

Invited Paper

Netanyahu's Bloody Endgame Seeks a Future Israel with a Minimum Palestinian Presence

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In the face of mounting global criticism, Israel is stepping up its military offensive in Lebanon, continuing its genocidal violence against the Palestinians and even intensifying its attacks on the Houthis in Yemen.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu holds maps as he speaks during the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly at the United Nations headquarters in New York City on September 27, 2024, that erase all traces of a Palestinian claim to statehood and the exercise of their right of self-determination. (AFP)

Israel in the year since the Hamas-led attacks on October 7 has insisted that it is motivated only by anti-terrorist and self-defense goals in its original pledge to exterminate Hamas, and more recently expanded by the commitment to destroy Hezbollah as a credible adversary and possibly occupy a buffer zone in southern Lebanon, and in the process weaken its most feared adversary, Iran.

Israel's political discourse has cast Hamas, Hezbollah, and Yemen's Houthis as proxies for arch-enemy Iran, which stands accused of being the main enabler of "anti-Israeli terrorism" in the

Middle East, a coalition of militias and political groups in the Middle East, most on Western lists of terrorist organization. These movements, linked in uncertain ways to Iran, and less so Syria and Iraq, are demonized by Western governments as illegitimate components of an illegitimate 'axis of resistance.' The use of the word 'axis' recalls World War II propaganda speaking of the enemies of the West as 'axis powers' and the Cold War derogatory reference to the Soviet Union and its allies as 'the axis of evil.' Western public discourse strives to occupy the high moral ground, which was a challenge during the anti-colonial wars of the 1950s to 1980s and in the latter stages of the Cold War. Western moral hegemony is currently under siege as a result of Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza and beyond that enjoyed military, economic, and diplomatic support of the Western liberal democracies.

Casting new dark clouds over the observance of the grim anniversary of October 7 is the Gaza-like onslaught carried out by Israel. These have included in recent months attacks against alleged Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon, extending to the Hezbollah controlled neighborhoods of south Beirut, as well as periodic high-profile and provocative assassinations and bombardments in Iran, Syria, and Iraq.

This latest phase of Israeli hyper-violence culminated in the deadly pager/radio attacks followed by the assassination of Hezbollah's longtime leader, Hassan Nasrallah on September 28. And this was one year after the United Nations Secretary General spoke of the world as "becoming unhinged as geopolitical tensions rise." In an unprecedented symbolic act of defiance Israel exhibited its defiance of the UN, international law, and global public opinion by declaring Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General, as a 'persona non-grata' in Israel.

Amid this preoccupation with daily reports of atrocities and severe, massive civilian suffering, a core question is recently being posed in reaction to the prolonged excessiveness and expansions of Israeli violence. This behavior is aggravated by Israel's stubborn refusal to accept the near universal call at the UN and elsewhere for a Gaza ceasefire tied to a hostage/prisoner swap deal:

What is Israel's strategic objective that is worth this much sacrifice in its global reputation as a dynamic and legitimate, if controversial, state? Has Israel already become a pariah or rogue state outside of the Global West? If not, why not?

And, lurking behind this unnerving question is a related anxious query: Does Israel have an endgame that might vindicate, at least in its eyes, this self-sacrifice? This comes along with a sullen acceptance of the criminal stigma of credible allegations of apartheid and genocide, as well as the laundry list of crimes against humanity and its crude defamation of the United Nations.

Netanyahu's Endgame

On September 27, 2024, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appeared in New York to deliver an angry, arrogant speech before a UN General Assembly. Netanyahu blended bitterness toward Israel's UN critics and assessments with a vision of a peaceful future that seemed better interpreted as a delusional Israel victory speech that was oblivious to the heavy costs Israel will pay in the future.

In an fiery display of diversionary invective, Netanyahu began his remarks by referring to the UN as "a swamp of anti-Semitic bile," a racist filter through which any allegation against Israel, however perverse, could gain "an automatic majority." Netanyahu railed against this UN bias against the world's only Jewish-majority state "in this flat-earth society." Such an allegation implied that Israel as the only Jewish state was incapable of doing wrong internationally. Indeed, if any serious charges were mounted against Israel, no matter how well evidenced, they should be dismissed as nothing more than one more instance of antisemitic racist barbs. Throughout Netanyahu's harangue there was not a single word of regret or even the slightest show of self-criticism.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks during the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly at the United Nations headquarters in New York City on September 27, 2024. (AFP)

It was in this strained atmosphere that Netanyahu chose to announce his grandiose vision of an Israeli endgame that he claimed would alone bring peace and prosperity to the region. What Netanyahu presented to the almost empty UN chamber (because so many delegates had protest his speech) was a geopolitical package tied together with the verbiage of "the blessings of peace."

Netanyahu's plan was essentially a manifesto in which stage one involved the destruction of Israel's active adversaries, the supposed proxies of Iran. It is worth observing that countries friendly to the West are viewed as 'allies' while adversaries are demeaned as 'proxies.'

It was to be followed by a stage two "historic peace agreement with Saudi Arabia," presented as a dramatic sequel to the Abraham Accords reached in the last period of Donald Trump's presidency four years ago.

These words celebrating the emergence of "a new Middle East" were hyped by Netanyahu, who said, "what blessings such a peace with Saudi Arabia would bring." Other than those who wanted to be fooled by such an envisioned endgame, informed persons realized it was little other than a crude example of state propaganda with little chance of happening anytime soon and almost no prospect of delivering a bright, peaceful, prosperous future to the peoples of the region.

Netanyahu displayed a map of his new Middle East that assigned no presence to Palestinian statehood, even though Saudi Arabia had recently indicated that it would not establish peace with Israel until a Palestinian state existed.

Such an omission was not an oversight. The Netanyahu coalition with the far-right religious parties led by such extremists as National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich would collapse the instant any genuine commitment to Palestinian statehood was officially endorsed. It is impossible to believe that Netanyahu was unaware of this constraint, and so it seems unlikely, to put it mildly, that he expected any enthusiasm even in Washington for his vision of a peace-building endgame. The US had long attempted to hide its Israeli partisanship behind a two-state mantra that was also a UN consensus that substituted piety for realism, and was a token of recognition of the justice of Palestinian grievances.

Probing Israel's Real Endgame

Underneath the public relations idea of Israel's endgame lays a worrisome reality. Even before the Netanyahu government took over at the beginning of 2023, it was evident that Israel's political agenda was in hot pursuit of a publicly undisclosed endgame that would complete the Zionist Project after a century of settler colonial striving by incorporating as much of incorporated Palestine as it could get away with by a combination of stealth and coercion.

This plan to thwart the UN partition consensus became clear as an openly endorsed goal when Israel's pre-Netanyahu government adopted a quasi-constitutional Basic Law in 2018. With it, Jewish supremacist rights were written into Israeli law as granting the right of self-determination exclusively to the Jewish people, establishing Hebrew as Israel's sole official language, and extending Israeli protective sovereignty to the occupied West Bank settlements that had been declared "unlawful" at numerous UN settings.

It was this legislative action by the Knesset that confirmed that the real Israeli endgame was a one-state solution widely known as "Greater Israel," a formula descriptive of extending Israel's sovereignty to encompass the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem in violation of international law and the UN consensus, including that of most Western countries.

Such a Basic Law cannot be changed in Israel, which lacks a written constitution, by normal legislative action, but only by a later Basic Law overriding the earlier enactment.

When the Netanyahu coalition took over in January 2023 there were provocative signs that this 2018 Basic Law would be coercively expedited as Israel's number-one priority. It was initially signaled by the informal, yet unmistakable, greenlighting of settler violence in the occupied West Bank with the pointed frequently articulated message to Palestinian residents: "leave or we will

kill you." This violence was tolerated by the IDF, which on some occasions joined in, without even producing a fake censure from Tel Aviv.

In September 2023, Netanyahu's UN speech featuring a map of the region with no Palestine was reinforced by feverish diplomatic efforts to secure an Abrahamic normalization with some Arab states, further indications to establish so-called "Greater Israel." These acts along with provocations at the Al Aqsa Mosque compound helped set the stage for the Hamas-led attack on October 7, an event itself now veiled in ambiguity that can only be removed by an international investigation.

Miscalculations on Both Sides

The world at first largely accepted, or at least tolerated, Israel's version of October 7, including its retaliatory rationale given a dubious international law cover as an exercise of the "right of self-defense."

As further information became available, the original Israeli rationalization for its response to October 7 became problematic. It was established that the Netanyahu leadership had received several reliable warnings of an imminent Hamas attack, which it apparently ignored or underestimated.

After months of reported Hamas training including rehearsals of the attacks, it strains credulity to accept the official version that Israel's world-class surveillance and intelligence capabilities did not detect the impending attack. Further, the immediate magnitude and severity of the Israeli response raised suspicions that Israel was seeking a pretext to induce the forced evacuation of Palestinians from Gaza, to be followed by their forced exit from the occupied West Bank. These developments established a credible prelude to the formal establishment of "Greater Israel," and the attainment of Israel's real endgame.

In retrospect, both Hamas and Israel seem to have seriously miscalculated. Israel seems to have counted on genocidal violence producing either political surrender by Hamas or a cross-border evacuation, and a new wave of Palestinian refugees.

Israel underestimated the stubborn, heroic Palestinian attachment to the land and to the indignity of being made unwanted strangers in their own homeland, even in the face of total devastation. Israelis undoubtedly anticipated the growth of hostile public opinion around the world after an initial grace period after October 7 that actually indulged Israeli violence, given the widely endorsed and accepted accounts of atrocities inflicted and hostages seized in the Hamas-led attack.

On its side, Hamas underestimated the ferocity of the Israeli response, apparently because it conceived of its attack in normal battlefield action and reaction patterns, and not linked to a culminating Israeli endgame scenario.

Israel's hollow claims of victory suggest that the Netanyahu coalition is now as committed as earlier to the "Greater Israel" endgame, with the enlargement of the combat zone to include Lebanon, and maybe even Syria and Iran, as parts of the Israeli endgame quietly enlarged to

include what is being called ‘restored deterrence,’ which is a polite way of expressing civilian massacre and disproportionate devastation.

Having endured so much pain, suffering, and loss, it is hard to envision any kind of acquiescence by the Palestinians, however decimated by the Israeli onslaught, of an endgame to the conflict that does not include the establishment of a viable Palestine political future. This could take the form of either a co-existing Palestinian state with full sovereign rights or a new safeguarded one-state confederation based on unconditional equality between these two peoples with respect to the totality of human rights.

In conclusion, the political conditions do not currently begin to exist for an endgame that would satisfy the minimum expectations of both peoples, but we should not overlook the cunning leverage of the Global West and the comparative passivity of the rest of the world, including the Global South, and even China and Russia.