Israel and Its 'Near Abroad' After the October Election

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Articles & Testimony

Israel does not seem to be planning any major new security steps before the vote to address tensions with Gaza, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, or Turkey, and that same caution may linger with the next government—but for how long?

A new Israeli election could open the door to different Israeli policies towards its near abroad conflicts and tensions, from Gaza and Lebanon to Syria, Turkiye and Iran. Much depends on the nature of any new Israeli government, and American success in neutralising current sources of conflict all around Israel. That said, post-October 7 Israel, regardless of what might or might not change in its political leadership, is likely to act much more quickly to protect its security under almost any circumstances.

A poll in the Israeli daily *Haaretz* reported on 14 September that 68% of Israelis believe issues related to the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack will be central to the Israeli national elections on 27 October. Consequently, Israeli actions both before and after the election on security questions in Israel's 'near abroad'—Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and further afield, Turkiye and Iran—will be guided by popular perceptions of October 7's lessons, and by the specific government coalition that assumes power after the elections.

The impact of October 7 on Israelis was far greater even than that of Pearl Harbour or 9/11 on Americans. First, proportionally, a much larger number of Israelis were killed or taken hostage than in those American tragedies. Furthermore, unlike Pearl Harbour or 9/11, Israel's existence, at least in anything like its pre-October 7 dimensions, was at risk, certainly if Iran and its other proxies joined battle on October 7 rather than ad seriatim later. That reality decisively shapes Israeli threat perceptions and security policy.

The current Israeli security worldview widely shared among Israeli military professionals and much of the population is that Israel cannot take chances. Threats must be dealt with before they can reach Israeli soil, and

potential foes must be countered based on their stated positions re: Israel and capabilities, not on imperfect subjective Israeli analysis of foes' intentions, which failed dramatically on October 7.

The result has been Israeli offensive action in Gaza, even after the Trump ceasefire, as well as in Lebanon, throughout Syria, and against Iran, while simultaneously making rhetorical diplomatic (with Greece and Cyprus) and even military moves in Syria against rival Turkiye. Whatever the short-term military benefits from such aggressive action, Israel's broader security interests are challenged by such actions, as they have dramatically undercut diplomatic support—support no state can simply ignore indefinitely.

Within the region, Israel has not been this isolated since 1948, with the two other strong American partners in the region, Turkiye and Saudi Arabia, moving away from earlier productive relations with Israel. Meanwhile, significant elements in both American political parties have become alienated, at least against the current government, but even against Israel as a whole.

While the Trump administration in many areas has been supportive, the president and top officials have expressed concerns about Israel's behaviour with Turkiye, and in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria. Meanwhile, as Israel focuses attention on its near abroad and on a largely solvable rivalry with Ankara, Iran, the only true threat to Israeli existence, slowly rebuilds its position in the region.

Again, much of the Israeli behaviour can be traced back to October 7. But the current composition of the Israeli government—reluctant to compromise on issues related to Israel's new security worldview, and with an apparent priority to show no weakness before the elections—blocks any reconsideration of Israel's policies, in the view of many observers. After the election, however, a different government and the absence of election pressure might open the door to new approaches on these Israeli security positions.

Potential Election Outcomes

Hardly any democratic state has a more complicated electoral or party landscape than Israel, and thus outsiders, or even knowledgeable Israelis, cannot predict the outcome of any election or the path to a new coalition government. However, certain general outcomes, and their possible impact on security issues, can be advanced as below.

Election outcomes could vary considerably, from a period of weak coalitions as before 2022 to a more moderate coalition without Prime Minister Netanyahu—one with fewer hard-right ministers, or something like the current coalition. Once a government is in place, there will be considerable pressure to continue current policies, though likely not to escalate further.

Any new government could also try more moderate approaches, but what that would look like is hard to predict. Even with his current coalition partners, Prime Minister Netanyahu accepted President Trump's Gaza ceasefire in 2025, and President Biden's in Lebanon in 2024. And even a more middle-road Israeli government could well be constrained by the post-October 7 Israeli security worldview discussed above.

Near-Abroad Scenarios and Threats

For various reasons, Israel does not seem to be planning any major new security steps before the elections that could either reinforce or undercut ceasefires in Gaza and Lebanon, or calm or exacerbate tensions with Syria or Turkiye. Chances are fairly good that under any of the above new government scenarios, that same caution will continue initially. The larger question is what, if any, steps Israel post-October might take to calm the near abroad without endangering its core security elements. Below is a breakdown of possible scenarios by area.

On Gaza and Lebanon, Israel faces complicated next steps following its military victories, almost total in Gaza and limited in Lebanon. In both cases, the United States will press a new government to move forward on the ceasefires

already negotiated with significant Washington involvement.

In Gaza, Hamas has at least theoretically agreed to Trump's Phase II peace plan, and the Board of Peace set up by that plan and endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2803 argues that it is ready to advance initial police training and deployment, international security force standup, and local Palestinian administration, step by step if Israel and Hamas stick with the plan.

Israelis, however, have serious doubts about Hamas' willingness to truly disarm and hand over governmental control. Questions on what will happen to weapons seized from Hamas, and the capabilities of the various international organs foreseen in the plan, add to understandable Israeli determination that any pullback does not lead to another October 7.

The situation in Lebanon is even more complicated. The ceasefire agreement is between Israel and the Lebanese government, not with Hezbollah, which claims to reject it and refuses to disarm. Israel has grave doubts about the capability and even intent of both the Lebanese Armed Forces and the government itself to secure areas Israel withdraws from, the central pillar of the entire agreement.

With the new post-Assad government in Syria, the situation is more stable following, first, the escalatory Israeli strike on a Syrian base close to the Turkish border, based on reports that Turks had plans for the base, and, second, talks in Jordan brokered by Washington between Syria and Israel to calm the situation.

While there is distrust on both sides, the Syrians, facing extraordinary problems on every front, want to de-escalate the situation with Israel. Neither country has overarching conflicting security interests, and thus a return to the 1974 Israel-Syria Agreement and an Israeli military withdrawal from areas seized after Assad fell would be theoretically possible post-election.

But Israel has significant security concerns it would need to address. These include the fate of the Druze, with many relatives in Israel; Israeli operational flexibility in Syrian airspace for Iran contingencies; and the imperatives of its security worldview. More generally, Israel does not quite know what to make of al-Sharaa and his former al-Nusra allies and their strong Islamist beliefs. Nor, given larger tensions with Turkiye noted below, can Israel rest easy given the close relationship between Damascus and Ankara. That said, the collapse of Iran's strongest ally, Assad, is a blessing for Israeli security.

In short, probably any government will maintain calm absent some untoward Syrian event, but the US will have to push hard with an Israeli government more willing to resolve near-abroad issues to get back to something like the 1974 agreement. And finally, there is the Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights, which impedes a full reconciliation of the two states.

While by far the bigger threat, Iran may be the easier of the two "near peer" challenges Israel faces in the region to manage at least in the near future. The US now has the lead in the Iran conflict following the early 2026 joint Israeli-American strikes on Iran. As long as the US keeps working to contain Iran, Israel is unlikely to pursue a policy at odds with Washington. However much Israelis might question specific American decisions, Israel knows it cannot easily deal with Iran without the US.

Turkiye may be the most difficult near-abroad challenge. On the plus side, there is no immediate military-to-military standoff to de-escalate. But that can work against resolving larger issues, as experience in implementing mutually beneficial deconfliction and ceasefires can build trust and communication, which are very much lacking now between the two states.

Both, however, fiercely defend their near abroad and are fundamentally status quo powers, unlike Iran. They accept the regional order, and both prioritise close ties with Washington. But the tension between them begins with the

reality that, with Iran at least temporarily a wounded predator, Turkiye and Israel are by far the two most powerful and recently most militarily successful states in the region. That generates inherent tension, even though they do not have significant opposing security interests. These tensions were long fed by personal animosity between the two current leaders, but even more by Erdogan's and much of his population's support for the Palestinians and criticism of Israel's Gaza war operations.

The Assad regime served as a physical and military buffer between the two states, but that buffer is now gone, and both states are now reaching out in various ways to influence Damascus. Given the catastrophe for the entire region if these two pillars of stability were to enter anything like open conflict, Washington has a primary interest in calming relations between the two. A change in top leadership in either country could reduce some immediate friction, but underlying beliefs in both countries can generate conflict if not managed well by all.

James Jeffrey is the Philip Solondz Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute. Previously, he served as U.S. special representative for Syria and U.S. ambassador to Turkey and Iraq, among other posts. This article was originally published ***on Al Majalla's website*** **(https://en.majalla.com/node/333242/politics/israel-and-near-abroad-after-october-elections)** . ❖

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