's future.

Episode 14: Post-Sinwar: Hostages, Succession, and Thwarting Hamas Revival

On October 16, an IDF infantry unit killed Yahya al-Sinwar, the architect of last year's Hamas attack on Israel. A central goal of the war effort, his death marks a significant turning point for Hamas leadership, hostage negotiations, and Palestinian society.

In this episode, host David Makovsky is joined by experts Ghaith al-Omari and Michael Milshtein, who explore the implications of this high-profile death on Hamas internal politics, regional power dynamics, and Israel's next steps in the conflict. Omari is the Gilbert Foundation Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute, former executive director of the American Task Force on Palestine, and a former advisor to the Palestinian Authority. Milshtein is head of the Palestinian Studies Forum at Tel Aviv University and former advisor on Palestinian affairs for IDF Military Intelligence.

Episode 15: Israel and Iran Tensions: Calculating Risk Amid Conflict

The weeks since October 1 have seen significant Israeli strikes on Iranian targets and a weakening of Tehran's proxy network. At the same time, Israel is stretched across multiple fronts, challenging its traditional military doctrine of short, decisive wars and increasing its reliance on U.S. resupply. With Iran reeling from the damage and Israel adopting a bold defensive posture, the coming weeks will be critical, and the risk of a broader conflict will grow. How might Israel respond to further Iranian retaliation, and what might this mean for its policy toward Tehran's nuclear infrastructure? Could the conflict evolve into a war of attrition, or will Israel use its momentum to push for decisive action?

To explore these questions, host David Makovsky is joined by two experts: Karim Sadjadpour, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, specializing in Iran and U.S. policy in the Middle East; and Assaf Orion, the Rueven International Fellow with The Washington Institute and former head of the Israel Defense Forces Strategic Planning Division.

Episode 16: Will the Israel-Lebanon Ceasefire Hold?

When President Biden announced a ceasefire after more than a year of intense fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, hopes were raised that the agreement could save lives, restore stability, and end the escalation that began with the Gaza war. Yet many questions were raised as well: How did the ceasefire come about, and how does it compare to the conclusion of the 2006 Lebanon war? Is Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu accurate in assessing that Israeli military action has set Hezbollah back decades? Will the ceasefire mark a shift in Israel's broader security strategy or Iran's regional calculus?

To unpack these critical questions, host David Makovsky is joined by Amos Harel, a leading Israeli military analyst and senior correspondent for Haaretz. Amos has extensively covered Israel's northern front and is a keen observer of the country's military strategies and security leadership.

Episode 17: How War, Ceasefires, and Trump's Arrival Are Reshaping the Middle East

The past few weeks in the region have been some of the most eventful in recent history. Hezbollah, the crown jewel of Iran's proxy network, has suffered a devastating blow, Iran's air defense systems have been dismantled, and a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon has been established. At the same time, the election of former president Donald Trump has introduced an entirely new level of unpredictability, sending shockwaves throughout the region.

How is the war reshaping perceptions within the Middle East, particularly regarding the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire? How does the concept of Iran's "ring of fire" hold up in this new reality? What does Saudi Arabia's approach to normalization with Israel mean for its leadership and the future of Gaza? And how are these shifting dynamics influenced by the Trump administration?

On this episode of *Decision Points*, David Makovsky is joined by Bernard Haykel, a leading authority on Middle Eastern politics, religion, and society, and someone who has spent more time with Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman (MBS) than perhaps any American over the last decade. Bernard will soon be releasing his book on MBS, and as a scholar with a personal connection to the region—having grown up during Lebanon's civil war—he brings a unique insider perspective on the Middle East's complexities.

Episode 18: After Assad: Navigating Syria's Power Vacuum and Regional Fallout

After just a few days of fighting, Bashar al-Assad's regime has fallen, and Assad has fled to Russia. However, the collapse of the Syrian regime is far from a fairytale ending. The rebels responsible for toppling Assad, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), are designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, and history shows that power vacuums in the Middle East often lead to prolonged instability and conflict.

HTS currently holds a dominant position, but Syria's balance of power remains precarious. Competing factions are poised to challenge HTS, creating a volatile security landscape. Meanwhile, the fall of the Assad regime has significant implications for Israel. Syria has been a critical component of the Iranian axis, serving as a conduit for weapons and illicit materials to reach the West Bank and Jordan.

At this critical juncture, the future of Syria hangs in the balance. How much influence will Russia, Turkey, and Iran exert in shaping Syria's trajectory? Who will ultimately fill the power vacuum? And what role will the United States and Israel play in this tense and rapidly evolving environment?

In this episode of *Decision Points*, David Makovsky is joined by Andrew J. Tabler and Tamir Hayman. Tabler, a senior fellow at The Washington Institute, previously served as Senior Advisor to the Special Envoy for Syria Engagement at the State Department and as Director for Syria Affairs at the White House National Security Council. Hayman, the current Director of INSS—Israel's leading national security think tank—served as Head of IDF Intelligence, focusing on Iranian entrenchment in Syria, and previously led efforts to provide humanitarian assistance in southern Syria.



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Lebanon Ceasefire: Status and Prospects of the Israel-Hezbollah Truce

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Khalil Helou,
Tal Kelman,
Hanin Ghaddar

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