A second extension of the truce, lasting one day, came into force early Thursday But the lull in fighting also sharpens the moral, political and military dilemmas that will play out in the almost inevitable return to fullscale hostilities including some apparent strategic and humanitarian differences of emphasis between the Biden administration and the Israeli government

While the truce has so far been surprisingly successful given that it is taking place with both Israel and Hamas seeking the others elimination there is an unmistakable sense that a fateful moment is approaching within days when Israel will decide on how long it can hold off its scorching military offensive

That means the debate about what happens next in Gaza is increasingly urgent, even as the US seeks to extend the pause in fighting in the medium term and Israel seeks to temper expectations of restraint in the days to comeThese profound questions are also taking place against a backdrop of deepening tragedy in a cruel war, even if the emergence of hostages has offered fleeting moments of joy amid the horror In one wrenching development on Wednesday, Israel said it was looking into a claim that the youngest Israeli hostage, 10monthold Kfir Bibas, his brother and his mother are no longer alive Uncertainty, meanwhile, surrounds the future of the remaining hostages, mostly male, that Israel believes remain in Gaza The humanitarian crisis in the territory is worsening with the World Health Organization warning that more Gazans could die from disease than bombing if an already rudimentary health service is not urgently repaired And as growing unrest rocks the occupied West Bank, the Israeli military killed two Palestinian children when it opened fire in the city of Jenin, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health the latest of more than 240 Palestinians that the ministry says have been killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers in the West Bank since October 7

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Will Israel listen to US pleas for a more surgical approach

Israel has made no secret of its aim since the October 7 Hamas terror attacks that killed 1,200 people the irrevocable eradication of the Islamist group designated by the US as a terror organization, which controls the Gaza Strip Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus government viewed the Hamas attacks as an existential threat to Israel and the Jewish people and argues it has no choice but to crush Hamas completelyThe Israeli leader on Wednesday dismissed the idea that the prolonged pause in fighting would make it more difficult strategically and morally for Israel to resume its relentless action against Hamas Over the past few days Ive been hearing this question will Israel go back to fighting after maximizing this phase of returning our hostages So my answer is unequivocal Yes, he said

But Israels initial assault on Hamas led to huge civilian carnage in the densely populated Palestinian enclave in the first phase of the war, sending tens of thousands of protesters into the streets in the US and across the world while heaping political pressure on President Joe Biden from inside his own electoral coalition

The likely prospect that a second wave Israeli offensive against Hamas strongholds in southern Gaza would be even more bloody now threatens to open gaps between Washington and Netanyahus government and military leaders CNNs MJ Lee, Jennifer Hansler and Katie Bo Lillis reported Wednesday that US officials, including Biden, told the Israelis they dont want to see a repeat of air strikes that led to massive destruction and terrible scenes of civilian casualties Israel must be more cautious, more careful, more deliberate and more precise in their targeting, one senior administration official saidIn the days after the October 7 attacks, Biden hugged Israel and Netanyahu close, traveling to the Jewish state to mourn with the victims of the horror Will the Israeli prime minister pay any more attention to Bidens entreaty to do more to protect Palestinian civilians than the passing consideration that he gave it in the first days of the conflict

This is an issue likely to lead to intense discussions on Thursday between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, whos in Israel, and top Israeli officials

Israels moral and military dilemmas

The Israeli government is being pulled in two directions that may be irreconcilable the desire to get all of the hostages back and the incentive to press on with its military operation after a pause that offered Hamas a chance to regroup and prepare for a new assaultAt home, the Israeli prime minister, beset by deep unpopularity after the surprise Hamas attacks, is also being pulled between growing political pressures from hostage families, who want their loved ones released, and his rightwing coalition members, who are advocating for harsh action amid frustration that the pause has allowed Hamas to use hostages to regain control of the tempo of the crisis And Netanyahu also faces the growing possibility of a clash between his desire to target Hamas and US anxiety over another round of huge civilian casualties in Gaza American support would be even more crucial for Israel in a second phase of fighting because foreign powers are likely to strongly criticize the Netanyahu government if it is seen to reignite hostilities

Israels heavyhanded military tactics are also coming under scrutiny amid fears that more civilian casualties will seed a new generation of fury against the Jewish state that will eventually translate into recruitment for extremist groups and terrorism

Retired US Army Lt Col Daniel Davis noted that the Israeli leader sees the elimination of Hamas as the key to bringing peace to Israel but warned, What he is doing with the military will not bring that peace He told Kasie Hunt on CNN Internationals State of the Race that Ive seen it myself in Afghanistan several times, to where the more Taliban you kill, the more the enemy, the more you make, especially when youre killing so many people

Israel says that it takes pains to avoid killing civilians Hamas has embedded its forces within the civilian population, using infrastructure like hospitals and apartment blocks as cover Senior Israeli figures argue that while Washington wants to see more forensic targeting of Hamas if the battle resumes, such an approach is not always feasible given conditions in Gazacivilians it sent to southern Gaza early in the war to head back north, one senior US official told CNN Multiple officials have also raised the need for the creation of safe zones for civilians in the south, CNN reported But there are practical difficulties with such a plan For one thing, swathes of northern Gaza have been devastated by the Israeli advance, as new drone footage of mile upon mile of buildings turned into rubble shows In an enclave surrounded by Israel and with the border to Egypt closed, there is nowhere for millions of people to go

While a debate is boiling over the tactics to be used in a second phase of the war, the very idea of starting the fighting again while hostages are still being held by Hamas is horrifying family members of those still held The pause in the fighting over the last week has offered both Netanyahu and Biden some political relief on this issue but that would end as soon as the guns begin firing

Yehuda Beinin the father of Liat Beinin, a dual USIsraeli national freed by Hamas on Wednesday voiced a growing concern among hostage families that the remaining hostages are not the first priority of Netanyahus government This naturally would create a great deal of fear that the hostages will again come under some kind of danger, as a result of renewed Israeli bombing, said Beinin, whose soninlaw Aviv Atzili, is still believed to be a hostage

Biden administration steps up diplomacy

The Biden administrations current priorities areA further extension of the truce

The release of all the hostages from Gaza

The alleviation of a horrendous humanitarian crisis in the enclave

Supporting Israels effort to prevent future terror attacks

Turning the focus toward postwar governance of Gaza ahead of an effort to tackle the longdormant question of diplomacy to halt the IsraelPalestinian conflict

Potential difficulties with Israel lie in the fact that such goals or their urgency may not always intersect with those of the Netanyahu government Biden has a huge stake in the conflict for humanitarian, political and geopolitical reasons The president noted in a statement on Wednesday that the US, along with Qatar, had been instrumental in negotiating the pause that had freed scores of hostages, and delivered substantial humanitarian aid to help the innocent people of Gaza

Bidens support for Netanyahu has cost him politically at home and abroad US foreign policy goals in the Arab world and elsewhere risk being compromised as governments react to outrage at the civilian death toll in Gaza Core initiatives like the bid to cement peace between Israel and Arab states have been seriously damaged Domestically, scenes of Palestinian deaths have split the Democratic Party and raised fears over whether younger and more progressive voters already cool toward Biden will show up in the numbers he needs in November 2024 Less of a concern, but still significant, are attacks from Republicans at the first sign he is trying to constrain Netanyahu

While there is no sense that unshakable US support for Israel is at risk, the real danger of growing differences between the two governments about the future conduct of the war could introduce new tensions into the relationship

The vital national interests of the United States and Israel are not always or irrevocably aligned So whether Netanyahu has political room to maneuver on military strategy or the inclination to ease some of the pressure on Biden will be closely watched in the coming days

How far will Israel go in testing Bidens loyalty, forbearance and political viability if the war heats up again And if push comes to shove, will Netanyahus desire to eliminate Hamas override all other considerations

The sevenday IsraelHamas truce ended on Friday after negotiations reached an impasse and Israel accused the Palestinian militant group of violating the agreement by firing at IsraelThe nearly eightweek war that preceded the lull in fighting caused widespread destruction and saw more than 14,800 people killed in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in the West Bank, which draws its data from Hamasrun health authorities in the Gaza Strip For the next round of fighting, however, the United States has made it clear to Israel that scale of devastation should not be repeatedWhether Israel will listen is a different matter Analysts say the war is bound to continue until Hamas is crushed, and it may be much fiercer this time

The Israeli militarys announcement about the resumption in fighting came moments after the truce between Israel and Hamas expired The deal saw the warring parties exchange hostages held in Gaza for Palestinians held in Israeli prisonsIsraeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week vowed that Israel would fight until the end His government had informed the US before the truce ended that it intended eventually to turn its focus on the southern part of the enclave after fighting resumed

Benny Gantz, who is part of the war cabinet, said Wednesday the fighting would expand to wherever it is needed throughout the Strip There will be no cities of refugeIt is unclear if there will be another truce, but with more than 100 hostages still in Hamas captivity, it could theoretically be revived for several days if both parties agree to extend by one day for every 10 hostages released, analysts said

The deal, however, primarily included women and children Of the 137 people Israel believes are still in Hamas captivity, 20 are women and 2 are under the age of 18, the prime ministers office said FridayDuring its October 7 attack, Hamas killed more than 1,200 in Israel and kidnapped about 240 others, Israeli authorities saidNegotiations with Qatari and Egyptian mediators over the release of hostages held are ongoing, a source familiar with the talks told CNN, even after Israels announcement that it is resuming its operation

Israel has paid a big price for the pause in fighting, Yaakov Amidror, a senior fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies, who was previously National Security Adviser to Netanyahu, told CNN, noting that the truce broke the momentum of the IDF and gave Hamas the ability to regroup

We understood that, and we were ready to pay that price, because it is a price that should be paid for releasing the hostages, he said, adding that Israel is prepared for more intense fighting to make up for lost time

What happens next

The US now is piling pressure on Israel to avoid mass civilian casualties in the next round of fightingI underscored the imperative of the United States that the massive loss of civilian life and displacement of the scale that we saw in northern Gaza not be repeated in the south, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a televised news conference in Tel Aviv on Thursday

Blinken said he made clear to Israel that it must put in place humanitarian protection plans and safeguard hospitals, power stations and facilities He said Netanyahu had agreed to take steps to protect civilians

How that will manifest remains unclear

Frank Lowenstein, who worked as Special Envoy for IsraeliPalestinian Negotiations under US President Barack Obama during the 2014 IsraelGaza war, told CNN that whether Israel heeds the US advice will be a very strong indication of how much influence we actually have over the IsraelisIf Israel takes the same military approach in the south as it did in the north, it could lead to increasingly open disagreement with the Biden administration, he said Given that the Israelis probably want to avoid a big public rift, theres a reasonable likelihood they will take at least some steps to moderate their approach in the next phaseBiden administration officials have been discussing with their Israeli counterparts how to protect civilians who fled to southern Gaza, should the IDF target the area again, US officials told CNN earlier

The options being considered include moving civilians who went south back up north once military operations there end, one senior US official told CNN Israel has so far warned displaced Palestinians against returning north, saying the area remains unsafe

It is unclear how hundreds of thousands of displaced residents can return to the north, where up to half of homes have been destroyed, satellite analysis showsOn Friday, the Israel Defense Forces IDF dropped leaflets in Khan Younis, the biggest city in southern Gaza, calling it a fighting zone and telling residents to evacuate immediatelyKhan Younis, Rafah and the Middle governorates in the south are sheltering nearly 920,000 internally displaced people, says the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees UNRWA, which estimates that some 18 million people over 80 of Gazas population have been displaced across the Strip since October 7

Gershon Baskin, a former Israeli hostage negotiator who once acted as a channel to Hamas, said it would be difficult for Gazans to return to their homes in the north, as most of those neighborhoods are not livable anymore He doesnt however see the war ending without the Israeli military moving south, especially to Khan Younis and Rafah

Urban warfare

If the fighting moves to the south, it will definitely be different, said Riad Kahwaji, founder and CEO of the Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis, a strategy and security consultancy in Dubai

That part of Gaza, Kahwaji told CNN, is densely populated This area was designated a safe area, and Israel had nearly a million of the Palestinians living up in the north relocate to the south under the pretext that the military operations are in the north, even though there was still bombardment in the south, Lowenstein, the former US envoy, suggested that the immediate focus would likely be on providing safe zones and passage in the south, adding that it is nonetheless far from clear how feasible that is, as hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians are living in a very small area

And the already catastrophic humanitarian conditions will likely get even more dire as the weather gets worse and the health situation deteriorates further,Kahwaji said one element likely to be a factor in Israels military calculations is the costbenefit analysis of each tactic ground operations versus air offensives

Israel has primarily relied on airstrikes and targeted bombardment in its war on Hamas, which has spared it major troop casualties, he said If it decides on a primarily groundbased offensive in the south to lessen civilian losses, it will prove challenging for its soldiers, he added

Urban warfare is the toughest warfare, Kahwaji said It is regarded as the hell for any soldier on an offensive operation

Amidror, the former Netanyahu adviser, said that while Israel does what it can to minimize civilian losses, it cannot halt its military operation because Hamas uses civilians as human shields

Let us assume that there is no technical way to fight and destroy Hamas without harming civilians, Amidror said What is your advice To give immunity to Hamas because they are very successful in attempts to use civilians as human shields

From our Israels point of view, Hamas doesnt have any immunity, and we will destroy Hamas, he said And if civilians in Gaza are paying a price for that, we are very sorry, but the question should be applied to HamasThe Israeli military has told all civilians in Gaza City to evacuate southwards as it maintains its bombardment of the coastal enclave in response to last weekends Hamas attacks that killed more than 1,400 peopleconstant airstrikes a task that the United Nations says is dangerous and unfeasible

Israeli war planes have been pounding Gaza for a week, leveling entire neighborhoods, including schools and mosques Israel says it strikes Hamas targets and that the group has used civilians as human shields

Israels assault has killed at least 2,670 people in Gaza, and injured more than 9,600 others Nearly 1 million Palestinians in Gaza have been forced from their homes,What happened

Militants from Gaza fired thousands of rockets towards Israeli towns on October 7, before breaking through the heavily fortified border fence with Israel and sending militants deep into Israeli territory There, Hamas gunmen killed more than 1,400 people, including civilians and soldiers, and took up to 150 hostages, according to Israeli authoritiesThe attacks were unprecedented in tactics and scale as Israel has not faced its adversaries in street battles on its own territory since the 1948 ArabIsraeli war It has also never faced a terror attack of this magnitude that has taken the lives of so many civilians While Hamas has kidnapped Israelis before, it has never before taken dozens of hostages at once, including children and the elderly

A senior Hamas official in Lebanon told a Russian statebacked channel that the group had been preparing for the attack for two years

Hamas called the operation AlAqsa Storm and said that it was a response to what it described as Israeli attacks on women, the desecration of the alAqsa mosque in Jerusalem and the ongoing siege of GazaThey said the bodies of some 1,500 Hamas fighters had been recovered inside Israel since Saturdays assaultHow has Israel responded

In response to the attack, Israel has declared war and launched Operation Swords of Iron, striking what it says are Hamas and Islamic Jihad targets in Gaza It has also blocked supply lines of basic necessities to the Gaza population, including fuel and waterBetween October 7 and 12, Israel dropped 6,000 bombs on the densely inhabited territory thats equivalent to the total number of airstrikes on Gaza during the entire 2014 GazaIsrael conflict, which lasted 50 days

Children make up between 30 and 40 of the wounded in Israels airstrikes on Gaza, BritishPalestinian surgeon Ghassan AbuSittah told CNNs Christiane Amanpour on Thursday

The IDF has told civilians in Gaza to leave their residential areas immediately for their safety, but some say there is nowhere safe to go All crossings out of Gaza have been shut

Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant said on Monday that he had ordered a complete siege on Gaza, blocking delivery of electricity, food, fuel and water Energy Minister Israel Katz has said supplies will remain cut off until hostages being held by Hamas are freedIsrael on Wednesday formed an emergency government and war management cabinet

On Friday, Israels military told the 11 million people in northern Gaza to evacuate their homes immediately

CNN has geolocated and authenticated five videos from the scene of a large explosion along one of the evacuation routes for civilians south of Gaza City

The videos show many dead bodies amid a scene of extensive destruction Some of those bodies are on a flatbed trailer that appears to have been used to carry people away from Gaza City They include several children There are also a number of badly burned and damaged cars

Its unclear what caused the widespread devastation the explosion occurred on Salah alDeen Street on Friday afternoon

IDF spokesman Lt Col Peter Lerner told CNN in an interview on Sunday that the Israeli military did not strike the convoy on Salah AlDeen streetWhats the situation in Gaza now

A humanitarian crisis in Gaza is rapidly spiraling amid warnings that peosple are at risk of starvation as Israel tightens its chokehold on the territory

The Gaza Strip is one of most densely populated places on earth, with some 2 million people crammed in 140squaremile territory The enclave lies on Egypts western border and has been under blockade since Hamas seized control in 2007

The Israeli air, naval and land blockade on the territory, as well as the Egyptian land blockade, continue today

The enclaves only power station stopped working on Wednesday Hospitals are expected to run out of fuel, leading to catastrophic conditions, the Palestinian Health Ministry warned The World Health Organization WHO has said that hospitals are at breaking point

On Thursday, the International Committee of the Red Cross warned hospitals in Gaza risk turning into morgues as they lose power Airstrikes have hit at least 88 education facilities and killed 12 UN personnel, according to the UN

The Palestine Red Crescent has warned of a humanitarian catastrophe as there are no safe areas to evacuate civilians to, after Israel told half the population to migrate south It described the Israeli evacuation call as shocking and beyond belief

Human rights groups have meanwhile warned of possible war crimes being committed by Israel in Gaza Amnesty International on Friday urged Israel to immediately lift its blockade on the enclave, saying the collective punishment of civilians for Hamas terrorist atrocities amounts to a war crime

Since Israel shut its two crossings with Gaza, the only corridor through which Palestinians or aid can pass in and out of the territory is the Rafah Crossing, which connects the south of the enclave to Egypt But its unclear whether that crossing is open

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said on Saturday that the crossing is open but aerial bombardment has rendered the roads on the Gaza side inoperable

Aid flights from Jordan, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the World Health Organization, and the Red Cross have arrived in Egypt, but the supplies have not yet made it through the crossing Shoukry said Egypt has tried to ship humanitarian aid to Gaza but has not received the proper authorization to do soHamas said on Friday that 13 Israeli hostages held in Gaza have been killed by random Israeli bombings on the enclave over the past 24 hours The Israel Defense Forces IDF said it could not confirm or deny the claim

Hamas also called on Gazans not to leave their homes, accusing Israel of engaging in psychological warfare by sending messages telling Palestinian civilians and employees of international organizations to evacuate to the south Displacement and exile are not for us, Hamas said

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency UNRWA on Friday said it had relocated its central operations center and international staff in Gaza to the south of the besieged enclave

What is Hamas

Hamas is an Islamist organization with a military wing that came into being in 1987, emerging out of the Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni Islamist group that was founded in the late 1920s in Egypt

The group, like most Palestinian factions and political parties, insists that Israel is an occupying power and that it is trying to liberate the Palestinian territories It considers Israel an illegitimate state and has called for its downfall

Unlike some other Palestinian factions, Hamas refuses to engage with Israel In 1993, it opposed the Oslo Accords, a peace pact between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization PLO that saw the PLO give up armed resistance against Israel in return for promises of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel The Accords also established the Palestinian Authority PA in the Israelioccupied West BankHamas presents itself as an alternative to the PA, which has recognized Israel and has engaged in multiple failed peace initiatives with it The PA, whose credibility among Palestinians has suffered over the years, is today led by President Mahmoud Abbas

It has over the years claimed many attacks on Israel and has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union and Israel Israel accuses its archenemy Iran of backing the group

Hamas rules Gaza, the small strip of land bordering Israel and Egypt that has changed hands several times over the past 70 years The vast majority of its population are descendants of refugees who were either expelled or forced to flee their homes in 1948 in what is now IsraelHow did the two sides get here

Tensions between Israelis and the Palestinians have existed since before Israels founding in 1948 Thousands of people on both sides have been killed and many more injured over decades

Violence has been particularly acute this year The number of Palestinians militants and civilians killed in the occupied West Bank by Israeli forces since the year began is the highest in nearly two decades The same is true of Israelis and foreigners most of them civilians killed in Palestinian attacks

Israel captured Gaza from Egypt in the 1967 war, then withdrew its troops and settlers in 2005 The territory, home to some 2 million Palestinians, fell under Hamas control in 2007 after a brief civil war with Fatah, a rival Palestinian faction that is the backbone of the Palestinian Authority

After Hamas seized control, Israel and Egypt imposed a strict siege on the territory, which is ongoing Israel also maintains an air and naval blockade on Gaza

Human Rights Watch has called the territory an openair prison More than half of its population lives in poverty and is food insecure, and nearly 80 of its population relies on humanitarian assistanceHamas and Israel have fought several wars Before Saturdays operation, the last war between the two was in 2021, which lasted for 11 days and killed at least 250 people in Gaza and 13 in Israel

Saturdays assault occurred 50 years almost to the day since the 1973 war, when Israels Arab neighbors launched a surprise attack on Israel on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, on October 6, 1973

What happens next

Israel is now on a war footing and has amassed more than 300,000 reservists along the Gaza border for a potential ground operation It has said that it will exact a heavy price on Hamas for its attack and plans to retrieve Israeli hostages from the territory

Israel has dealt with hostage situations before, but never at this scale In the past, militants have mostly demanded the release of prisoners held in Israeli jails in exchange for captured Israelis In 2011, Israel traded 1,027 Palestinians for Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and in 2004, it released more than two dozen Lebanese and Arab prisoners including two senior Hezbollah officials for Elhanan Tannenbaum, an Israeli businessman and army reserve colonel, as well as the bodies of three IDF soldiers In 2008, Israel released five Palestinian prisoners, five Lebanese prisoners and returned the bodies of nearly 200 Arab fighters in exchange for the bodies of two Israeli soldiers

Hamas has captured at least 150 hostages Their presence in Gaza will undoubtedly complicate any Israeli military operation there

The militant groups armed wing said Monday it would begin killing civilian hostages and broadcasting the act if Israel targets people in Gaza without warning It isnt clear if it has acted on those threats yetThe IDF has said that it plans to take control of the Gaza Strip Its spokesperson, Lt Col Richard Hecht, said the aim is to end the Gaza enclave and control the entire enclaveAl Jazeera Arabic on Saturday that Hamas is ready for all options, including a war and an escalation on all levels

We are ready for the worstcase scenario, including a ground invasion, which will be the best for us to decide the ending of this battle, alArouri said

Could this lead to a wider regional conflict

Hamas operation was carried out in a sophisticated and coordinated manner and would have taken a significant amount of planning Speculation has been rife that the group may have received assistance from abroad, which, if proven, could raise the specter of a wider regional warIsrael says Iran supports Hamas to the tune of some 100 million dollars a year The US State Department in 2021 said that the group receives funding, weapons, and training from Iran, as well as some funds that are raised in Gulf Arab countries

Of course Iran is in the picture, one US official told CNN Theyve provided support for years to Hamas and HezbollahA senior Biden administration official said on Saturday that it was too early to say whether Iran was directly involved in the attack, but that Washington will be tracking the matter very closely

But President Joe Biden on Wednesday issued a stark warning to Iran to be careful around its actions in the regionIranian President Ebrahim Raisi spoke to Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh by phone last Sunday and later congratulated the Palestinian people for their victory over Israel On Monday, however, Irans mission to the United Nations said the Islamic Republic was not involved in Palestines response, referring to the Hamas attack It is taken solely by Palestine itself, it said

On Friday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said in Beirut that Lebanons security is Irans security, in an apparent warning to Israel not to strike Lebanon or the Iranbacked Hezbollah militant group that operates there

He said that Western officials had asked him if new fronts could open against Israel, adding that its probable that members of the resistance against Israel could enter the war with the continuation of Israeli war crimes

The warning came a day after the Iranallied Syrian regime said that Israel struck Damascus and Aleppo airports, rendering them nonoperational

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has meanwhile been shuttling around the region, visiting Israel, the occupied West Bank and Jordan Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin also arrived in Israel on Friday

The US has ordered two carrier strike groups to the eastern Mediterranean Sea, Austin said on Saturday A US official told CNN that the US is also sending more fighter jets to the Middle East to deter any Iranian potential aggression or an expansion of the fighting beyond Israels bordersIsrael may also face the threat of new fronts opening in the war Of its immediate neighbors, it is only at peace with Jordan and Egypt, and is officially in a state of war with Lebanon and Syria Israel has said it is ready in case there are attacks from those two countries

The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran, has praised Hamas attack and said it is in contact with Palestinian militant groups at home and abroad, its Al Manar channel said The group claimed responsibility for targeting three Israeli sites in an area known as Shebaa Farms using missiles and artillery The area is considered by Lebanon as Israelioccupied Israel responded by firing artilleryMonday, the IDF said it killed a number of armed suspects who infiltrated into Israel from Lebanon and that soldiers were searching the area Lebanese Prime Ministerdesignate Najib Mikati said on Monday that his country doesnt want to be drawn into the conflict

The IDF said Wednesday a report was received regarding a suspected infiltration from Lebanon into Israeli air space

It did not provide further details and it was unclear whether the infiltration involved aircraft, drones, gliders, balloons or people

Hamas is attacking both Israeli civilian and military targets, and it has also taken hostage an unknown number of Israeli soldiers and citizens, presumably to exchange them at some point for Hamas prisoners held in Israeli jails In the past, Israel has exchanged large numbers of Palestinian prisoners for Israelis held by Hamas

The Israeli hostages seized by Hamas will also complicate any Israeli military response in Gaza since the hostages will likely be dispersed in such a way as to dissuade Israel from air strikes in Gaza that might put the hostages in harms way

But there appears also to be a larger play going on here an attempt to end the rapprochement between Israel and the Arab states that began in earnest during the Trump Administration with the Abraham AccordsLed by President Donald Trumps soninlaw, Jared Kushner, the Abraham Accords resulted in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain signing deals recognizing the state of Israel for the first time Morocco and Sudan also normalized ties with IsraelThose accords were a striking breakthrough because historically, Arab nations cited the treatment of Palestinians by Israel for their refusal to recognize the Jewish state Fearing their cause would be ignored, Palestinians opposed the agreements

Opinion Did Hamas attacks have a hidden target

Opinion by Peter Bergen, CNN

4 minute read

Updated 828 PM EDT, Sat October 7, 2023

Video appears to show Hamas taking woman hostage near Gaza

0106 Source CNN

Editors Note Peter Bergen is CNNs national security analyst, a vice president at New America, a professor of practice at Arizona State University, and the host of the Audible podcast In the Room With Peter Bergen, also on Apple and Spotify The opinions expressed in this commentary are his own View more opinion at CNN

CNN

The surprise weekend attack by Hamas, involving thousands of missiles fired from Gaza and ontheground fighting inside Israel, has the potential to upend an emerging diplomatic deal that could reshape the region

Hamas is attacking both Israeli civilian and military targets, and it has also taken hostage an unknown number of Israeli soldiers and citizens, presumably to exchange them at some point for Hamas prisoners held in Israeli jails In the past, Israel has exchanged large numbers of Palestinian prisoners for Israelis held by Hamas

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Led by President Donald Trumps soninlaw, Jared Kushner, the Abraham Accords resulted in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain signing deals recognizing the state of Israel for the first time Morocco and Sudan also normalized ties with Israel

Rockets are fired from Gaza City as Israels Iron Dome air defence system attempts to intercept them on October 7, 2023

US officials raise concerns over Israeli intelligence after Hamas attacks

Those accords were a striking breakthrough because historically, Arab nations cited the treatment of Palestinians by Israel for their refusal to recognize the Jewish state Fearing their cause would be ignored, Palestinians opposed the agreements

Indeed the Abraham Accords did not do much of anything for the Palestinians Kushner said he would help to find 50 billion for Palestinian projects, but that didnt happen because the Palestinians boycotted an investment conference he hosted in Bahrain in 2019

The Trump administration also moved the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which previous US administrations had not done, deeming it provocative to the Palestinians who claim parts of East Jerusalem

The Biden administration has largely continued the Trump administrations approach the US embassy remains in Jerusalem, and the Biden team is seeking to broker a deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel, which, if it happened, would help to reshape the Middle East even more than the Abraham Accords didThis deal seems to have been moving forward already in small but significant ways Israeli planes now have overflight rights over the Saudi kingdom, an Israeli cabinet minister visited the kingdom last month, the first time this has ever happened, and an Israel official conducted a Jewish prayer service in Saudi Arabia last week, again a firstAn Israeli normalization deal with Saudi Arabia the location of the two holiest sites in Islam would be hugely symbolic and have real security benefits for Israel After all, almost exactly half a century ago, during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, two Arab states, Egypt and Syria, attacked Israel Also, both Israel and Saudi Arabia have a strong common interest today, both seeing Iran as their most dangerous enemy

The details of the IsraeliSaudi deal are still being hammered out, but the Palestinians, who were left out in the cold by the Abraham Accords, may have reason to worry that their interests will not be given their due consideration in any future IsraeliSaudi dealIsraels government today is the most rightwing in its history and the least sympathetic to the Palestinians political aims At the same time, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman known as MBS, is reported to be far less concerned about the Palestinian cause than his father, King Salman, who remains the titular head of the Saudi kingdom but is widely reported to be in ill health MBS is the de facto ruler

In a rare interview two weeks ago, MBS told Fox News, Every day we get closer to normalizing ties with IsraelAll of that may help explain why Hamas militants launched their surprise attack on Israel now With the fighting inside Israel and the Israeli strikes in Gaza, a USbrokered SaudiIsraeli deal could be scuttled for the foreseeable futureA beneficiary of such a development would be Iran which has long had a contentious relationship with Israel and Saudi Arabia

Iran has also provided support to Hamas, according to the US State Department, in a 2020 report on terrorism

Top Iranian officials have recently publicly warned against any rapprochement with Israel Last week the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said, Countries that make the gamble of normalization with Israel will lose They are betting on a losing horse

And on Saturday, Khameneis top military adviser said that Iran supported Hamas attacks in Israel until the liberation of Palestine and JerusalemHamas claims to be holding over 100 Israeli hostages, including highranking officers, and continued to fire rockets into Israel throughout Sunday Another Palestinian armed group, called Islamic Jihad, said on Sunday it is holding at least 30 hostages in GazaIsraeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed retaliation, warning his country would take mighty vengeance and was readying for a long and difficult war

He urged Palestinians living in Gaza to leave now

Over 400 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza as Israel responds with airstrikes in the denselyinhabited enclaveThroughout the bloody weekend, Hamas launched thousands of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel making direct hits on multiple locations inside the country including Tel Aviv while armed terror groups entered Israel and infiltrated military bases, towns and farms, shooting at civilians and taking hostagesPhotos released by the Israeli foreign ministry showed dozens of bodies in the aftermath of a Hamas attack on a music festival near the IsraelGaza border, which emergency responders said left at least 260 dead

As Israeli forces clashed on the ground with Hamas fighters, Israeli airstrikes blasted what it said were Hamasassociated locations

The Israel Defense Forces IDF said it had struck over 400 targets in the small enclave, including 10 towers that it said were used by Hamas and a number of terrorist squads in the area surrounding the Gaza Strip

Palestinian authorities say 78 children are among the dead, and 2,300 others woundedAccording to Netanyahu, Israels first phase of retaliation has ended with the destruction of the majority of the enemy forces that penetrated our territory It will be followed by an offensive formationHis government has decided to stop the supply of electricity, fuel and goods to GazaHamas has warned against measures in Gaza, alluding to hostages held in the areaIn a recorded audio message Saturday, Abu Obaida spokesman for the Al Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, said What happens to the people of the Gaza Strip will happen to them and beware of miscalculation

Civilians taken hostage include not only soldiers but civilians, children, grandmothers, Israeli Defense Forces spokesman Lt Col Richard Hecht told a briefing on Sunday We have lost soldiers, we have lost commanders, we have lost a lot of civilians

It has been more than 17 years since an Israeli soldier was taken as a prisoner of war in an assault on Israeli territory And Israel has not seen this kind of infiltration of military bases, towns and kibbutzim since townbytown fighting in the 1948 war of independenceOn Sunday, Hecht, the IDF spokesman, said Israeli forces had neutralized most of the significant battles that took place in the settlement of Otef, but there are still ongoing operations in numerous other parts of the countryThe IDFs goal for the next 12 hours is to end the Gaza enclave and kill all the terrorists in our territory, he said

The IDF is evacuating more than 20 communities adjacent to the Gaza security fence, and searching the area for any Hamas militants left It is also seeking to control breaches in the fence

Asked by a journalist about the intelligence failure that had allowed such a large scale attack to occur, Hecht said This is not a question for now I am sure that will be a big discussion down the road

No warning of any kind

The highly coordinated assault, which began Saturday morning, was unprecedented in its scale and scope and came on the 50th anniversary of the 1973 War in which Arab states blitzed Israel on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar

We had no warning of any kind, and it was a total surprise that the war broke out this morning, Efraim Halevy, the former head of Mossad, Israels Intelligence Service, told CNN

The number of rockets fired by Palestinian militants was at a scale never seen before, Halevy said, and this was the first time that Gaza has been able to penetrate deep into Israel and to take control of villagesIt is rare for Palestinian militants to be able to make it into Israel from Gaza which is sealed off and heavily watched by Israels military Gaza is one of the most densely packed places in the world, an isolated coastal enclave of almost 2 million people crammed into 140 square miles

Governed by Hamas, the territory is largely cut off from the rest of the world by an Israeli blockade of Gazas land, air and sea dating back to 2007 Egypt controls Gazas southern border crossing, Rafah Israel has placed heavy restrictions on the freedom of civilian movement and controls the importation of basic goods into the narrow coastal strip

Fighting between the two sides has surged in the last two years The violence has been driven by frequent Israeli military raids in Palestinian towns and cities, which Israel has said are a necessary response to a rising number of attacks by Palestinian militants on Israelis

They also come at a moment of deep division in Israel, months after the countrys rightwing government pushed through a contentious plan to reduce the power of the countrys courts, sparking a social, political and military crisis

Western states condemned the Hamas attack on Saturday and pledged support for Israel while Arab states, including those that have recognized Israel, called for calm

United States President Joe Biden spoke to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Saturday and said that Washington unequivocally condemns this appalling assault against Israel by Hamas terrorists from Gaza

Saudi Arabia, which is holding talks with the US to potentially normalize relations with Israel, said it is following closely the unprecedented situation and called on both sides to immediately stop the escalation,Pleas for release of hostages

Israelis are sharing photos of friends and family who they say have been kidnapped by Hamas militants, many of them women and children

One Israeli mother told CNN she had been on the phone with her children, aged 16 and 12, who were home alone when they heard gunshots outside and people trying to enter

They were scared to death I cant even imagine what they felt And I wasnt there to help, said the mother, who was away from the home at the time CNN is not identifying the mother and her children for safety reasons

Then, over the phone, she heard the door break down

I heard terrorists speaking in Arabic to my teenagers And the youngest saying to them Im too young to go, the mother said And the phone went off, the line went off That was the last time I heard from them

Another Israeli resident Yoni Asher told CNN his wife, who was visiting near the Gaza border with their young daughters, was among those abducted On Saturday he tracked her phone and saw it was located in Gaza later that day he said he recognized her in a viral clip of people loaded into the back of a truck flanked by Hamas militants

Several people were taken hostage during an attack by Hamas militants on an Israeli music festival near the IsraelGaza border One video on social media showed an Israeli woman being kidnapped, hoisted onto the back of a motorcycle and driven away as her boyfriend was apprehended Another clip pictured a GermanIsraeli woman who was taken from the festival being paraded around Gaza, unconscious and motionlessAn Israel Police spokesperson has told CNN that family members who wish to report their loved ones as missing to come to the nearest police station when its safe to leave their homes The police suggested relatives bring photos and personal items from which DNA samples can be extracted to help with identification

Hours before Israel said it had resumed combat operations against Hamas, the United States pressured its ally to shield Palestinian civilians in one of the most significant diplomatic moves yet in the more than 50day conflictThe question now, if a sevenday truce is permanently broken, is whether Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus government is prepared to listen

Secretary of State Antony Blinken laid out American requirements in private talks in Jerusalem with Netanyahu and his war cabinet More significantly, Blinken made the Biden administration approach clear in unmistakable language in public

I underscored the imperative of the United States that the massive loss of civilian life and displacement of the scale that we saw in Northern Gaza not be repeated in the South, Blinken said in a televised press conference in Tel Aviv His comments came hours before the lapsing of a sevenday pause in the fighting, which had seen more than 100 hostages released by HamasI made clear that before Israel resumes major military operations, it must put in place humanitarian civilian protection plans that minimize further casualties of innocent Palestinians, Blinken said, specifically mentioning the need to safeguard hospitals, powers stations and facilities He said that Netanyahu had agreed to take steps to protect civilians But two key questions now will be whether those efforts are genuine and effective and to what extent the Israeli prime minister and his military brass are willing to accommodate US concerns

The Israel Defense Forces said early Friday that it has resumed operations against Hamas, accusing the group of violating the agreement and firing toward Israel

Blinkens talks with top Israeli officials came on a day when there were growing indications that the pause in fighting was increasingly fragile

His frank tone contrasted with public comments that were more advisory in tone from the Biden administration in the initial stage of the war Heartrending scenes of death and mayhem in Gaza opened up the White House to intense domestic criticism from grassroots, young and progressive voters less than a year before the 2024 electionUS officials have been making clear in recent days in private and in anonymous quotes to journalists that they wanted to see Israel take more care when fighting resumes to protect Gazans even while acknowledging that Hamas embeds its forces in high population centers and in civilian infrastructure Blinkens decision to do so publicly reflects an elevated attempt to use US influence following a period in which the administration helped orchestrate the pause to allow many of the hostages to leave Gaza alive

It also suggests that the White House is not completely buying Israels assurances that it takes every possible step to alleviate civilian casualties in its response to the October 7 Hamas terror attack that killed 1,200 people Blinken noted bluntly, for instance, that he told Netanyahu Intent matters But so does the resultThe Biden administration makes a significant move

Blinken specifically said that Washington wants Israel to permit civilians who fled to southern Gaza in the first wave of fighting to head back north before Israel resumes operations And he called for the provision of safe areas in the heavily populated south to allow Palestinians to escape Israeli bombardments Those details were first reported by CNNs MJ Lee, Jennifer Hansler and Katie Bo Lillis on WednesdayAaron David Miller, a US Middle East peace negotiator for multiple presidents, noted a significant shift in the administrations rhetoric

The public messaging on the part of the administration from the president on down is if the Israelis are going to continue this campaign, certainly, for any significant duration, they are going to have to deal with two realities, Miller told CNN International on Thursday

Number one, you are going to have to not attack locations where there are densely populated civilians And number two, you are going to have to allow the continued surging of humanitarian assistance for the roughly half to twothirds of Gazans who have now been displaced from their homes, many of whom are in the location where the Israelis intend to operate

The administrations tougher tone with Israel is not without risk While he may be able to alleviate some of the domestic political pressure from his left, President Joe Biden will attract criticism from Republicans who will accuse him of curtailing Israels right to defend itself following a horrific terror attack The strong US focus on curbing civilian casualties could also be exploited by Hamas in its ongoing efforts to use civilian infrastructure as cover for its military operationsIf the Israelis do not heed Blinkens warnings, the Biden administration will look weak And if there are again episodes in which hospitals come under siege from Israeli forces or residential areas are bombed and large numbers of innocent Palestinians die, the presidents critics are unlikely to remember the nuances of Blinkens remarks in IsraelNetanyahus dilemma

Increasing US pressure adds another dimension to the political, military and moral dilemma that Israel is facing as it deliberates its next move Netanyahu had been under increasing heat from families of those still believed to be held hostage in Gaza, including young men and soldiers, to hold off on launching a new offensive until all those captive are freed Thats a calculation that would keep the initiative in the conflict in the hands of Hamas and could take many days or weeks The price that Hamas would demand for the return of Israeli soldiers is likely to be far beyond the current ratio of three Palestinians freed from Israeli jails for one Israeli civilian released, and it may be one the government would find it impossible to payThe Israeli leader is also weakened because the Hamas attacks, one of the darkest days in Israels history, happened on his watch A New York Times report published Thursday is likely to heighten his vulnerability The paper cited emails, documents and interviews in revealing that the plans for the Hamas assault were known for more than a year before October 7, but Israeli military and intelligence officials considered they would be impossible for the terror group to pull off The report said it was unclear whether Netanyahu and other top leaders saw the planetanyahu told Israelis on Thursday that he swore to eliminate Hamas and nothing would stop him Given the militant groups maze of tunnels below Gaza and its embedding in civilian areas, it is not clear if Israel will consider that its operational needs are reconcilable with what Blinken called US imperatives

But for Israels standing internationally, US support of the Jewish state will be even more important in a second wave of fighting in Gaza than it was in the initial outbreak of the war The country is likely to find itself isolated if it is blamed for reigniting the war

At home, however, Netanyahu is under great political duress from the hardright members of his coalition, which is critical to his fragile hold on power Israel also believes that it is fighting an existential threat to its survival and that of the Jewish people While many foreign powers do not necessarily accept that interpretation of the war against Hamas, this is a mindset that could convince Israel that any action is justified

Former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett told CNN News Central on Thursday that we are going to have to do what we need to do and were doing it as best as we can to minimize casualties But theres no magic wand and if anyone has a magic wand, let us know and well use it

Senior Netanyahu adviser Mark Regev told CNNs Wolf Blitzer that the Israeli cabinet had presented maps to Blinken showing what he said were humanitarian safe zones in the southern part of the Gaza Strip to which civilians could flee He also said that Israel would allow aid to continue to flow to Gazan civilians

As we pursue Hamas, and we will pursue Hamas relentlessly, he said, adding, At the same time as we pursue our campaign against Hamas, well do all that we can to safeguard Gazas civilian population, to keep it out of the crossfire between the IDF and the terrorists, and at the same time, in parallel, of course work so that aid enters the Gaza Strip, food, water, medicine and other things for the people of Gaza to limit the level of suffering

But the reality is that high intensity warfare in an area as densely populated as Gaza will almost always have disastrous results

Washington will be watching closely how Israel conducts itself since, in the past, its standards for protecting civilians have fallen short of what much of the rest of the world would accept

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In the border town of Sderot, a frequent target of Hamas rockets over the years, an Associated Press photographer captured the bodies of at least six people, who were killed while standing under one of the reinforced bus shelters

By Saturday evening, with rockets injuring civilians as far north as Tel Aviv, Israeli media reported at least 300 dead and more than 1,400 wounded, with an unknown number taken hostage and prisoners of war Its one of the deadliest days in Israels history, and a security failure reminiscent of both 911 and Israels 1973 calamityAs Israel sought to stop Hamas attacks, and launched retaliatory air strikes on targets in Gaza, the casualties started to mount among Palestinians, as well At least 232 Palestinians have been killed and a further 1,697 have been wounded, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry Israeli airstrikes also targeted Hamas offices in Gaza City After warning it was going to fire, as it usually does, Israel flattened a 14story building As always, Palestinian civilians will pay a steep and tragic price

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Captured Israeli Soldier vpx

Hamas captured hostages and prisoners of war during assault on Israel, IDF says

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen unequivocally condemned the attack as terrorism in its most despicable form French President Emmanuel Macron said I strongly condemn the current terrorist attacks, offering his solidarity German Chancellor Olaf Scholtz said his country stands by Israel The Dutch Prime Minister issued a statement saying he unequivocally condemns this terrorist violence and fully supports Israels right to defend itself Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed shock, vowing solidarity with Israel

Brazils foreign minister, calling for an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council, expressed its solidarity with the Israeli people, saying theres no excuse for violence, especially against civilians Ukraine declared its support for Israel in its right to defend itself and its people

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In the border town of Sderot, a frequent target of Hamas rockets over the years, an Associated Press photographer captured the bodies of at least six people, who were killed while standing under one of the reinforced bus shelters

By Saturday evening, with rockets injuring civilians as far north as Tel Aviv, Israeli media reported at least 300 dead and more than 1,400 wounded, with an unknown number taken hostage and prisoners of war Its one of the deadliest days in Israels history, and a security failure reminiscent of both 911 and Israels 1973 calamity

TOPSHOT Rockets are fired from Gaza City towards Israel on October 7, 2023 Dozens of rockets were fired from the blockaded Gaza Strip towards Israel on October 7, 2023, an AFP journalist in the Palestinian territory said, as sirens warning of incoming fire blared in Israel Photo by MAHMUD HAMS AFP Photo by MAHMUD HAMSAFP via Getty Images

A Pearl Harbor moment Why didnt Israels sophisticated border security stop Saturdays attack

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated the obvious when he told Israelis the country was at war When this ends, Netanyahu and top Israeli security officials will have to reckon with the stunning failure of intelligence and basic defensive preparations

This disaster is occurring at a time of deep political fractures in Israel The time will come for recriminations and the political consequences for this failure will be severe But the priority is elsewhere now Benny Gantz, a retired general and one of the opposition leaders, declared, in what he said was a message to Iran, The entire people of Israel are unitedThere is no coalition and opposition now

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Captured Israeli Soldier vpx

Hamas captured hostages and prisoners of war during assault on Israel, IDF says

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen unequivocally condemned the attack as terrorism in its most despicable form French President Emmanuel Macron said I strongly condemn the current terrorist attacks, offering his solidarity German Chancellor Olaf Scholtz said his country stands by Israel The Dutch Prime Minister issued a statement saying he unequivocally condemns this terrorist violence and fully supports Israels right to defend itself Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed shock, vowing solidarity with Israel

Brazils foreign minister, calling for an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council, expressed its solidarity with the Israeli people, saying theres no excuse for violence, especially against civilians Ukraine declared its support for Israel in its right to defend itself and its people

Support for Israel, however, was hardly unanimous

Both Iran, the principal sponsor of Hamas, and Hezbollah, another Iranlinked terrorist organization committed to Israels destruction, praised Hamas And Qatar, while calling for deescalation and maximum restraint, said it holds Israel solely responsible for the ongoing escalation due to its ongoing violations of the rights of the Palestinian people

Saudi Arabia, which has been negotiating a potential diplomatic deal with Israel, also called for restraint and an immediate halt to the escalation between the two sides, but also appeared to blame Israel, although less directly than Qatar, citing the kingdoms repeated warnings of the dangers of the explosion of the situation

Opinion Hamas attack on Israel is an indisputable act of terrorism

Opinion by Frida Ghitis

6 minute read

Updated 800 AM EDT, Sun October 8, 2023

Footage captures destruction throughout the day in Israel and Gaza

0103 Source CNN

Editors Note Frida Ghitis, a former CNN producer and correspondent, is a world affairs columnist She is a weekly opinion contributor to CNN, a contributing columnist to The Washington Post and a columnist for World Politics Review The views expressed in this commentary are her own View more opinion on CNN

CNN

Millions of Israelis were jolted awake on Saturday by the sounds of explosions and blaring emergency sirens The Palestinian group Hamas had launched an unprecedented assault on the country hours after the 50th anniversary of what Israelis call the Yom Kippur War and Arab countries call the October 6 War

Frida Ghitis

Frida Ghitis CNN

It promptly became clear that the highly organized attack by land, air and sea would turn into a terrorist rampage Iranbacked Hamas, which has ruled the Gaza strip since 2006, tightening its grip in 2007 when it expelled its Palestinian rivals Fatah in brief internal war, launched thousands of rockets as its operatives infiltrated Israeli territory using motorcycles, trucks, paragliders, and speedboats

Inside Israel, they went after soldiers and civilians, even posting videos on social media, as the world saw evidence of how they targeted, hunted down, and brutalized Israelis of all ages Many were kidnapped and taken to Gaza and dragged through the streets

Theres much that Israel has done wrong But nothing justifies what Hamas has just perpetrated As many knowledgeable people have pointed out, what Hamas has done is clearly an act of terrorism, no matter what your definition

Few Israelis miss the irony that Gaza, the territory from which it withdrew in 2005, is the launchpad for such deadly attacks Israel and Egypt, Gazas neighbors, have imposed a blockade of the territory But there is no occupation of Gaza, which is now in the hands of Hamas, a terrorist group spun off from the Muslim Brotherhood, with a charter committing it to the destruction of Israel

On Saturday, Israelis huddled in fear as news spread that heavily armed Hamas gunmen were roaming the south of the country, indiscriminately killing men and women and kidnapping adults and children, taking many of them to Gaza

Rockets are fired toward Israel from the Gaza Strip, Saturday, Oct 7, 2023 The rockets were fired as Hamas announced a new operation against Israel

CNN and others authenticated many of the videos In one, geolocated by CNN to a Gaza neighborhood, gunmen open the trunk of a car and pull out a terrified woman barefoot, with her wrists cabletied behind her back and move her into the backseat

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The United Arab Emirates, the crown jewel of the Abraham Accords, called for maximum restraint and an immediate ceasefire

Social media, of course, was full of antiIsrael activists, already gearing up for what comes next

As sure as night follows day, Israel will retaliate, and millions around the world will blame Israel and the Jews ignoring what happened this bloody Saturday

The IsraeliPalestinian conflict is extraordinarily complicated But theres no denying that what happened on Saturday was an act of terrorism, one that deserves clear, unequivocal condemnation

After the horrendous attacks against Israeli civilians on October 7, Israel is rightly pursuing a campaign to eliminate Hamas In doing so, it is imperative that Israel not lose sight of longterm strategic national security objectives but instead seek to wipe out Hamas within a broader military and diplomatic strategyFor the longterm security of Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus government must recognize that the extremism that fueled Hamas is part of a broader constellation of issues that are interconnected and that must be addressed for there to be a lasting peace in the region

Israel should avoid acting in isolation but rather develop a strategy that serves its larger regional and international objectives These include securing the safe release of more than 230 hostages, protecting nearby alliances, building partnerships with additional nations most notably Saudi Arabia and working cooperatively and collaboratively with the United States and other countries as it seeks to eradicate Hamas

Netanyahus creation of a war Cabinet was widely celebrated as a prudent step from a military point of view, but this entity, by design laserfocused on a military objective, risks being blind to the regional security imperatives vital to Israels near and longterm survival The Israeli people must demand that Netanyahu create a mechanism that ensures the government adequately weighs other regional cross currents

Specifically, the Israeli government must seek ways to eliminate Hamas without undermining its relationships with its Arab neighbors Over several decades, these efforts have created vital relationships between Israel and Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Sudan

And at least until October 7, significant diplomatic headway was being made toward a normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia Indeed, it is likely that a central aim of Hamas attack was to fuel an unrelenting Israeli response to undermine their Arab alliances, all of which contribute to regional stability and threaten the terrorist groups legitimacy

For this reason, Israel must do all it can to minimize outrage on the Arab street While this might seem unfair, the fact is that Arab leaders cannot long ignore the protests from their outraged citizens and will be forced to take increasingly hostile diplomatic positions with Israel

As Dennis Ross, a former US envoy to the Middle East, noted last week in The New York Times, many regional leaders eager for a partner in Israel to help crush radical Islamism privately support Israels effort to eliminate Hamas But these Arab leaders are facing increasing domestic political pressure to respond to reports of civilian casualties in Gaza, first through words of condemnation and ultimately through action, such as pledging to part ways diplomatically with Israel

Moreover, in eliminating Hamas, Israel must ask itself, to borrow a phrase from former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, whether it is creating more terrorists than it is killing If so, its nearterm goals to eliminate Hamas will do nothing to advance its longterm security interests in preventing the next generation of terrorists determined to strike at Israel

Israel must ensure that its pursuit of its objectives against Hamas are conducted with the utmost care to minimize civilian casualties While it is true that Hamas uses civilians as human shields to create a significant tactical complication for Israels mission, Hamas inhumanity does not form a basis upon which Israel can depart from its obligations to minimize civilian casualties To fail to do so is to risk undermining Israels security interests in the region, Western support and its legitimacy

In a lengthy statement posted on the online site Medium, former President Barack Obama was right to emphasize that how Israel prosecutes its war against Hamas matters It matters not only for the reasons Obama stated consistency with international law and efforts to avoid death and suffering of civilians but also because failing to do so likely constitutes a red line of sorts though not one that President Joe Biden or other officials in the administration have publicly articulated as to what the US government will be willing to stomach as the suffering of civilians mounts And it likely represents a pragmatic line as well for broader international support

Take, for example, the Israel Defense Forces strike on Gazas Jabalya refugee camp on Tuesday While the IDF said that it was targeting highlevel Hamas leadership, which might make the strikes legal under international law, Israel must not ignore the realpolitik implications Bolivia, Chile and Colombia have taken drastic diplomatic steps against Israel, and Jordan recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv Meanwhile, Secretary of State Antony Blinken is again visiting Israel, no doubt to put private pressure on the Israeli government to avoid civilian casualties The diplomatic impacts to Israel will only continue to mount if these types of strikes persist

Indeed, taking extreme care to minimize Palestinian civilian causalities is not only unquestionably the right, moral and lawful thing for Israel to do, but is inextricably linked to its own national security interests in building and maintaining vital partnerships that it will need long into the future

Israel must also take meaningful steps to provide immediate relief from the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza While it is true that Egypt, which controls a border with Gaza, and other regional actors have a part to play, Israel must take a leading role, given its blockade and aerial campaigns, both to abide by its obligations under the laws of war and to minimize regional and international condemnation

Moreover, Israel must sharpen its rhetoric with respect to the enemy it faces and the nature of its objectives It must be relentlessly precise that its enemy is singularly Hamas, and it must avoid rhetoric that demonizes the Palestinian people or the broader Arab community

It should make clear that Hamas not only poses an existential threat to Israel but also has long victimized the Palestinian people and deprived them of a chance at a better future Doing so hopefully can shift the prevailing narrative from one where Israel and the Palestinians are in conflict to one in which Israel and the Palestinians along with other nations in the region and around the globe must defeat a common enemy in Hamas

And Israel must broaden its statement of purpose Currently focused only on eradicating Hamas and the safe return of the hostages, Israel should instead articulate comprehensive strategic objectives that seek to advance or at least not undermine other interests, including regional stability and normalized diplomatic relations with its neighbors

Absent broader strategic goals and action to further them, Israel could easily fall into the trap set by Hamas and Iran seeking to decimate Hamas but, in so doing, undermining the prospect for the return of the hostages, alienating regional partnerships, strengthening Irans influence and fomenting a new generation of Arab youths to sustain the cycle of violence between Israel and its neighbors

Israel has every right to defend itself from the heinous attacks by Hamas But it must not allow anger and a desire for retribution at all costs to undermine its longterm goals of regional stability, security and peace

In a 2009 book, Gideon Rose wrote that Americans think of wars as street fights on a grand scale, with the central strategic challenge being how to beat up the bad guys The military leaders focus on the fighting, paying little attention to the longterm consequences But at some point, every war enters what might be called its endgame, and then any political questions that may have been ignored come rushing back with a vengeance

In the book, titled How Wars End, Rose found that a failure to fully think through political issues marked the United States involvement in six conflicts, from World War I to the Iraq War

Last week, as Israel continued its military response to the October 7 Hamas terror attack, its political goals and potential endgame remained a source of huge controversy The US has backed Israels right to defend itself, but President Joe Biden, under pressure from some in his party, has called for a pause in the war for humanitarian reasons

Air power and terrorism expert Robert A Pape of the University of Chicago recalled that Israel invaded Southern Lebanon with some 78,000 combat troops and almost 3,000 tanks and armored vehicles in June 1982

The goal was to smash PLO terrorists, and Israel achieved significant nearterm success However, this military operation caused the creation of Hezbollah in July 1982, led to vast local support for Hezbollah and waves of suicide attacks and ultimately led to the withdrawal of Israels army from much of southern Lebanon in 1985 and the growth of Hezbollah ever since In the war against Hamas, he added, Israels strategic vision has been to go in heavily militarily first and then figure out the political process later But this is likely to integrate Hamas and the local population together more and more and to produce more terrorists than it kills There is an alternative now, not later, start the political process toward a pathway to a Palestinian state, and create a viable political alternative for Palestinians to Hamas

DJ Rosenthal, who served as director for counterterrorism at the US National Security Council during the Obama administration, wrote that Israel must ensure that its pursuit of its objectives against Hamas is conducted with the utmost care to minimize civilian casualties While it is true that Hamas uses civilians as human shields to create a significant tactical complication for Israels mission, Hamas inhumanity does not form a basis upon which Israel can depart from its obligations to minimize civilian casualties To fail to do so is to risk undermining Israels security interests in the region, Western support and its legitimacyTake, for example, the Israel Defense Forces strike on Gazas Jabalya refugee camp on Tuesday While the IDF said that it was targeting highlevel Hamas leadership, which might make the strikes legal under international law, Israel must not ignore the realpolitik implications Bolivia, Chile and Colombia have taken drastic diplomatic steps against Israel, and Jordan recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv Meanwhile, Secretary of State Antony Blinken is again visiting Israel, no doubt to put private pressure on the Israeli government to avoid civilian casualties The diplomatic impacts to Israel will only continue to mount if these types of strikes persist

Shai Davidai, an assistant professor of management at Columbia Business School, explained why he was seen crying in a viral video taken on the universitys campus Following the horrific massacre in Israel by Hamas terrorists on October 7, I felt an intense, relentless grief Grief for the thousands of civilians shot, murdered, mutilated, raped and beheaded Grief for the intentional killing of babies, some burned beyond recognition Grief for the confused children dragged at gun point by violent men into captivity in Gaza

Yet there was a deeper, darker grief A grief that seeped from a wound Id thought was healed A grief that comes from the trauma hiding at the bottom of every Jewish persons heart A grief that comes from seeing, once again, Jewish people targeted in their homes and communities

In Gaza, Nadia AbuShaban attended a birthday party for her 12yearold nephew Hashem With so little opportunity in Gaza, what will he grow up to become What effect will all this fear and violence have on his developing, young mind When will the realities of life here set in And, of course, will he even live to see his next birthday

The most important factor in determining the political outcome of Israels current war will not take place in Gaza but will instead unfold in the West BankThats because if Israel really wants to deliver a serious longterm blow to Hamas as a potent political movement among the Palestinian people, its going to be essential to seriously rethink its attitude towards the Islamist extremist groups archrivals the Fatahdominated Palestinian Authority PA in the West Bank and Palestine Liberation Organization PLO on the international stage

Without strengthening these Palestinian groups, which still represent the mainstream of the national movement, Hamas and even more extreme groups will almost certainly continue to grow and thrive among the Palestinian people

If Israel is now serious about decimating Hamass military and political power, that cannot be done only or even mainly by killing the groups leaders and members and blowing up its equipment and infrastructure New people can and will fill the void and insurgencies can successfully operate on a shoestring and under extremely onerous conditions

Because the Palestinian people, their cause and their national movement are not going to disappear, the only way to really marginalize Hamas in the long run is to abandon the policy of simultaneously strengthening and weakening both Palestinian factions to keep them at odds with each other and therefore ineffective as a national movement

Hamas, the early years

In one of the most reckless and selfdefeating policies in its young history, Israel, from the outset, sought to bolster and use Hamas to split and thereby cripple the Palestinian national movement

Hamas was formed by the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza during the firmament of the first Palestinian intifada uprising against Israeli occupation in 1987 Israeli occupation authorities immediately believed they had stumbled upon a marvelous opportunity to divide Palestinians between secular nationalists and Islamists just as they began to rise up on the ground in the occupied territories

Hamas was given considerable leeway to organize and form itself, with Israel turning a blind eye to the organizations early efforts to structure and found itself activities that would have been ruthlessly suppressed if pursued by either Fatahdominated organizations or the local grassroots committees that led the first uprising in its initial months

For a brief period during the Oslo negotiations and the initial implementation of the IsraeliPalestinian agreements that led to the formation of the small selfadministered Palestinian enclaves in the West Bank and most of Gaza in the 1990s, this deeply misguided strategy of divide and rule was essentially set aside in favor of serious negotiations with the PLO and a significant degree of cooperation with the PA

However, after the failure of the Camp David summit in 2000 and the subsequent outbreak of the far more violent second intifada in the fall of that year, the Israeli right resumed power Under Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli right has dominated national politics for the vast majority of subsequent years, and it eagerly resumed a divide and rule approach

This seemed to reach a successful crescendo in 2007, when a year of divided government among Palestinians with a Fatah presidency under Mahmoud Abbas and a Hamasdominated legislature collapsed into open conflict and Hamas violently expelled Fatah and the PA from Gaza

Israels divide and rule approach

For Netanyahu and his colleagues, this split was ideal Hamas unwavering commitment to armed struggle and violence allowed the Israeli right to paint the entire Palestinian national movement as hopelessly extreme

And the split between Gaza and the West Bank provided Israelis who wanted no part in any additional negotiations with the Palestinians which could result in a twostate solution with a perfect excuse not to sit down with the PLO, by claiming that they do not represent the entirety of the Palestinian people

For almost 20 years, Israels policy was to keep Hamas in power in Gaza, albeit besieged and contained, and periodically and literally cut down to size through wars cynically described as mowing the grass, while at the same time ensuring that the PA continued to control the selfadministered enclaves in the West Bank, albeit with extreme institutional and political weakness

Above all, the core goal appeared to be to ensure that the Palestinian division prevented any additional movement towards the creation of a Palestinian state or the development of any further restrictions on Israeli settlement activity and the now openlydeclared national policy goal of eventual additional major annexation in the West Bank

In March 2019, Netanyahu told a private meeting of Likud party Knesset members that whoever is against a Palestinian state should be for transferring funds to Hamas in Gaza, according to the Jerusalem Post He reportedly said that this was part of Israels strategy to isolate the Palestinians in Gaza from the Palestinians in the West Bank This articulated policies that the Israeli right had been diligently following for many years And it led, inexorably and predictably, to the October 7 massacres

What Hamas did next

Israelis, including the national security establishment, were taken aback by the Hamas attack of October 7 because they had wrongly concluded that both Palestinian groups were content to rule their separate fiefdoms and persist in a relative stalemate for dominance of the national movement that played perfectly into Israels hands

What the Israelis had not appreciated is that since Hamas founding in 1987, its prime directive has been to maneuver to take over the Palestinian national movement and, eventually, the PLO with its invaluable international diplomatic presence, including nonmember observer state status at the UN and over 100 embassies around the world

It was instantly obvious after the October 7 killing spree that the increasingly unpopular Hamas was seeking to use violence assert its dominance of the national movement Indeed, its clear that Hamas expected an overwhelming military response from Israel on the ground in Gaza, and that it hopes to provoke a longterm Israeli security presence against which it can, sooner rather than later, organize a sustained and increasingly powerful insurgency

The obvious goal is to contrast this armed resistance, not just now, but especially in coming years, with PA security cooperation with Israel and the PLOs unwavering commitment to securing independence through a twostate agreement with Israel

The only rational choice left for Israel in the wake of October 7 is to finally choose to deal seriously and constructively with the Palestinians who are committed to talking to Israelis, as opposed to bolstering those who want to kill Israelis

It may go against all the instincts of many Israeli extremists in the current government, including Netanyahu, but if they do not begin to deal seriously, constructively and cooperatively with the PA and the PLO, Hamas and even more extreme groups will continue to thrive

This means taking any number of obvious measures to strengthen the PA institutionally and politically, including by expanding its authority in the West Bank

And it means reengaging with the PLO at the negotiating table to seriously discuss a viable accommodation that meets the needs of both peoples

Beyond Mahmoud Abbas

Many Israelis may find it hard to imagine suddenly taking Mahmoud Abbas, who is both the PA president and the PLO chairman, seriously, both because they are used to thinking of him as a spent force and ineffective leader, and because he has lashed out in frustration with language that has been highly offensive, including regarding the Holocaust

There is no doubt that Abbas is, in almost every imaginable way, long past his sellby date But the old, infirm and chainsmoking politician, who at least has time and again proven his unwavering rejection of violence as a Palestinian national strategy, represents exactly this trend among Palestinians And when he passes, sooner rather than later, from the scene, he will be replaced by others from the same tendency

Israelis cannot approach this decisive strategic and political inflection point by focusing on the personality, failures or foibles of Abbas In many ways, Israels consistently hostile policies were the single biggest factor in shaping him into the highly flawed figure he has become

This is the Palestinian leader who, after all, resigned as Yasser Arafats Prime Minister during the second intifada and voluntarily went into an openended sojourn in the political wilderness, precisely because he categorically rejected the use of violence

Moreover, its not about Abbas or his inner circle as personalities It must be about strengthening the hands of Palestinians who sincerely seek an accommodation with Jewish Israelis and represent the primary obstacle to Hamas finally achieving political dominance among Palestinians

Its a nobrainer, but Netanyahu and his government show no signs of understanding the necessity of such a radical policy shift The Biden administration appears to understand the challenge in theory, but how much they can or will do to implement such a revised policy towards the Palestinian political scene is uncertain at best

Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas are fighting a war that has killed thousands and resulted in a devastating humanitarian crisis in Gaza

The Israeli military began an offensive on the Palestinian enclave after Hamas militants launched a brutal assault on Israel on October 7 the biggest terrorist attack in the countrys history with gunmen killing more than 1,400 people and taking more than 200 people hostage, according to Israeli authorities

Israels retaliation has been fierce, with an air, sea and ground campaign on Gaza as well as a total siege on the territory to choke its Hamas rulers

The conflict has led to a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, with more than 10,000 people killed there, according to the Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah Residents of the Strip, which is home to more than 2 million Palestinians, are trapped, lacking basic supplies and with nowhere to escape Israels bombs

In response, aid groups, Arab states and the United Nations have repeatedly called for a ceasefire to allow for the delivery of food, water, medical supplies and other necessities

Israel has so far shown no signs of scaling back its military operation, which is only widening, as it vows to eliminate Hamas once and for all How did the conflict start

In an operation it called AlAqsa Storm, Hamas fired thousands of rockets towards Israeli towns on October 7, before breaking through the heavily fortified border fence with Israel and sending militants deep into Israeli territory

There, gunmen killed civilians and soldiers, and took more than 200 hostages, including dozens of foreign nationals The attacks were unprecedented in tactics and scale, as Israel hasnt faced its adversaries on its own territory since the 1948 ArabIsraeli war It has also never faced a terror attack of this magnitude that took the lives of so many civilians

How did Israel react

Israel responded by launching Operation Swords of Iron, with the goal of eliminating Hamas It imposed a complete siege on Gaza, blocking food, water and fuel from entering, and launched a ground offensive that saw its troops enter deep into the enclave and effectively split it in two

Amid the bombardment, Gaza residents were advised by Israel to evacuate their homes in the north and move southwards as troops sought to encircle Gaza City, which Israel described as the fortress of Hamass terrorist activities

Human rights groups have said Israels evacuation order could breach international law, and CNN has documented instances when Palestinian civilians were killed by Israeli strikes around evacuation zones

What is the situation in Gaza

Before the war, Israel and Egypt imposed a blockade of Gaza that strictly controlled the movement of people and goods both into and out of the territory

But Israel has now imposed an even tighter siege, banning the entry of food, water and fuel, which the United Nations has said amounts to collective punishment Residents are grappling with severe shortages and power is running out as fuel dwindles, with hospitals illequipped to treat the wounded as Israel continues its bombardment Doctors often operate on patients without anesthesia, and maternity and postnatal services are close to nonexistent As the water system collapses, some Gazans have been forced to drink dirty, salty water, sparking concerns of a health crisis and fears that people could start dying from dehydration

The UNs Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs OCHA has said that more than 14 million people in Gaza are now internally displaced More than half a million are seeking refuge in facilities run by the UNs Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees UNRWA, which are accommodating numbers three times their intended capacity

Thousands of people are sheltering in hospitals and other civilian facilities, which health workers say have been targeted by Israel

The World Health Organization WHO has said that it has documented at least 102 attacks on health care facilities in Gaza since October 7 Israel has said it is targeting Hamas operatives in the strip, and accused Hamas of embedding itself in civilian areas, as well as using civilians as human shields

Out of those who have been killed in the enclave, more than 4,100 are children, according to the Gazan health ministry

The enclave has been described by the UN as a graveyard for children

What is the Rafah crossing

Israel has shut its two border crossings with Gaza And with aid desperately needed, the only route for its entry into the territory is through the Rafah Crossing with Egypt

Rafah is the sole border crossing between Gaza and Egypt, falling along an 8mile 128kilometer fence that separates Gaza from the Sinai Peninsula

The crossing has been essential for the delivery of aid and evacuation of wounded Palestinians during previous wars with Israel

Following intense negotiations, the crossing was finally opened more than three weeks into the war, allowing a small number of wounded Palestinians and foreign nationals to leave Gaza Aid trucks have started entering the enclave in very small numbers

How has the international community reacted to the war

The US has largely supported Israels operation in Gaza throughout the war, despite heavy criticism from some opponents at home and mass protests across the world calling for a ceasefire

Arab leaders have delivered strong messages to Israel, especially against what they perceive as plans to expel Palestinians from Gaza into Egypt, and those in the West Bank to Jordan

US President Joe Biden has said that it would be a mistake for Israel to occupy Gaza, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israel will have the overall security responsibility in Gaza for an indefinite period after the war ends

Some of Hamas allies in the region, such as Iran and Lebanons powerful Iranbacked Hezbollah movement, have also warned Israel and Washington against continued bombing of Gaza

Amid rising death tolls and an international outcry over the humanitarian situation in Gaza, however, the Biden administration has been warning Israel that its support for the carnage in the enclave is running out

What will it take for deescalation

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said his government opposes any temporary ceasefire in Gaza unless Hamas frees all the hostages it holds, adding that it will continue to block fuel from entering the strip Netanyahu has however said he is open to short pauses taking place

Israel has accused Hamas of hoarding and diverting fuel CNN cannot independently verify the amount of fuel in the enclave

Qatar, a US ally that maintains ties with Hamas, has been trying to mediate deals to free hostages, as well as evacuate foreign nationals from Gaza

Four hostages held by Hamas two Israelis and two AmericanIsraelis have so far been freed through Qatari and Egyptian mediation

How likely is this war to escalate into a regional conflict

The Hamas attack raised concerns that the conflict could spread across the region, with the potential entry of Hezbollah from Lebanon as well as Israels arch enemy Iran

The US has warned regional players against getting pulled into the war, calling on Iran and its proxies not to escalate

The US military has said that a guided missile submarine has arrived in the Middle East, a message of deterrence directed at regional adversaries The Pentagon last month ordered a second carrier strike group to the eastern Mediterranean and sent Air Force fighter jets to the region

Iran, which backs Hamas, has denied involvement in the October 7 attack but has said that it morally supports the antiIsrael resistance which includes Hamas, Hezbollah and other Iranbacked militias

On Israels northern border, Iranbacked Hezbollah has engaged in an exchange of fire since the Gaza war began Those altercations have however been confined to the border areas

There have also been skirmishes in Syria and Iraq, from which Iranbacked militias have launched multiple drone attacks on US forces Yemens Iranbacked Houthis have attempted an aerial attack on Israel, which Israels military said it thwarted

In a November 3 speech, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah said his primary goal was to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza, and said it was incumbent on the US to implement the cessation of hostilities The speech appeared to show that Nasrallahs immediate plans do not include broadening the conflict

More than four months after Hamas, the Iranbacked Islamist group that rules Gaza, launched a brutal attack on Israel, triggering a ferocious response, diplomats met in Cairo this week aiming to reach a temporary ceasefireDespite the participation of CIA Director William Burns, Mossad chief David Barnea, and other heavyweights, the talks did not succeed and theres some question about whether they will continue

In the meantime, prominent figures across the globe are urging Israel not to launch an offensive in Rafah, the Gaza city on the border with Egypt which remains a stronghold of Hamas brigades, and where more than a million civilians, most of them displaced by the fighting, have taken shelter amid widespread devastation across the strip

Rafah encapsulates the perverse genius of the Hamas strategy, and the unwinnable moral dilemmas it created with the war it deliberately provoked

By launching a brutal attack on Israel, committing large scale sexual violence, and taking hundreds of hostages, it ensured that Israel would counteract with overwhelming force By embedding itself in the population, it guaranteed that Israels response would bring enormous suffering to Palestinians, knowing that Israel would take the blame and Hamass support would surge, particularly in the West Bank, where Fatah, its Palestinian rival, dominates

The crux of the matter remains how to make Hamas relinquish power in Gaza If Hamas leaders leave, surrender, or lay down their arms, the war could end

Israels critics demanding an immediate ceasefire may believe Israel should accept Hamass continuing control of Gaza, but Israelis, divided on political and social issues, are convinced of the justness of their cause

Hamas leaders vow that massacres like they committed on October 7 will happen again and again, that Israel cannot be allowed to exist Its political leaders, in comfortable exile, acknowledge the tactics will prove costly, but dismiss the casualties among their own people saying We are proud to sacrifice martyrs

With every passing day, however, with every Israeli bomb, with every death and injury among the besieged Palestinians, the pressure on Israel grows, even as Hamas remains defiant, hoping to survive the war as a power in Gaza

Hamas, classified as a terrorist group by many countries, not only rejects the existence of Israel It is a repressive, fundamentalist, homophobic, dictatorial power in the Gaza strip It was elected in 2006, but then brutalized its foes and became a dictatorship, funneling foreign aid to boost its financial empire and build tunnels and rockets

This conflict may be creating more terrorists than it is eliminating, but it is clear that it cannot end with Hamas still in control of Gaza That would ensure that theres no peace for Israel or Palestinians on either side of the border, a perpetual war

The diplomats immediate goal is to craft a formula for a temporary ceasefire and a release of some of the more than 130 Israeli hostages an unknown number of them already dead that Hamas is still holding after its October 7 rampage, when they brutalized families, women and children, children killing some 1,200 and kidnapping some 240 people in Israel, most of them civilians The hostages would be exchanged for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails

But the larger goal, beyond this shortterm objective, is to leverage the deal to build a permanent ceasefire to end the war so that the region, and the world, can move to the even more complicated matter, the most crucial of all, of what happens the day after, when the war ends

Among those raising alarms about a Rafah operation is President Joe Biden, who has become increasingly critical of Israels conduct of the war, calling it over the top and is demanding that Israel provide a credible plan for protecting the civilian population before it goes into Rafah

Israel is putting together controversial plans to temporarily relocate civilians to 15 tent cities along the coast, according to the Wall Street Journal However, no official evacuation plan has been announced

Israelis see the situation in stark terms

Traveling to The Hague to file war crimes complaints against Hamas, Ofri Bibas, whose brother, his wife and two children one of them a nine monthold baby were kidnapped and have not been released, called Hamas the successors of Hitler, Eichmann and Goebbels

Seeking a solution, Biden is exasperated with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is also profoundly unpopular in Israel and remains in power only because of support from extreme rightwingers in his coalition Biden is publicly demanding that Israel take more care to protect civilians

Standing with Jordans King Abdullah, Biden correctly described October 7 as the deadliest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust He added, also correctly, that the Palestinian people have also suffered unimaginable pain and loss The Hamascontrolled Health Ministry in Gaza says 27,000 have died in the war It doesnt distinguish combatants from noncombatants, but its beyond doubt that thousands of civilians have been killed, including large numbers of children And the living are enduring excruciating conditions

It may seem that the administration is sending mixed signals, but a closer look shows a nuanced position that not only maintains strong support for Israel, but also continues to endorse the uprooting of Hamas, including in Rafah

National Security spokesman John Kirby said this week, We never said that they cant go into Rafah and remove Hamas, arguing that Hamas remains a threat and Israel will continue to go after its leadership and infrastructure, as they should

In the meantime, talks about what should happen in Gaza the day after are moving forward quietly, out of the spotlight

The New York Times reported that officials from six Arab countries recently met in Saudi Arabia to discuss the prospects

Even though Arab leaders are publicly critical of Israel, theres little doubt that many of them wish fervently to see Hamas, which is backed by their regional foe Iran, removed from power Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and others, would like to see Hamas soundly defeated

One postwar scenario said to be gaining support among Sunni leaders is the formation of a new Palestinian administration, replacing the unpopular Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, to run Gaza backed by Arab troops from countries like the United Arab Emirates and perhaps Saudi Arabia, which is reportedly willing to establish diplomatic relations with Israel if it agrees to a path toward the creation of a Palestinian state

For now, Israelis still smarting from the trauma of October 7, with hostages still in Hamass hands, and with surveys showing most Palestinians approved of Hamass decision to launch its onslaught are in no mood to endorse a Palestinian state

Netanyahu has called the idea delusional But if Hamas is uprooted a prerequisite for genuine progress the government of Israel could change Polls predict Netanyahu would be crushed in another election

The sentiment in Israel could also change if the hostages return and if Arab countries offer steady reassurance But before the war can end, before the wounds can begin to heal on both sides, Hamas has to be removed from power

On February 1, I met US Secretary of State Antony Blinken for a 90minute private discussion on the situation in GazaI was seated directly across the table from Blinken in an ornate meeting room at the State Department Blinken was flanked by advisors I sat alongside a handful of fellow Palestinian AmericansSome of the invited Palestinian Americans declined to attend, pointing out that there is nothing more that administration officials need to hear or see to compel them to end their complicity in this genocide, referring to the situation in Gaza

I shared some of their concerns But I decided to attend because I felt it was my duty as a Palestinian American with family in Gaza whose lives hang in the balance to let the secretary know directly the horrors and war crimes he is aiding and abetting

Throughout our discussion, Blinken took extensive notes and nodded attentively As we ran well past our scheduled time, he insisted on extending the discussion

I am Rajaie Batniji

I take no pride and no honor in being here

Many of my fellow Palestinian Americans discouraged me from speaking with you today, concerned that this discussion was solely performative I share their concern

I come here out of a sense of duty, to try as futile as it may be to save my family in Gaza from being killed

I was born in Gaza and immigrated to California as a young child

I grew up visiting Gaza often, and those visits shaped me in many ways I personally experienced some of the violence of occupation

I studied the history of the region at Stanford, completed my doctorate in international relations at Oxford as a Marshall Scholar honoring the legacy of one of your predecessors in this office and became a physician focused on the health of those that have the least privilege

Im an entrepreneur who builds teams and technologies that improve American health care

I would rather not be here today

Mr Secretary, you have provided the weapons and the political cover that enabled the murder of 65 members of my family, mostly women and children, over the past four months In strikes in midNovember, three generations of my family were killed by missiles as they sought shelter and safety I carry their memories with me I see their crushed bodies when I close my eyesThe survivors in my family are homeless Some 70 of homes in Gaza have been destroyed, according to an analysis by The Wall Street Journal, along with almost all the schools, all the universities, many of the hospitals, the mosques, the churches, the historical sites and the public records

My paternal grandparents home in Shejaiya had been among the last homes of my family still standing This is the home where I was born It collapsed in a controlled demolition just before the new year

According to our own US intelligence agencies, Israel used 29,000 airtoground munitions during the first two months of its assault on Gaza Thats more than were used in the years of the Iraq War and Gaza is less than one thousandth the size

No one I know in Gaza has a home, or possessions beyond what they carried as they fled Israeli bombardment

My family may be better off than most in Gaza and they are still hungry I spoke with my moms brother this week, and he told me he has lost almost 20 kilograms 44 pounds Despite your promises, food aid has not been able to reach Gaza to come anywhere near meeting the need It is blocked at every opportunity, including by Israeli protestors at the Kerem Shalom border crossing, and by Israeli inspections and within Gaza by the Israeli military

According to the United Nations, 4 out of 5 of the hungriest people anywhere in the world are in Gaza You know that the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, provides food for most Gazans and critical infrastructure for other aid organizations Yet, after Israel made unverified allegations that a handful of UNRWA staff participated in the October 7 attacks, you cut the funding for UNRWA in what I can understand only as an act of collective punishment I fear this makes you, and me as an American party to the use of starvation as a weapon of war

My cousins in Gaza, who are physicians like me, have no place to practice medicine Their hospitals have been destroyed or incapacitated After moving from Shifa to alAqsa hospital, only to be evacuated from each by the Israeli military after seeing patients and colleagues killed, they are now living in tents in Rafah and alMawasi, using their surgical skills to repair leaks in their tents while the bodies of wounded Palestinians go untreated, and often unretrieved

I have worked extensively in global health and wrote a series of research papers in 2009 on what we thought then was a Palestinian health crisis We could never, though, have imagined this the complete destruction of Gazas health care system is unprecedented

Even the dead among my family were not spared Satellite images show that Israeli bulldozers and tanks desecrated the graveyards where my grandparents and great grandparents were resting I hope to bury their remains again one day

What do you wish to be your legacy, Secretary Blinken You cannot say you didnt know You cannot say that you did not knowingly and materially support these deaths, which a US federal court and the International Court of Justice have both determined plausibly constitute genocide

I am the father of three young children in San Francisco As adults, I am certain they will reflect on this genocide with horror It will be taught in our classrooms and remembered in our museums as we vow never to repeat it

I ask you to use your power, which can stop the killing of our families, to call for an immediate ceasefire and to stop sending weapons to Israel You and the president may be the only two people with the power to make this stop

I ask you to use the full power of your office and every bit of leverage the US has to allow aid to reach all of Gaza, including in the north, where hundreds of thousands of people remain in desperation And, to resume the funding for UNRWA, which will be essential to the distribution of any aid

I ask you to uphold a rulesbased order which serves our longterm interests by calling Israels indiscriminate bombing that has largely killed women and children, the attacks on health care and the use of starvation as a weapon of war as the war crimes you and I know they are Your words matter, Mr Secretary

I feel indignity sitting before you in this comfortable conference room while my family desperately awaits word about a ceasefire, in the dark, hungry, and in tents in fear that the Israeli military will kill them at any moment

In a dignified world, I would be asking for justice, not mercy That day will come

I hope that you, and this administration, can act quickly to bring our nation to the right side of history before it is far too late

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu boasted in August that the Palestinian issue had become a mere check box for Arab states that were looking to establish ties with the Jewish state, suggesting that it was a matter of lip service to an outdated cause

You have to check it to say that youre doing it, he said The Palestinian issue, he said, is brought up a lot less than you think in negotiations with Arab states

A month later, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman MBS acknowledged the existence of talks to normalize relations with Israel In return for recognition, he said, Israel would have to ease the life of the Palestinians, stopping short of calling for a Palestinian state and effectively abandoning a twodecadeold Saudi pledge to only make peace with Israel after it fully withdraws from land it occupies

But Hamas brutal weekend attack on Israel has thrust the Palestinian issue back into the international spotlight and may have thrown a wrench in Israels efforts to expand what Netanyahu calls the circle of peace, referring to Arab nations that have sidestepped the Palestinian issue to establish ties with Israel

The assault, which killed 1,200 people in Israel and prompted Israeli airstrikes that killed 1,055 in Gaza, was a gamechanging event for the IsraeliPalestinian conflict, according to Omar Rahman, a fellow at the Middle East Council on Global Affairs who focuses on Palestinian issues

For years, Israeli leaders have believed they can isolate Palestinians in ghettoized enclaves indefinitely, he told CNN The international community no longer seems to care, and the Palestinians Arab allies are embracing the most rightwing government in Israeli history This has left Palestinians with no hope or political horizon, facing a future of permanent subjugation

A SaudiIsraeli deal would have been a major diplomatic victory for Netanyahu in his efforts to end Israels regional isolation without making notable compromises to the Palestinians, and a significant foreign policy achievement for the Biden administration ahead of next years presidential elections

The Arab trend to normalize relations with Israel started in 2020, when the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan recognized the Jewish state while lending rhetorical support to the Palestinian cause The deal, dubbed the Abraham Accords, was facilitated by the Trump administration and touted as a historic turning point in the region

Normalization as a cornerstone of US policy

The United States has made ArabIsraeli normalization a cornerstone of its Middle East policy, which critics say has come at the expense of more pressing matters The sidelining of the Palestinians from such deals has been criticized in many quarters

When the UAE recognized Israel in 2020, it said that doing so was conditional on Israel giving up plans to annex parts of the West Bank, but critics have said that the text of the agreement made no mention of the condition and only references the Palestinian issue twice

The Biden administration is chasing this shiny new toy called normalization, said Khaled Elgindy, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute and director of its Program on Palestine and IsraeliPalestinian Affairs

The international community had become complacent to the plight of the Palestinians and moved on, he said, adding that last weekends events could put the issue back on the regional, international and great power agenda

Jordans King Abdullah lambasted the SaudiIsraeli normalization process last month, saying that even those Arab states that have already recognized Israel find themselves in a tough position when Israelis and Palestinians are dying

This belief, by some in the region, that you can parachute over Palestine, deal with the Arabs and work your way back that does not work, he said at a conference in New York Netanyahu told CNN last month he believes that making peace with Saudi Arabia could eventually lead to peace with the Palestinians

In a scathing editorial on the day of the Hamas attack, Israels most prominent leftwing newspaper Haaretz put the blame squarely on Netanyahu for, among other reasons, embracing a foreign policy that openly ignored the existence and rights of Palestinians while trying to reach an agreement with Saudi Arabia

Elham Fakhro, a research associate at Londons Chatham House and author of a forthcoming book on ArabIsraeli normalization, said Saudi normalization talks cannot proceed while Israel is at war with Gaza

Both Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden made Arab normalization with Israel their main diplomatic focus in the region while neglecting to advance any kind of meaningful peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, she told CNN The dramatic escalation in the conflict we are witnessing today is a direct result of this neglect

But the US is keen not to let last weekends attacks get in the way of normalization

We still believe that normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia is not only good for the people of those two nations, but for the American people and for everybody else in the region, US National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby said on Tuesday And we have every intention to continue to encourage a process where normalization can occur

Saudi takes a traditional approach

Prospects of SaudiIsrael normalization appeared to have reached such an advanced level that just last month, the Biden administration presented to the world a landmark plan to connect India to Europe through a maritime and rail trade network that would also link Saudi Arabia to Israel The plan was widely perceived as challenging Chinas trade ambitions and would presumably have been activated after Saudi Arabia and Israel normalized ties

But the Hamas attacks on Israel, and Israels deadly response to them, have prompted Riyadh to take a more traditional approach to the conflict

Responding to the attack on Saturday, Saudi Arabia blamed Israel for its continuing occupation and depriving the Palestinian people of their legitimate rights, stopping short of condemning Hamas, which is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood group that Riyadh considers a terror organization MBS spoke to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on the phone on Tuesday and expressed solidarity

On Monday, prominent Saudi commentator Mohammed Al Yahya wrote in a Washington Post article that Saudi officials were frustrated at the notion that they had become indifferent to the Palestinian cause But he said that the idea of a total Israeli withdrawal from the territory it captured in the 1967 war, as previously demanded by Saudi Arabia, was dated

Arab nations that normalized relations with Israel in 2020 appear to have done so despite strong public opposition to the move, according to a poll last year by the Washington Institute Public sentiment against normalization may harden further if Israel conducts a potentially devastating ground invasion into Gaza, adding more pressure from the Arab street In the UAE, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, around threequarters of their populations were opposed to normalizing with Israel, the poll found

I think the ultimate objective from the Hamas operation is to ensure that theres no going back to the status quo ante, said Elgindy The goal was to shatter this sense of Israeli complacency

The Israeli military has told all civilians in Gaza City to evacuate southwards as it maintains its bombardment of the coastal enclave in response to last weekends Hamas attacks that killed more than 1,400 peopleEvacuating would involve moving more than 11 million people from the north to the south of the besieged enclave, amid constant airstrikes a task that the United Nations says is dangerous and unfeasible

Israeli war planes have been pounding Gaza for a week, leveling entire neighborhoods, including schools and mosques Israel says it strikes Hamas targets and that the group has used civilians as human shields

Israels assault has killed at least 2,670 people in Gaza, and injured more than 9,600 others Nearly 1 million Palestinians in Gaza have been forced from their homes, the UN has said

What happened

Militants from Gaza fired thousands of rockets towards Israeli towns on October 7, before breaking through the heavily fortified border fence with Israel and sending militants deep into Israeli territory There, Hamas gunmen killed more than 1,400 people, including civilians and soldiers, and took up to 150 hostages, according to Israeli authorities

The attacks were unprecedented in tactics and scale as Israel has not faced its adversaries in street battles on its own territory since the 1948 ArabIsraeli war It has also never faced a terror attack of this magnitude that has taken the lives of so many civilians While Hamas has kidnapped Israelis before, it has never before taken dozens of hostages at once, including children and the elderly

A senior Hamas official in Lebanon told a Russian statebacked channel that the group had been preparing for the attack for two years

Hamas called the operation AlAqsa Storm and said that it was a response to what it described as Israeli attacks on women, the desecration of the alAqsa mosque in Jerusalem and the ongoing siege of Gaza

They said the bodies of some 1,500 Hamas fighters had been recovered inside Israel since Saturdays assaultHow has Israel responded

In response to the attack, Israel has declared war and launched Operation Swords of Iron, striking what it says are Hamas and Islamic Jihad targets in Gaza It has also blocked supply lines of basic necessities to the Gaza population, including fuel and water

Between October 7 and 12, Israel dropped 6,000 bombs on the densely inhabited territory thats equivalent to the total number of airstrikes on Gaza during the entire 2014 GazaIsrael conflict, which lasted 50 days

Children make up between 30 and 40 of the wounded in Israels airstrikes on Gaza, BritishPalestinian surgeon Ghassan AbuSittah told CNNs Christiane Amanpour on Thursday

The IDF has told civilians in Gaza to leave their residential areas immediately for their safety, but some say there is nowhere safe to go All crossings out of Gaza have been shut

Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant said on Monday that he had ordered a complete siege on Gaza, blocking delivery of electricity, food, fuel and water Energy Minister Israel Katz has said supplies will remain cut off until hostages being held by Hamas are freed

Israel on Wednesday formed an emergency government and war management cabinet

On Friday, Israels military told the 11 million people in northern Gaza to evacuate their homes immediately

CNN has geolocated and authenticated five videos from the scene of a large explosion along one of the evacuation routes for civilians south of Gaza City

The videos show many dead bodies amid a scene of extensive destruction Some of those bodies are on a flatbed trailer that appears to have been used to carry people away from Gaza City They include several children There are also a number of badly burned and damaged cars

Its unclear what caused the widespread devastation the explosion occurred on Salah alDeen Street on Friday afternoon

Whats the situation in Gaza now

A humanitarian crisis in Gaza is rapidly spiraling amid warnings that peosple are at risk of starvation as Israel tightens its chokehold on the territory

The Gaza Strip is one of most densely populated places on earth, with some 2 million people crammed in 140squaremile territory The enclave lies on Egypts western border and has been under blockade since Hamas seized control in 2007

The Israeli air, naval and land blockade on the territory, as well as the Egyptian land blockade, continue today

The enclaves only power station stopped working on Wednesday Hospitals are expected to run out of fuel, leading to catastrophic conditions, the Palestinian Health Ministry warned The World Health Organization WHO has said that hospitals are at breaking point

On Thursday, the International Committee of the Red Cross warned hospitals in Gaza risk turning into morgues as they lose power Airstrikes have hit at least 88 education facilities and killed 12 UN personnel, according to the UN

The Palestine Red Crescent has warned of a humanitarian catastrophe as there are no safe areas to evacuate civilians to, after Israel told half the population to migrate south It described the Israeli evacuation call as shocking and beyond belief

Human rights groups have meanwhile warned of possible war crimes being committed by Israel in Gaza Amnesty International on Friday urged Israel to immediately lift its blockade on the enclave, saying the collective punishment of civilians for Hamas terrorist atrocities amounts to a war crime

Since Israel shut its two crossings with Gaza, the only corridor through which Palestinians or aid can pass in and out of the territory is the Rafah Crossing, which connects the south of the enclave to Egypt But its unclear whether that crossing is open

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said on Saturday that the crossing is open but aerial bombardment has rendered the roads on the Gaza side inoperable

Aid flights from Jordan, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the World Health Organization, and the Red Cross have arrived in Egypt, but the supplies have not yet made it through the crossing Shoukry said Egypt has tried to ship humanitarian aid to Gaza but has not received the proper authorization to do so

Hamas said on Friday that 13 Israeli hostages held in Gaza have been killed by random Israeli bombings on the enclave over the past 24 hours The Israel Defense Forces IDF said it could not confirm or deny the claim

Hamas also called on Gazans not to leave their homes, accusing Israel of engaging in psychological warfare by sending messages telling Palestinian civilians and employees of international organizations to evacuate to the south Displacement and exile are not for us, Hamas said

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency UNRWA on Friday said it had relocated its central operations center and international staff in Gaza to the south of the besieged enclave

What is Hamas

Hamas is an Islamist organization with a military wing that came into being in 1987, emerging out of the Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni Islamist group that was founded in the late 1920s in Egypt

The group, like most Palestinian factions and political parties, insists that Israel is an occupying power and that it is trying to liberate the Palestinian territories It considers Israel an illegitimate state and has called for its downfall

Unlike some other Palestinian factions, Hamas refuses to engage with Israel In 1993, it opposed the Oslo Accords, a peace pact between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization PLO that saw the PLO give up armed resistance against Israel in return for promises of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel The Accords also established the Palestinian Authority PA in the Israelioccupied West Bank

Hamas presents itself as an alternative to the PA, which has recognized Israel and has engaged in multiple failed peace initiatives with it The PA, whose credibility among Palestinians has suffered over the years, is today led by President Mahmoud Abbas

It has over the years claimed many attacks on Israel and has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union and Israel Israel accuses its archenemy Iran of backing the group

Hamas rules Gaza, the small strip of land bordering Israel and Egypt that has changed hands several times over the past 70 years The vast majority of its population are descendants of refugees who were either expelled or forced to flee their homes in 1948 in what is now Israel

How did the two sides get here

Tensions between Israelis and the Palestinians have existed since before Israels founding in 1948 Thousands of people on both sides have been killed and many more injured over decades

Violence has been particularly acute this year The number of Palestinians militants and civilians killed in the occupied West Bank by Israeli forces since the year began is the highest in nearly two decades The same is true of Israelis and foreigners most of them civilians killed in Palestinian attacks

Israel captured Gaza from Egypt in the 1967 war, then withdrew its troops and settlers in 2005 The territory, home to some 2 million Palestinians, fell under Hamas control in 2007 after a brief civil war with Fatah, a rival Palestinian faction that is the backbone of the Palestinian Authority

After Hamas seized control, Israel and Egypt imposed a strict siege on the territory, which is ongoing Israel also maintains an air and naval blockade on Gaza

Human Rights Watch has called the territory an openair prison More than half of its population lives in poverty and is food insecure, and nearly 80 of its population relies on humanitarian assistance

Hamas and Israel have fought several wars Before Saturdays operation, the last war between the two was in 2021, which lasted for 11 days and killed at least 250 people in Gaza and 13 in Israel

Saturdays assault occurred 50 years almost to the day since the 1973 war, when Israels Arab neighbors launched a surprise attack on Israel on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, on October 6, 1973

What happens next

Israel is now on a war footing and has amassed more than 300,000 reservists along the Gaza border for a potential ground operation It has said that it will exact a heavy price on Hamas for its attack and plans to retrieve Israeli hostages from the territory

Israel has dealt with hostage situations before, but never at this scale In the past, militants have mostly demanded the release of prisoners held in Israeli jails in exchange for captured Israelis In 2011, Israel traded 1,027 Palestinians for Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and in 2004, it released more than two dozen Lebanese and Arab prisoners including two senior Hezbollah officials for Elhanan Tannenbaum, an Israeli businessman and army reserve colonel, as well as the bodies of three IDF soldiers In 2008, Israel released five Palestinian prisoners, five Lebanese prisoners and returned the bodies of nearly 200 Arab fighters in exchange for the bodies of two Israeli soldiers

Hamas has captured at least 150 hostages Their presence in Gaza will undoubtedly complicate any Israeli military operation there

The militant groups armed wing said Monday it would begin killing civilian hostages and broadcasting the act if Israel targets people in Gaza without warning It isnt clear if it has acted on those threats yet

The IDF has said that it plans to take control of the Gaza Strip Its spokesperson, Lt Col Richard Hecht, said the aim is to end the Gaza enclave and control the entire enclave

When asked whether it had stopped the knock on the roof, which is the Israeli militarys warning for civilians before it bombs a building Hecht responded that Hamas did not knock on the roof

When they came in and threw grenades at our ambulances they did not knock on the roof This is war The scale is different, Hecht said

Senior Hamas member Saleh alArouri told Al Jazeera Arabic on Saturday that Hamas is ready for all options, including a war and an escalation on all levels

We are ready for the worstcase scenario, including a ground invasion, which will be the best for us to decide the ending of this battle, alArouri said

Could this lead to a wider regional conflict

Hamas operation was carried out in a sophisticated and coordinated manner and would have taken a significant amount of planning Speculation has been rife that the group may have received assistance from abroad, which, if proven, could raise the specter of a wider regional war

Israel says Iran supports Hamas to the tune of some 100 million dollars a year The US State Department in 2021 said that the group receives funding, weapons, and training from Iran, as well as some funds that are raised in Gulf Arab countries

Of course Iran is in the picture, one US official told CNN Theyve provided support for years to Hamas and HezbollahA senior Biden administration official said on Saturday that it was too early to say whether Iran was directly involved in the attack, but that Washington will be tracking the matter very closely

But President Joe Biden on Wednesday issued a stark warning to Iran to be careful around its actions in the region

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi spoke to Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh by phone last Sunday and later congratulated the Palestinian people for their victory over Israel On Monday, however, Irans mission to the United Nations said the Islamic Republic was not involved in Palestines response, referring to the Hamas attack It is taken solely by Palestine itself, it said

On Friday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said in Beirut that Lebanons security is Irans security, in an apparent warning to Israel not to strike Lebanon or the Iranbacked Hezbollah militant group that operates there

He said that Western officials had asked him if new fronts could open against Israel, adding that its probable that members of the resistance against Israel could enter the war with the continuation of Israeli war crimes

The warning came a day after the Iranallied Syrian regime said that Israel struck Damascus and Aleppo airports, rendering them nonoperational

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has meanwhile been shuttling around the region, visiting Israel, the occupied West Bank and Jordan Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin also arrived in Israel on Friday

The US has ordered two carrier strike groups to the eastern Mediterranean Sea, Austin said on Saturday A US official told CNN that the US is also sending more fighter jets to the Middle East to deter any Iranian potential aggression or an expansion of the fighting beyond Israels borders

Israel may also face the threat of new fronts opening in the war Of its immediate neighbors, it is only at peace with Jordan and Egypt, and is officially in a state of war with Lebanon and Syria Israel has said it is ready in case there are attacks from those two countries

The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran, has praised Hamas attack and said it is in contact with Palestinian militant groups at home and abroad, its Al Manar channel said The group claimed responsibility for targeting three Israeli sites in an area known as Shebaa Farms using missiles and artillery The area is considered by Lebanon as Israelioccupied Israel responded by firing artillery

On Monday, the IDF said it killed a number of armed suspects who infiltrated into Israel from Lebanon and that soldiers were searching the area Lebanese Prime Ministerdesignate Najib Mikati said on Monday that his country doesnt want to be drawn into the conflict

The IDF said Wednesday a report was received regarding a suspected infiltration from Lebanon into Israeli air space

It did not provide further details and it was unclear whether the infiltration involved aircraft, drones, gliders, balloons or people

Even as the US believes Iran is complicit in the attack, given its years of support to the Palestinian militant group, national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Tuesday that the administration still does not have direct evidence linking Tehran to the planning and execution of the assault

Were looking to acquire further intelligence, Sullivan told reporters at the White House But as I stand here today, while Iran plays this broad role sustained, deep and dark role in providing all of this support and capabilities to Hamas in terms of this particular gruesome attack on October 7, we dont currently have that information

Privately, multiple intelligence, military and congressional officials with access to classified intelligence tell CNN the same thing that Sullivan said publicly No direct evidence has been found indicating Iran was directly involved

Waiting to see if we get a smoking gun in the intel, said one military official

Israeli intelligence is also going back and examining previous evidence, a senior Israeli official told CNN

I doubt that Iran had no knowledge whatsoever, the official said Weve seen meetings and weve seen the close coordination between them

US and Israeli intelligence had no advance warning of the attack something US officials say is stunning given the scale of the assault and now, the Biden administration is treading cautiously

Where else would it have come from

Iran has for years been Hamas chief benefactor, providing it with tens of millions of dollars, weapons and components smuggled into Gaza, as well as broad technical and ideological supportHamas maintains a degree of independence from the Iranian regime Tehran doesnt have advisers on the ground in blockaded Gaza, according to former security officials and other regional analysts, and it doesnt command the groups activities

But the unprecedented scale of the weekends attack combined with analysts broad belief that Iran sees the attack as a net positive for its interests in the region have fueled questions of whether Hamas could have pulled off such a sophisticated operation without direct Iranian assistance

We spend a lot of time and resources worrying about what Iran is doing and how to counter what Iran is doing, a State Department official said This certainly opens up a new chapter in that discussionIn 2022, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said publicly that the group had received about 70 million from Iran that year and that it used the money to build rockets A State Department report from 2020 found that Iran provided about 100 million annually to Palestinian terrorist groups, including Hamas

Former US officials say there is little question the massive stockpile of weapons used in Saturdays attack was acquired and assembled with help from Iran

Hamas didnt build the guidance system and those missiles in Gaza, said retired Gen Frank McKenzie, the former commander of US Central Command They got them from somewhere And the technology assistance to put it together certainly came from Iran where else would it have come from

Still, the Biden administration has for days stopped short of attributing a role in the tactical planning and execution of the attack to Tehran, and current and former US intelligence analysts who spoke to CNN cautioned that past Iranian support to the group isnt enough evidence to prove its direct involvement

Even if they didnt give the instruction, you see it in the support, said Zohar Palti, the former head of the PoliticalMilitary Bureau at Israels Ministry of Defense Is Hamas a complete Iranian proxy that does everything Iran wants No But the relationship is much closer than it was even three years agoTehran has denied any involvement in the attack, even as it has lauded it publicly Israel has also expressed caution publicly

We have no evidence or proof that Iran was behind the attack, Maj Nir Dinar, a spokesperson for the Israel Defense Forces, told Politico on Monday We are 100 percent sure that the Iranians were not surprised

Disrupting Saudi, Israeli negotiations

Privately, some US officials believe its likely Iran had at least some involvement in the planning of the attack But those personal assessments are largely based on the belief that Iran would likely look for any opportunity to disrupt the fragile negotiations that had been in the works to normalize relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel Saturdays attack is widely seen as having endangered those talks

Other analysts say its equally likely that Iran would have wanted to maintain its distance from any Hamas operation against Israel even if it was aware of the attack in advance

It is not in Irans interest to have more direct involvement, said Norm Roule, the former national intelligence manager for Iran at the CIA

Iran identifies regional proxies and then provides them with the political, financial and security support to dominate their particular geography, Roule said Iran encourages military operations, but its proxies manage those actions

Its possible that Iran provided some operational and planning support in advance of the attack, but that it told Hamas, Youre on your own once it happens, said Mike Knights, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute who specializes in Iranbacked proxy groups

This looks like Hamas learned some very significant new tricks from someone else and that may well have been the Iranians, Knights said But that doesnt necessarily mean that Iran is up for broadening the war

An evolving relationship

The relationship between Iran and Hamas has evolved over the years In the early days of the Syrian civil war a decade ago, Hamas and Iran found themselves on opposite sides of the conflict

For years, the two had a fraught relationship driven by two different Islamist ideologies Sunni Muslim Hamas and Shia Muslim Iran But Hamas saw Irans influence expanding in the region, especially as Americas shrinking role in the Middle East created a power vacuum for Tehran to exploit, according to Michael Milshtein, the former head of the Department for Palestinian Affairs in the Israeli militarys intelligence directorate

More recently, Tehran has stepped up the training assistance it provides Hamas inside Iran, according to a former Western defense official Iran was being more proactive in logistics and training of these people, the former official said Theyve gone full on in last few years with explicit desire to destabilize the region

According to Knights, the closest relationship that Shia Iran now has with any Sunni group is Hamas Tehran has provided Hamas with precision loitering munitions drone systems that it has not even provided the Iraqi militias, with which it has had relationships since the 1980s

This suggests a level of actual operational arming, training, equipping that weve only previously seen with Lebanese Hezbollah, and then with the Houthis in Yemen, Knights said

But Hamas is not a proxy of Iran, Milshtein said Unlike terror groups such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza or Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas maintains a large degree of independence from Tehran, even as the assistance has dramatically expanded

Hamas became comfortable getting close to Iran, Milshtein said, but the relationship remains largely based on military cooperation Hamas received Iranian weapons and military technology, and learned from the Iranians about planning operations But the power to make a decision remained with Hamas leadership

Everything we have seen in the last four days, we cant say its an Iranian plan or an Iranian effort, Milshtein said Its a Hamas plan that got Iranian help

Searching for a motivation

US intelligence officials are also working to understand Hamas immediate motivation for launching the attack Unlike the Palestinian Authority, the militant group does not recognize Israel and is committed to the destruction of the Jewish state

Broadly, the more than 2 million residents of the Gaza Strip live in crowded and substandard conditions, partly as a result of a yearslong Israeli blockade and recurring airstrikes on the densely populated enclave

McKenzie and others said Hamas was likely motivated by its own parochial cause more than it was by any interest in disrupting normalization talks

I think the Hamas calculation is very little on normalization, McKenzie said I think its less the larger geostrategic things in the theater

Its the HamasIsraeli relationship, not the larger, What does this mean to Saudi Arabia

Get down the medic in the front seat hissed as our ambulance approached the Israeli checkpointI could see through the front window tanks by the side of the road, nervous Israeli soldiers raising their guns as we approached

This was January 2009 and the CNN crew had caught a ride with a convoy of ambulances going from Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip toward Gaza City along the coastal road The medics allowed us to come along on the condition we hid on their stretchers

This was what Israel had dubbed Operation Cast Lead, the first in a series of flareups of various durations between Israel and Gaza in 2012, 2014, 2021 and 2022 The ongoing operation in Gaza was preceded by another one this May

After a brief exchange with the medics in the lead ambulance, the soldiers waved us through without inspecting the ambulances

It was the deepest Israeli ground operation into Gaza since the withdrawal from the Strip in 2005 Then, Israeli troops largely avoided the most built up and crowded areas, particularly Gazas eight crammed refugee camps They were well aware that entering into the narrow alleys of camps like alShati, one of the most crowded, would be risky Their focus was on controlling the periphery of urban areas

Israels tactics have always been to move fast, control as much territory as possible, but avoid streettostreet, housetohouse fighting where a weaker opponent can take full advantage of the terrain Entering urban areas in Gaza, however, would bring in an entire new element to the fight

At the moment Israeli forces are engaged with Hamas But Gaza is home to a myriad of armed Palestinian groups, including Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine PFLP, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine DFLP to name just a few They dont have Hamas manpower or weaponry, but theyre numerous enough to put up serious resistance

In March 2008, I went to Gaza to cover an Israeli incursion into the north, this time dubbed Hot Winter, yet another attempt to stop rocket fire from Gaza At the time, Hamas was in full control of the Gaza Strip, having expelled the rival Fatah faction the previous year But when I arrived in the area where Israeli forces were trying to advance, it wasnt Hamas fighters but rather gunmen from the PFLP who were running street battles with Israeli troops They ducked in and out of alleyways, sprinted across streets with rocket propelled grenade launchers and Kalashinkov assault rifles The young men were almost giddy with excitement They finally had a chance to fight Israeli troops on their own ground Eventually, the Israelis pulled out The rocket fire continued

Going back to the summer of 1982 when Israel invaded Lebanon in pursuit of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Israeli forces made it all the way to Beirut then stopped on the outskirts, establishing a siege much along the lines announced Monday by Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant It was clear even back then that entering Beirut, particularly the Palestinian refugee camps, would be a deadly mission for all

During the siege that followed, Israeli warplanes and artillery pummeled West Beirut, but ground troops stayed out of Beirut proper

In the end, under American pressure, a deal was worked out whereby Palestinian fighters would evacuate Beirut and Lebanon to Yemen, Tunisia and elsewhere It was only after they left that Israeli troops took control of the western part of the city Soon afterwards in September 1982, with Israel in control of West Beirut, the Israeli military, under the leadership of then Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, allowed their rightwing Christian Lebanese allies, the Kataib, to enter Sabra and Shatila refugee camp and slaughter over a thousand civilians who no longer were able to defend themselves because the men of fighting age and their weapons had left as part of the USbrokered deal with the PLO

The Israeli military has now mobilized 300,000 reservists for what is now widely believed to be an unprecedented incursion into Gaza and perhaps, some speculate, a reoccupation of the enclave in the aftermath of Hamas October 7 surprise attack, which killed more than 1,300 people in IsraelWhat awaits it is a Hamas that has shown, despite the cruelty vividly displayed in its Saturday attack, a level of military capability far beyond what was previously thought It is probably well prepared for the next phase in this war

Over the past week, Israel has launched hundreds of punishing strikes on Gaza, turning some areas into wastelands of shattered concrete and twisted metal In the process, over 2,200 Palestinians including many civilians and over 700 children have been killed And this is just the initial phase of this war

If it comes, the ground operation will be far bloodier and more destructive Israeli forces will also have to be mindful that spread around Gaza are more than a hundred captive Israelis soldiers and civilians, including women and children held hostage by Hamas And although no one outside Hamas knows where theyre being held, its likely theyre in the most difficult areas for Israeli forces to access, possibly in crowded refugee camps

As eager as Israels leaders may be to deal a fatal blow to Hamas, it will come at a very high price To all Three months ago, speaking to citizens rocked by a horrific day of attacks by Hamas, Israels Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a promiseThe IDF will immediately use all its strength to destroy Hamass capabilities, Netanyahu said We will destroy them

Now, the Israel Defense Forces IDF is shifting to a new phase of its war on Hamas in Gaza and there are signs its objectives are changing too

The record is not very friendly to military campaigns seeking to eradicate political military movement that are deeply rooted, Bilal Y Saab, an associate fellow in the Middle East and North Africa at Chatham House, told CNN

IDF leadership understands very well that the most they can do is severely degrade the military capabilities of Hamas, Saab said

Israel has seen some successes in that regard its forces claim to have killed thousands of Hamas fighters, including some highranking members, and have dismantled some parts of the groups vast tunnel network under the enclave

But challenges remain and an endgame is far from sight Few countries at war set deadlines Israeli officials have warned of a lengthy war that could stretch through the entirety of 2024 and beyond It will unfold in front of an international community that is increasingly aghast at the extraordinary humanitarian crisis and spiraling civilian deaths in Gaza

And as international pressure increases, so too could domestic unease towards Netanyahu an embattled prime minister eager to point to tangible victories

There is a race against time, said Saab, outlining the key questions facing Israels leadership At what price is this tactical success going to come, and how much time do the Israelis have to achieve that tactical success without suffering from more significant international outrage

A new combat approach

The destruction of Hamas the goal that Netanyahu touted on October 7 was lofty, elusive and, according to many analysts, impossible

This kind of mission cannot be completed weve seen it fail over the years many times, Saab said

Hamas influence extends far beyond Gaza, meaning a total defeat of the group is at least highly ambitious for Israel, if it can be achieved at all

In a speech marking the anniversary of the attacks, Netanyahu reiterated his goals for the conflict To eliminate Hamas, return our hostages and ensure that Gaza will no longer be a threat to Israel

But it remains unclear whether IDF leadership places eliminating Hamas atop its priorities IDF intelligence chief Maj Gen Aharon Haliva left out the destruction of Hamas when listing military goals in a speech on Thursday, Israeli media noted

And also on Thursday, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant unveiled plans for the next phase of the war in Gaza, emphasizing a new combat approach in the north and a sustained focus on targeting Hamas leaders suspected to be present in the enclaves southern territoryIn the third phase, IDF operations in northern Gaza will encompass raids, the destruction of terror tunnels, aerial and ground activities, and special operations, according to Gallant

This phase will be less intense, but it will take more time, Yohanan Plesner, the President of the Israel Democracy Institute and a former Knesset member for the Kadima party, told CNN

If the more realistic target is a severe reduction in Hamas fighting capabilities, many analysts say that tangible progress has been made in the past three months

The definition of success will not be to catch or kill all Hamas operatives, but to ensure that Hamas can no longer effectively govern the Gaza Strip, Plesner said Hamas is organized like an army, with command and control centers, regiments and brigades This command structure is being seriously challenged and dismantled

Addressing reporters in Tel Aviv, Netanyahu said last week that the Israeli military is fighting with force and new systems above and below the ground and claimed to have killed 8,000 Hamas fighters in Gaza, according to Army Radio

CNN cant verify this figure The Hamasrun Health Ministry in Gaza says nearly 23,000 people have been killed in the territory since the war began The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants, but both the ministry in Gaza and its counterpart in the occupied West Bank suggest that approximately 70 of those killed or injured are women and children

Israel believed Hamas had about 30,000 fighters in Gaza before the war began on October 7, the Israel Defense Forces told CNN in December The fighters were divided into five brigades, 24 battalions and approximately 140 companies, the IDF told CNN, each with capabilities including antitank missiles, snipers and engineers, and rocket and mortar arrays

A hunt for Hamas leaders

Israel has also claimed some success in targeting Hamas tunnel shafts, a complex notoriously difficult for IDF troops to infiltrate The IDF released a video this week which it says showed the dismantlement of one tunnel route under AlShifa Hospital, the largest medical complex in Gaza, that it accused Hamas of excavating

Last month, it released other videos it said showed a network of tunnels which connect to residences and offices of senior Hamas leadership including Ismail Haniyeh, Yahya Sinwar, and Muhammad Deif

But the bigger goal of finding and killing Hamas most important leaders in Gaza has eluded Israel to date

This is where intelligence is king, Saab said Gallant and other officials have repeatedly emphasized the importance of their efforts to eliminate senior Hamas commanders, with the defense minister vowing in late December that Sinwar would meet the barrels of our guns soon

A longtime figure in the Islamist Palestinian group, Sinwar was responsible for building up Hamas military wing before forging important new ties with regional Arab powers as the groups civilian and political leader Organizations like these replace commanders pretty easily I dont think anyone is irreplaceable in Hamas, Saab said But if you take out the symbolic heads of the organization, who knows if that might have a trickle down effect, especially with people who have military responsibilities

It seems unlikely that the new phase of Israels war will bring relief for the Palestinians trapped in Gaza, where a humanitarian crisis has spiraled to extraordinary levels

But Netanyahu may be more likely to be bow in the face of domestic pressure, which has been rising in particular over the continued captivity of more than 100 hostages taken by Hamas on October 7

Israel believes 25 hostages are dead and still being held by in Gaza, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus office told CNN Friday It leaves 107 hostages from the Hamas attack last year still thought to be alive

The return of those hostages remains a goal in the wars new phase, but failure to deliver would intensify political pressure on a decisive leader whose popularity among Israelis has only plunged since October 7

From day one, there was a clear disparity there is support for the war goals and for the IDF, but the trust in the Israeli government is at an alltime low, Plesner said, Theres a huge gulf

Anxiety mounts every day that a fullscale Middle East war could erupt from the flames of the IsraelHamas war in GazaWe feel and were afraid of it, Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib told CNNs Christiane Amanpour this week We dont want any escalation in the war We dont like a regional war because its dangerous to everybody Dangerous to Lebanon, dangerous to Israel and to the countries surrounding Israel, he said, adding, A regional war is bad for everybody

But the one thing that could avert such a disaster is that a more expansive conflict may not be in the vital national interests of any of the regions major powers

And while key states and extremist groups appear to be walking right up to the brink, theres still hope that the economic, political and military consequences of an escalation will be so grave, that they will stop just short of escalation

Almost every day brings another violent incident On Thursday, for instance, the US carried out a strike in Baghdad that killed a leader from an Iranbacked militia that Washington blames for attacks against US personnel in the region US troops in Iraq and Syria tasked with keeping a lid on ISIS have repeatedly come under rocket and drone attacks from Tehrans proxies

Fighting is intensifying between Israel and another proIranian group, Hezbollah, across the Lebanon border In another alarming sign, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on Thursday told US envoy Amos Hochstein that time was running out to create a new reality on Israels northern border to allow residents there to return to their homes Israel is, meanwhile, suspected of carrying out an attack on highranking Hamas leader, Saleh AlArouri, in Beirut, sparking fury among Hezbollah leaders who control the area where he was killed

In another alarming incident, US forces this week sank three boats belonging to Houthi rebels in the Red Sea, following a series of attacks on commercial shipping Central Command said American helicopters were fired on first and acted in selfdefense The US and around a dozen allies have launched a maritime task force to protect commercial vessels in critical sea lanes in the area after some shipping firms sent their vessels on a longer, less economical route around Africa

A double bomb attack this week near the grave of former Iranian intelligence chief Qasem Soleimani, since claimed by ISIS, meanwhile rocked an already tense region and may increase internal pressure on Irans government as it plots its wider moves in the Middle East

Why a wider war could be avoided

Many of the regions power brokers including Israel, Iran and Hezbollah may have the most interest in a highlevel of tension stopping just short of war The worry for the US, however, is that all of this playing with fire could spark another Middle Eastern conflict that could drag in Americans Thats a scenario the Biden administration is desperate to avoid especially in an election year

There are no strategic drivers, for the main regional or external actors to ignite a regional war, if only because the goals of such conflict would be unclear, and this would immediately disrupt their significant political and economic stability, Norman Roule, former US national intelligence manager for Iran, told CNNs Jake Tapper on Wednesday At the same time, Iran and its proxies have multiple incentives to maintain and even increase the intensity and frequency of the current actions against Israel

The concern should be that any of these activities produces an event that requires retaliation or involvement by other actors that then build on each other, leading to the very conventional conflict we all wish to avoid

The situation is so treacherous because rapid deterioration could happen at any moment on any number of fronts Hezbollah has thousands of missiles that could target Israeli civilians, meaning that intensified clashes could quickly get very dangerous A mass casualty attack by Iranian proxies against US forces would create political and military imperatives for President Joe Biden to take far more robust military action than he has so far If a US or allied ship in the Red Sea sustains serious damage, Biden would face similar choices And the entry into the Red Sea this week of an Iranian destroyer raised the possibility of miscalculations with rival navies operating in close quarters in fraught waters

The scale and barbarity of the Hamas operation and Israels response, which has pulverized vast areas of civilian neighborhoods in Gaza, set off a cascade of events embedded in the fault lines of the Middle East The subsequent shockwaves ended a period of relative calm in the region, during which the Trump and Biden administrations, and its allies, had tried to forge closer links between Gulf States and Israel The ensuing tensions appear to have ended hopes in the White House for any tacit and informal lowering of antagonism with Iran, although Bidens political foes accuse him of being insufficiently tough on the Islamic Republic and its nuclear program

A geopolitical circuit breaker

The key players interest in avoiding conflict could act as a circuit breaker Given the likely cost of a regional war and the global economic, military and political repercussions it would spark, each power has good reasons to avoid the brink

Israel is already embroiled in a hot war in Gaza that its government says will drag on for months A fullscale war with Hezbollah could subject Israeli citizens to bombardments potentially far greater than those suffered by Israeli cities from Hamas rocket attacks last year In that sense, the strike against Arouri which Israel was behind, a US official confirmed to CNN on Wednesday may have been a gamble that it would not spark a massive response from Hezbollah At the same time, however, as the rest of the world frets about a widening conflict, Israeli leaders believe they are already embroiled in what is effectively a regional war given the multifront threats they face

The United States is intensifying a strategy it has been employing for weeks to try to stop things spilling out of control Secretary of State Antony Blinken is headed to the region again, facing increasing pressure to cool tensions between Israel and Hezbollah in a situation that has Lebanon, which Hezbollah dominates, fearing a catastrophe that could worsen its already fragile political, economic and humanitarian plight American forces in Syria, Iraq, and at sea look painfully exposed Regarding Iranian proxies, the Biden administration appears to be seeking to reestablish a level of deterrence without itself setting off the regional tinder box

Washington and its allies also just issued a statement warning Houthi rebels in Yemen of consequences if attacks on shipping continue in the Red Sea, a sea lane that is vital to the global economy CNNs Natasha Bertrand and Kevin Liptak reported on Thursday that the White Houses patience is close to running out with the rebels But direct strikes against their launch sites on land would not only drag allied forces deeper into the conflict, they could threaten a truce that paused Yemens murderous civil war Biden is in a political bind Hes constantly accused by Republicans of being too soft on Iran and its proxies But any worsening of the regional situation also could play into GOP claims that the 81yearold Democratic president lacks the capacity to lead The danger for Biden is that the last 20 years are filled with repeated US failures to impose its will on the Middle East Asserting US power is easier said than done

Iran may have more to gain from using its sprawling network of proxy groups to exert lowerlevel costs on Israel and the United States than it would from plunging into a direct conflict The latter could prove militarily and economically destabilizing and increase political pressure toward the clerical regime, which is already soaring after the bomb attacks But theres also a danger that such political heat could force the hand of leaders who may see a more aggressive posture abroad as likely to ease difficulties at home Only 15 months ago, Irans clerics were facing a wave of antigovernment protests sparked by the death of a woman in the custody of the countrys feared morality police

Vali Nasr, a professor at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, told CNNs Becky Anderson on Wednesday he was very worried about current tensions But he added I dont think the Iranians want an expanded conflict, while making the point that some in Iran believed that Israel was trying to bait Iran into direct clashes I think the calculation, at least among Iranians, Hezbollah, maybe other governments in the region, not necessarily Israel, is that the United States does not want a bigger war President Biden doesnt want a bigger war, Nasr said

That said, these calculations could change if Washington is unable to deter Israel from expanding the conflict The attack on the Hamas leader in Beirut, which the US said it didnt know about beforehand, therefore looks like a risky move by Benjamin Netanyahus government It risks worsening increasingly dicey relations with the US, after White House calls for an easing of intensity of the Gaza operation, that have been repeatedly rebuffed

Hezbollah is the most powerful political player in Lebanon It is effectively an extension of Irans Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps While it has a massive arsenal of rockets aimed at Israel, its power could be significantly diminished in the event of a fullscale war A degraded Hezbollah would mean a significant ebbing of Irans regional influence Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned on Wednesday that the killing of Arouri, the Hamas leader, wouldnt go unpunished and that if Israel wages war in Lebanon, the response would be limitless

But Bou Habib, the Lebanese foreign minister, told CNN he believed the militia group would stop short of increasing the intensity of the war with Israel We have a lot of reasons to think that this would not happen, that they and we do not want, as Lebanese, all of us, we do not want any war, he said Its not like we can order them Were not claiming that, but we can convince them And I think it is working in this direction

Rifts in the Israeli government emerged publicly on Friday as members of the cabinet argued over plans for the postwar future of Gaza and how to handle investigations into the security failings around Hamas October 7 attacks

The public sniping followed what one source described as a fight at a meeting of the the security cabinet on Thursday Farright Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said there had been a stormy discussion, while former Defense Minister Benny Gantz said a politically motivated attack had been launched

The developments illustrate the fault lines emerging in the governing coalition of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after three months of war with Hamas If the government collapses, Israel would likely face new elections that Netanyahu is widely expected to lose

Thursdays security cabinet split was over how to handle investigations into the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, including the Israeli militarys failure to foresee it, as well as how to prosecute the war from now on

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant outlined plans for the next phase of the war in Gaza, and provided details of what might follow that, in a threepage document entitled the Day After

He described a new combat approach with a sustained focus on targeting Hamas leaders in southern parts of the strip In northern Gaza, he said the Israel Defense Forces IDF campaign would encompass raids, the destruction of terror tunnels, aerial and ground activities, and special operations

After the war, the Israeli military would maintain operational freedom of action in the Gaza Strip and Israel would continue to carry out the inspection of goods entering the territory

Gallant, a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus centerright Likud party, said that once the goals of the war have been achieved there would be no Israeli civilian presence in the Gaza Strip, appearing to rule out the reestablishment of Israeli settlements in Gaza that Israel unilaterally removed in 2005

The defense minister also unveiled the concept of a USled multinational task force charged with the rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip

But the ministers plan provided scant detail on the future governance of the enclave, merely saying that the Palestinian entity controlling the territory would build on the capabilities of local nonhostile actors already present in Gaza

The plan prompted a fiery discussion, according to a source After a break in the meeting, the source said, Transportation Minister Miri Regev went on the attack After the break Miri Regev came back and launched this fight that was leaked, said the official, who asked not to be named discussing internal political discussions

Regev, who is also a member of Likud, did not respond to a CNN request for comment

Gantz, who joined the government from opposition after October 7, said What happened yesterday was a politically motivated attack in the middle of a war I participated in many cabinet meetings such conduct has never occurred and must not occur

He did not say who had launched the attack, but he criticized Netanyahu The cabinet should have discussed strategic processes that will affect the continuation of the campaign and our security in the future It did not happen, and the prime minister is responsible for that, Gantz said, urging Netanyahu to choose between unity and security on the one hand and politics on the other

Netanyahus Likud party then lashed out at Gantz During a war, when the people are united, Gantz is expected to act responsibly and stop looking for excuses to break his promise to remain in the unity government until the end of the war, it said in a statement

Gantz is widely considered a likely successor to Netanyahu when an election is called

Tensions spill out in public

Gallants plan was criticized Friday by Smotrich, who along with farright National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir has advocated for resettling Gazans outside the enclave Their comments have drawn condemnation from the United States, United Nations officials and several Arab states

Smotrich wrote on Facebook that The Day After is a rerun of The Day Before on October 7, referring to the date of the Hamas terror attack in which 1,200 people were killed and more than 200 taken hostage

The solution in Gaza requires thinking outside the box and changing the concept by encouraging voluntary migration and full security control including the renewal of settlement, Smotrich added

Israels deadly bombardment and besiegement of Gaza has turned swathes of the Palestinian enclave into a wasteland, leaving more than 22 million people at risk of severe dehydration, starvation and disease At least 193 million Palestinians have been displaced, according to the United Nations

Regional actors in the Middle East have repeatedly likened the mass movement of Palestinians in Gaza to the Nakba, or catastrophe, the Arabic term for the expulsion or flight of Palestinians from their towns during the founding of Israel in 1948

Since October 7, Israeli attacks on Gaza have killed at least 22,600 people, 70 of whom are women and children, the Hamanrun health ministry said on Friday

International criticism

Smotrich previously said the removal of Gazans from the strip could pave the way for Israelis to make the desert bloom while Ben Gvir had suggested that the current war represented an opportunity to concentrate on encouraging the migration of the residents of Gaza

Smotrich, a Jewish nationalist, has denied the existence of a Palestinian people or nationhood Ben Gvir was previously convicted of inciting racism against Arabs and supporting a terrorist organization

Earlier this week, State Department spokesperson Matt Miller roundly condemned the inflammatory and irresponsible comments made by Smotrich and Ben Gvir, saying the US had been told repeatedly and consistently by Israel that such statements do not reflect the policy of the Israeli government

Responding to the US statement, Ben Gvir on Tuesday called the US a good friend but said the emigration of hundreds of thousands from Gaza would allow Israeli settlers to return and live in security

Smotrich also responded to the US State Departments rebuke, posting on X More than 70 of the Israeli public today supports a humanitarian solution of encouraging the voluntary immigration of Gaza Arabs and their absorption in other countries

Other foreign officials, from Europe to Saudi Arabia, have fiercely condemned the rhetoric pushed by Israeli farright cabinet ministers, while a UN official warned the forced displacement of Palestinians outside Gaza is an act of genocide

Forcible transfer of Gazan population is an act of genocide especially given the high number of children, Balakrishnan Rajagopal, the UNs special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, posted on X on Friday

Gaza is Palestinian and its future is not up to Israel to decide, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna told CNNs Isa Soares on Friday Its not up to Israel to determine the future of Gaza, which is Palestinian land we need to return to the principle of international law and respect it

On Thursday, the UNs human rights chief Volker Turk said he was very disturbed by highlevel Israeli officials statements on plans to transfer civilians from Gaza to third countries

The EUs foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Wednesday, Forced displacements are strictly prohibited as a grave violation of IHL International Humanitarian Law words matter

US officials have previously said they ultimately envision both Gaza and the occupied West Bank being ruled by a unified government led by a revitalized Palestinian Authority At present, the Palestinian Authority exercises limited selfrule in the West Bank, having lost control of the Gaza Strip to Hamas in 2007

An Arab delegation comprising officials from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Turkey and the Palestinian Authority emphasized in a meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in December that Arab states will need assurances that there is a path toward a Palestinian state if they are going are to play a role in the reconstruction of Gaza

Israel and Hamas are at war, after the Palestinian militant group launched surprise crossborder raids from Gaza on October 7, killing more than 1,400 people and taking hostages

In response, Israel has been pounding the territory, strikes which Palestinian authorities say have killed more than 5,000 people Many in the already cramped and impoverished territory are in dire need of aid

And with Israeli widely expected to launch a ground offensive, there are fears the crisis could escalate further, drawing in Israels neighbors

What happened

Militants from Gaza fired thousands of rockets towards Israeli towns on October 7, before breaking through the heavily fortified border fence with Israel and sending militants deep into Israeli territory There, Hamas gunmen killed more than 1,400 people, including civilians and soldiers, and took more than 200 hostages, according to Israeli authorities, in what has been described as the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust The attacks were unprecedented in tactics and scale as Israel has not faced its adversaries in street battles on its own territory since the 1948 ArabIsraeli war It has also never faced a terror attack of this magnitude that has taken the lives of so many civilians While Hamas has kidnapped Israelis before, it has never before taken dozens of hostages at once, including children and the elderly

Hamas called the operation AlAqsa Storm and said that it was a response to what it described as Israeli attacks on women, the desecration of thealAqsa mosquein Jerusalem and the ongoing siege of Gaza

How has Israel responded

Following the attack, Israel declared war and launched Operation Swords of Iron, striking what it says are Hamas and Islamic Jihad targets in Gaza It also blocked supply lines of basic necessities to the Gaza population, including fuel and water

Israel says it will exact a heavy price on Hamas for its attack and has amassed more than 300,000 reservists along the Gaza border for a potential ground operation

The IDF has told more than 1 million residents of northern Gaza to evacuate south, according to the United Nations, but some say there is nowhere safe to go, and crossings out of Gaza have been shut Hamas has called on Gazans not to leave their homes, accusing Israel of engaging in psychological warfare by calling on Palestinians to evacuate to the south

Complicating Israels response are the hostages that Hamas is holding The group has claimed that a number of hostages have been killed by Israeli bombings on the enclave Israel hasnt confirmed or denied the claim

Four hostages have been released by Hamas in recent days but Israeli officials have estimated that more than 200 people are still missing

Whats the situation in Gaza now

As the death toll from Israeli airstrikes mounts, a humanitarian crisis is rapidly spiraling amid warnings that people are at risk of starvation as Israel tightens its chokehold on the territory

The Gaza Strip is one of most densely populated places on earth, with some 2 million people crammed in 140squaremile territory The enclave lies on Egypts western border and has been under blockade since Hamas seized control in 2007

The Israeli air, naval and land blockade on the territory, as well as the Egyptian land blockade, continue today

The enclaves only power station stopped working Hospitals are expected to run out of fuel, with the International Committee of the Red Cross warning that they risk turning into morgues as they lose power

Human rights groups have warned of possible war crimes being committed in Gaza Amnesty International has urged Israel to immediately lift its blockade on the enclave, saying the collective punishment of civilians for Hamas terrorism amounts to a war crime

Since Israel shut its two crossings with Gaza, the only corridor through which Palestinians or aid can pass in and out of the territory is the Rafah crossing, which connects the south of the enclave to Egypt A tiny trickle of aid has been allowed through but otherwise the crossing has remained shut

What is Hamas

Hamas is anIslamist organizationwith a military wing that emerged in 1987 out of the Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni Islamist group that was founded in the late 1920s in Egypt

The group, like most Palestinian factions and political parties, insists that Israel is an occupying power and that it is trying to liberate the Palestinian territories It considers Israel an illegitimate state and has called for its downfall

Unlike some other Palestinian factions, Hamas refuses to engage with Israel In 1993, it opposed the Oslo Accords, a peace pact between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization PLO that saw the PLO give up armed resistance against Israel in return for promises of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel The Accords also established the Palestinian Authority PA in the Israelioccupied West Bank

Hamas presents itself as an alternative to the PA,which has recognized Israel and has engaged in multiple failed peace initiatives with it The PA, whose credibility among Palestinians has suffered over the years, is today led by President Mahmoud Abbas

It has over the years claimed many attacks on Israel and has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union and Israel Parts of the south are becoming even more crowded and overstretched, Gazans say, as waves of Palestinians abandon their homes in the wake of Israels statement, which came ahead of an anticipated ground assault by the Israel Defence Forces IDF

More than half of Gazas 2 million residents live in the northern section that Israel said should evacuate Many families, some of whom were already internally displaced, are now crammed into an even smaller portion of the 140squaremile territory

The IDF said Saturday it would allow safe movement on specified streets between the hours of 10 am and 4 pm local time 3 9 am ET Residents were advised to use this window to move from the northern Beit Hanoun to Khan Yunis in the south a roughly 20mile distance of rubblestrewn streetsThe evacuation statement has been described by rights groups as well as some neighboring countries as a breach of international humanitarian law Jordans foreign minister described it as a war crimeThe UNs Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees UNRWA, which was forced to move its central operations from Gaza City to a location in southern Gaza following the Israeli statement, on Saturday described the evacuation as an exodus, and said that nearly 1 million people have been displaced in one week alone

The evacuation advisory came after Israel imposed a complete siege on Gaza in response to a brutal attack launched a week ago by Hamas, which left at least 1,300 dead in Israel

At least 2,215 civilians, including 724 children and 458 women, have been killed in Gaza, according to the Palestinian health ministry, as the Israeli military continues to pound the territory

Food may last us a day or two

Palestinians who fled south, and those who are still north, are rapidly running out of food and water There is no more electricity, and those with fuelpowered generators will soon live in complete blackout Internet access, through which residents communicate their plight to the world, is also shrinking

Mohamed Hamed, a 36yearold resident of Gaza City, moved southward to Nuseirat, a refugee camp some five kilometers northeast of Deir alBalah which he was told was safe

Hamed fled the north with 30 family members, including his extended relatives, four children and his wife, who is over eight months pregnant

In this situation, were afraid that she goes into labor, and we wouldnt know where to go, he told CNN

The family has no access to medical care and are crammed into a single apartment with no electricity, and quickly depleting food and water

There is no electricity, there is no water Bakeries are working but these are their final hours, as the fuel they need is running out, he said, adding that the food we have may last us a day or two

Speaking to CNN by phone, Hamed said that Nuseirat is a small area yet has received large crowds of displaced Palestinians from the north Drinking water is only available in mineral water bottles, he said, which are dwindling as crowds rush to stock up

Shelling in Nuseirat is intense, but not as bad as it was in Gaza City, where neighborhoods were entirely wiped out, he said

Hamed said that the time provided by the IDF for safe passage southward may not be enough for vast number of Palestinians that need to flee, and that some Gazans in the north refuse to leave fearing forceful displacement into Egypt

For many, that would mean displacement for the second time The majority of Gazas residents today are already refugees from areas that fell under Israeli control in the 1948 ArabIsraeli war

People are afraid of this, of being pushed to Egypt, he said, adding that the airstrikes have been horrifying, with some areas being targeted for the first time despite the years of conflict between Hamas and Israel

Streets are filled with rubble, reek of blood

But not everyone in Gazas north has heeded the IDFs call to move southwards Palestinian journalist Hashem AlSaudi and his family have only moved from east to west of Gaza City, which is among areas the IDF told civilians to evacuate

Residents are forced to leave their homes to fill up water tanks, the 33yearold told CNN by phone, which puts them at risk of being struck by Israeli missiles

Food is scarce, he said, and may not last his 11member family more than three or four days

I say this jokingly, but those who are on a diet are eating more than us

AlSaudi says that not only do they have nowhere to stay if they moved south, but that the route itself is unsafe Even those who moved south were hit by airstrikes, he told CNN

Nowhere is safe in the Gaza Strip, from Rafah south to Beit Hanoun in the north, AlSaudi said, adding that everywhere is targeted, including homes, shelters hospitals and places of worship

Everyone on this piece of land is targeted by the Israeli military, which from the start did not differentiate between civilian and soldier

CNN has geolocated and authenticated five videos from the scene of a large explosion Friday along a route for civilians south of Gaza City that Israel said the following day would be safe

The videos show many dead bodies amid a scene of extensive destruction Some of those bodies are on a flatbed trailer that appears to have been used to carry people away from Gaza City They include at least several children There are also many badly burned and damaged cars

Its unclear what caused the widespread devastation the explosion occurred on Salah AlDeen street on Friday afternoon CNN has reached out to IDF for comment on any airstrikes in the same location

The situation is much worse than what you see on television, he said Many bodies remain unidentified, and corpses are being stored in refrigerators not made for storing human remains, AlSaudi said

Streets are filled with rubble and reek of blood

Bracing for the worst

The Israeli government launched a complete blockade on essential goods entering Gaza earlier this week, prompting warnings from human rights groups who say the siege is in violation of international law

Israel, which administers most of the electricity, water, fuel and some of the food inside the Palestinian enclave, already imposes a stringent land, sea and air blockade, but used to permit some trade and humanitarian aid through two crossings that it controls

Refaat Alareer, 44, a literature professor in Gaza City, said Thursday before Israel told Gazans to evacuate the shelves in his local supermarket are emptying every day He has been able to buy cans of tinned tuna, adding that he avoided purchasing perishable goods because the lack of electricity means refrigerated food will rot

Alareer, who lives with his wife and their six children, said his neighbors insist on leaving milk powder on the shelves so that other parents can feed their own families

Ive never seen people this disciplined, he said I didnt buy a single thing that is more expensive than it was last week

What is so beautiful about, you know, being in Gaza, being in Palestine, the solidarity

More than half of the residents in Gaza are food insecure and live under the poverty line, according to UNRWA Alareer warned that blue collar workers, farmers and street vendors will suffer the most, from the blockade

Were bracing for the worst What happened is extremely genocidal in every sense of the word, he added

Aseel Mousa, a 25yearold freelance journalist in Gaza, said she is unable to communicate with loved ones in other parts of the enclave, as electricity supplies diminish

We cannot connect with the world, she told CNN on Thursday We hear the bombings, the air strikes and we dont know where they are exactly

We cannot check up on our relatives who live in different areas of the Gaza Strip, we cannot reach them as there is no internet and there is no electricity She said on Friday that she relocated with her family from western Gaza to the south

On Friday, Alareer told CNN he and his family see no choice but to remain in the north despite Israels evacuation advisory because they had nowhere else to go

Israel bombs are everywhere, he said

Uncertainty at Rafah Crossing

Gaza has already been under blockade since Hamas took control of the territory in 2007

Egypt imposes a land blockade, while Israel imposes an air, sea and land blockade The siege was completely tightened after Hamas attack on Israel a week ago, and the only remaining route into or outside of the Gaza Strip is the Rafah Crossing, which connects Gaza to Egypts Sinai

While some aid has arrived in Egypt, it is yet to cross the border, which earlier this week was struck by Israel on the Palestinian side, according to Palestinian and Egyptian officials

Egypt on Thursday stressed that its Rafah Crossing was however open, a claim CNN could not independently verify

A Palestinian border official told CNN on Saturday morning that concrete slabs were being placed at the Rafah border crossing into Egypt, blocking all gates The slabs were being placed by a winch visible on the Egyptian side of the crossing, the official said

The official added that hundreds of Palestinians with foreign passports have been sat in the streets for hours, waiting to cross The gates are closed, and no one is being let through,The war in Gaza has been raging for six months and the patience of Israels allies is running out As the death toll in the enclave continues to climb, its becoming increasingly clear that Israel has no viable plan for how to end the war or what comes next

The determination to continue pursuing Hamas in Gaza despite the horrific humanitarian consequences is leaving Israel increasingly isolated on the global stage, with its government facing pressure from all sides

Multiple international organizations have warned Israel may be committing genocide and even the countrys closest allies are now openly criticizing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Calls to halt arms shipments to Israel are growing in the United States and the United Kingdom

At the same time, Netanyahu and his government are under mounting pressure at home, with protesters back on the streets in large numbers calling for his resignation

Israel launched the war immediately after the deadly October 7 terror attacks by Hamas At that time, the Israeli government said the operation had two goals eliminating Hamas and bringing back the hostages taken by the militants to Gaza

While the Israel Defense Forces IDF says it has killed thousands of Hamas fighters, most of the groups top leadership in Gaza, including Yayha Sinwar, continues to evade it, and Hamas political leaders are out of reach abroad More than 100 hostages have been freed, exchanged for Palestinians held in Israeli prisons as part of a truce deal with Hamas in late November But some 130 hostages, including 99 who are believed still to be alive, remain in Gaza

Meanwhile, the toll of the war on Palestinians has been horrendous more than 33,000 people, including thousands of children, have been killed since October 7, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health On top of that, some 75,000 have been injured and more than a million are on the brink of starvation, facing what international organizations say is imminent famine

I think the war has already far exceeded anybodys expectations in terms of its duration and intensity and scale and deadliness, and theres no end in sight, said Khaled Elgindy, senior fellow and director of the Program on Palestine and IsraeliPalestinian Affairs at the Middle East Institute

Yet Netanyahu is refusing to change tack While he promised to allow more aid into Gaza following an ultimatum this week from US President Joe Biden, he has rejected calls for a humanitarian ceasefire and for a rethink of his plan to invade Rafah, the southern Gaza city where more than one million people are currently sheltering

There is no viable plan for the future of Gaza, not just for the day after, but even today Nobody knows when this war is going to end, how its going to end, Elgindy told CNN

No exit strategy

Several experts told CNN that Israel was facing an impossible situation because the goal it has set for itself eliminating Hamas is both unachievable and very popular domestically

Hamas has dominated Gaza ever since it seized power in 2007, controlling all government and security bodies, as well as the healthcare, education and social systems

Israel cannot achieve its stated goal of eliminating Hamas, because Hamas is an integral part of the Palestinian society in the West Bank and Gaza Its popularity has increased in the last several months, said Nathan Thrall, a Jerusalembased expert on the ArabIsraeli conflict and author of A Day in the Life of Abed Salama Anatomy of a Jerusalem Tragedy

After Israel declared that it has defeated Hamas in the north, you see that every week, Israeli soldiers are dying in the north, so its evident that Hamas will continue to exist after this war, whether Israel invades Rafah or doesnt invade Rafah Hamas is a major power on the ground and will remain so at the end of this war, Thrall told CNN

This means that Israels leaders dont have a viable way out of the conflict,

The realistic options in front of them are to continue to occupy Gaza indefinitely, which most Israelis do not want to do, or, alternatively to leave Gaza and have Hamas be the strongest power on the ground whether or not its the official face of the government in Gaza, he said

Elgindy also said the goal of destroying Hamas was never realistic I think even American officials realize, belatedly, that its complete madness, that people are allowing this horror to continue as though the goal of destroying Hamas was more important than anything else in the world, including Israels own future security, he said

Its divorced from reality because even if you destroy Hamas, youre creating something that will be much worse than the future Because now you have 30,000 people who are dead, 17,000 orphans what is their view of Israel and the United States going to be when they grow up

Israel was a politically divided country before the October 7 attacks, paralyzed by months of largescale protests against Netanyahu and his government, the most rightwing in Israels history, and particularly the prime ministers proposed judicial overhaul

But while these political divisions remain, the vast majority of Israelis support the war in Gaza, despite the international outcry over the devastating impact on Palestinian civilians

The Israeli public is still traumatized from October 7, they are still in the revenge mode, some dont want even food to enter Even if we dont accept that its right, we can understand what their state of mind is, Elgindy said, adding that while understandable given the horrors of the October 7 terror attacks, this mindset should not influence international policy

We cant allow that state of mind to dictate the policies of the US and the UK and the European Union You need to have grownups saying this is not acceptable you cannot use starvation as a weapon In other words, it doesnt matter that the Israeli public isnt in the mood for stopping this war It needs to be forced on them, he said

The number of Israeli soldiers killed in combat in Gaza since the start of the war has now surpassed 250 While dwarfed by the Palestinian death toll, the losses are nevertheless significant Hamas killed more than 1,200 people on October 7 No plan for the future

Harel Chorev, senior researcher at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, told CNN that Israels lack of a concrete plan is increasingly hurting its relations with its allies

Our friends America first and foremost, Britain, Germany, France do not trust the government, that they know what theyre doing, that they have a strategic plan for the day after they dont trust us to do the right thing, he said

Netanyahu unveiled his plan for Gazas postHamas future in late February, calling for complete demilitarization of the enclave and closing off the territorys southern border with Egypt, as well as the overhaul of Gazas civil administration and education systems He also rejected any pressure from the international community to recognize a Palestinian state

Many of the proposals were directly opposed by key players at the negotiating table, including the US, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates

The plan was one and a half pages, speaking generally about the day after, using all sorts of code words that can be interpreted in all sorts of ways people were not happy with this, our allies were not happy with this, Chorev said

At the same time, Israel continues to refuse even to consider other proposals for the future of Gaza, HA Hellyer, senior associate fellow in security studies at the Royal United Services Institute RUSI in London and a nonresident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington DC, told CNN

There are lots of credible plans, but none of them are workable, frankly, because of one stumbling block And thats the Israelis The Israelis have made it very clear that they intend to have full security control for the entirety of the territory, which of course throws an unworkable wrench in the workings of any plan that seeks to devolve authority to any other entity, he said

Netanyahu has previously also rejected the suggestion that the Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the occupied West Bank, could take control of Gaza, although the plan outlined in February did not mention this

Instead, the plan envisions local entities running the civil service

Again, this was left purposefully vague and it can be interpreted in various ways It can be local clans, as some interpreted it, and it can be interpreted as a revitalized Palestinian Authority, Chorev said

Most likely, what will happen is, you will have an indefinite Israeli military presence on the ground, Elgindy said You will have something like a breakdown in law and order and more and more chaos So well see warlords, gangs, clans Gaza has become a place that is not really livable If there is someone out there who believes that this is a situation that is going to bring security and safety to Israelis, its a completely delusional concept

Proposals to establish temporary international security control over Gaza are not feasible given Israels stance, experts say

If Israel were to admit that its an occupying power that needs to withdraw, just as the near entirety of the international community insists, and not to claim the rights of security control over the territory in violation of international law, then you could have something thats similar to KFOR in Kosovo, an international force as a transition to Palestinians taking over responsibility for the territory, Hellyer said, referring to the NATOled peacekeeping force operating in Kosovo

Thrall also said that most attempts to find alternative plans are not realistic because of Israels position

They would require placing tremendous pressure on Israel and that is not anywhere in evidence today, he said, adding that this problem is unlikely to go away even if Netanyahu were to resign

In terms of the actual policy toward Gaza, the conduct of this war, the use of the blocking of humanitarian aid as a means of pressuring Hamas in the negotiations, the collective punishment of 23 million people in Gaza by cutting off food, water, electricity, those things, there is not great disagreement about by mainstream Israelis, he said Netanyahu insisted in a CNN interview last month that his countrys policy was to let as much humanitarian aid into Gaza as is necessary, a claim thats been widely disputed

Thrall said that anyone potentially replacing Netanyahu as prime minister would likely put forward similar plans

Benny Gantz, who this week called for early elections and is widely considered a likely successor to Netanyahu as and when Israelis vote, is a member of Netanyahus war government

He does not have a significantly different set of ideas for Gaza or for the future of Israel, Palestine or for Palestinian sovereignty And if you look at the plan by fellow war cabinet minister Gadi Eisenkot, his plan for Gaza, which was supposed to be a rebuttal against Netanyahus wholly unrealistic plan, was very similar to it, Thrall said

Whether its Netanyahu or somebody else is not the central issue with respect to the Palestinians

Israels military said its troops made a series of grave mistakes and violated protocol in their strikes that killed seven aid workers in Gaza this week

An Israeli inquiry published Friday found troops mistakenly thought they were attacking Hamas gunmen when drone strikes targeted three vehicles of the World Central Kitchen WCK late Monday night

The Israel Defense Forces IDF fired two of its officers and reprimanded others for their involvement in the strikes, but WCK has said Israel cannot be trusted to investigate its own errors in Gaza, and the incident has sparked fury from many of Israels staunchest allies

Heres what we know

What the IDF says happened

The IDF has been trying to track down and kill Hamas militants in Gaza for nearly six months, and has long accused Hamas of embedding itself in civilian areas like hospitals, schools and with aid groups

In its report, the IDF said its troops identified a Hamas gunman in an aid truck in the central Gazan city of Deir alBalah on Monday, and then identified a second gunman

After the vehicles left the warehouse where the aid had been unloaded, one of the commanders mistakenly assumed the gunmen were located inside the accompanying vehicles and that these were Hamas terrorists, the IDF said

An IDF spokesperson separately told CNN that the unit responsible thought an object slung over one of the passengers shoulders was a weapon, but Israeli officials now believe the object was a bag

In fact, the vehicles were being driven by workers with the WCK a charity founded by celebrity chef Jose Andres that has been helping to distribute food in Gaza as the enclave has tipped further towards famine

But the Israeli drone operators had not been told by their higherups about the humanitarian convoy, according to Israel Defense Forces IDF spokesperson Rear Adm Daniel Hagari In a video statement on Friday, Hagari that critical information regarding the humanitarian operation did not go properly down through the chain of command

The drone operators proceeded to target the three vehicles with a series of strikes, killing seven workers three Britons, a Palestinian, a USCanadian dual citizen, an Australian and a Pole

Because the strikes happened at night, the surveillance drones could not see the WCK logo on the vehicles, the spokesperson said The IDF is considering distributing thermal stickers for aid vehicles to prevent this happening again in the future, he added

After the first vehicle was struck, some of the surviving aid workers fled to the other vehicles in the convoy which were also struck, the spokesperson said

Who did the IDF dismiss and punish

The IDF said the strikes were a grave mistake stemming from a serious failure due to mistaken identification, errors in decisionmaking, and an attack contrary to the Standard Operating Procedures

In response, the Chief of the General Staff dismissed two officers The brigade fire support commander an officer with the rank of major, and the brigade chief of staff an officer with the rank of colonel in reserve

The IDF also reprimanded others the brigade commander and 162nd Division commander

The Chief of Staff also formally reprimanded the commander of the Southern Command for his overall responsibility in the incident

Israels swift public explanation and admission of guilt is rare, as is for such senior officers to be punished

What the WCK says

The WCK said earlier in the week that all three vehicles were clearly marked and that their movements were in full compliance with Israeli authorities, who were aware of their itinerary, route and humanitarian mission

Andres accused Israel of systematically targeting the aid workers In a Reuters interview, he said this was not a bad luck situation where, oops, we dropped the bomb in the wrong place

Responding to the Israeli report Friday, WCK said Israel had taken important steps forward in taking disciplinary action against those responsible, but warned that without systemic change, there will be more military failures, more apologies and more grieving families

WCK said the incident would not have occurred if Israel had not allowed Gaza to run short of food, and called for an independent inquiry into the incident

We demand the creation of an independent commission to investigate the killings of our WCK colleagues The IDF cannot credibly investigate its own failure in Gaza

At least 196 humanitarian workers have been killed in the West Bank and Gaza since October, according to the United Nations

What have the consequences been

The killing of the seven aid workers sparked condemnation from some of Israels most prominent supporters and may mark a turning point in how Israel perpetrates its war in Gaza

In a phone call on Thursday, US President Joe Biden told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the humanitarian situation in Gaza was unacceptable and warned Israel to address the crisis or face consequences

The 30minute conversation was the two leaders first phone call since the strike on the WCK convoy

Biden also said Israel needed to announce and implement a series of specific, concrete, and measurable steps to address civilian harm, humanitarian suffering, and the safety of aid workers

The UK has also responded sharply to the strikes, which killed three British nationals Alicia Kearns, a Conservative Member of Parliament and Chair of the UKs Foreign Affairs Select Committee, told the BBC on Friday that she believes we have no choice but to suspend arms sales to Israel

Kearns said Bidens phone call felt like a tipping point in the conflict, but said it is devastating that its taken six months for us to get to a point where it appears that the international community is able to influence Israels perpetration of this war

Amid strong rebukes from its allies, the strikes may also have played a role in Israels security cabinet approving the reopening of the Erez crossing into Gaza, which has been closed since the October 7 Hamas attacks

But distributing that aid may be difficult, after at least three aid providers said they are suspending operations in the Gaza in the wake of the deadly strikes on the WCK

In a sign of the delicate balance in Netanyahus coalition government, Israels National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir criticised the firing of the army officers, calling it an abandonment of the soldiers in the middle of a war and a grave mistake that conveys weakness

Nine Israeli soldiers were killed in a single attack in northern Gaza on Tuesday, an incident that was among the deadliest for Israeli forces since the beginning of their ground operation on October 27

The news sent shockwaves through Israel, where many are still grieving from the October 7 terror attack by Hamas But analysts say it is unlikely the incident will weaken the support for the war among the Israeli public The stakes, they say, are way too high

According to the official count, 116 Israel Defense Forces IDF soldiers have been killed in Gaza combat since the start of the invasion

The number is dwarfed by the enormous death toll among Palestinians in Gaza According to the Hamasrun Ministry of Health in Gaza, 18,412 had been killed as of Tuesday CNN cannot independently verify that number, but the IDF said it has struck more than 22,000 targets in Gaza since the beginning of the war

Right now, for the Israeli public, the threat from Hamas military capabilities is such that were willing to go to a relatively high number of casualties to destroy it, security expert and retired IDF Colonel Miri Eisin told CNN

Eisins husband and three children are all currently serving in the IDF This doesnt mean I want to sacrifice my children, she said

No, it means that I dont know how I can live here unless we destroy Hamas

Still, the attack on Tuesday hit Israelis hard, and not just because of the high number of dead

That combination, that it was a specific brigade that got a lot of the casualties and that it was a large amount of highranking officers, made it hurt a lot Were hurting today, Eisin said

Its always hard when soldiers are killed, but when its this level of command, it hits you in the gut These are commanders that commanded hundreds of soldiers, she added

The incident brought home the unpredictable nature of the type of war Israel is currently waging in Gaza, Eisin said The first phase of the operation was limited to aerial and artillery attacks, which caused a large number of Palestinian casualties, but kept Israeli soldiers safe because the IDF has air superiority over Gaza

But once the IDF put boots on the ground, the balance shifted somewhat According to the IDF, Hamas has spent a long time preparing for this war, building a vast tunnel system, setting up traps and defenses This is likely one reason why this invasion has been deadlier for the IDF than its 2014 ground operation in Gaza, which lasted 51 days and left 67 Israeli soldiers dead

In urban warfare, the advantage is always on the defender, which is why Hamas built itself into the urban arena and created the subterranean arena underneath this specific urban area, Eisen said, adding that in such cases, the attacking troops need to create local advantages to succeed Yesterday, it didnt work,

The IDF said the unit involved in the incident on Tuesday was the Golani Brigade, an infantry unit that had been operating within the Shejaiya neighborhood in central eastern Gaza

In a statement on Wednesday, the IDF said Hamas fighters threw explosives at the soldiers and shot at them from inside a residential building in which underground terror infrastructure was also located

Retired IDF General Israel Ziv told CNN the incident took place in a dense part of the Shejaiya neighborhood, which he said was known for being exploited by Hamas terrorists to deploy many rocket launchers and to hide entrance pits to underground tunnels, guarded by booby traps

Fighting and clearing the terror presence from this area is extremely risky and requires high level of bravery and determination, Ziv said, explaining that the incident was particularly deadly because after the first infantry team encountered Hamas fighters and booby traps, other teams rushed in to respond

That rush was the main reason for the high number of casualties, he said

The world does not get it

While the overwhelming majority of Israelis still support the Gaza operation, Ziv said there are some who are beginning to question the way the war is fought

Incidents like this are prompting calls to use more remote measures like air forces, instead of sending troops to fight face to face in those lethal urban areas, he said

Ziv and Eisin both said fighting on the ground would help to minimize civilian casualties compared to aerial bombardment

The IDF casualties yesterday did not have to happen if we had used an airplane, Eisin asserted

But when an airplane brings down the building, if you dont know exactly whats on all of the different floors, and if you think theres civilians there, thats part of the discussion Its a dilemma, she added

The huge number of civilian deaths in Gaza has seiously tested international support for Israel, with even some of its closest allies calling for a humanitarian ceasefire

Eisin said she sees a widening gap between the public opinion inside Israel and views of those outside the country

I absolutely feel that the world does not get it, they do not understand that we see this as an existential threat, that we cant live here as long as Hamas military capabilities exist, she said

A senior doctor in northern Gaza says that dozens of medical staffers at his hospital have been taken to an undisclosed location by the Israeli military, as the enclaves wider healthcare system teeters on the edge of collapse

Dr Hossam AbuSafia, head of pediatrics at Kamal Adwan Hospital, told CNN in a phone interview that the area where the facility is located saw particularly heaving bombing on Tuesday followed by the arrival of Israeli troops, describing the situation as very dangerous

The troops told all men between the ages of 16 and 65 to leave the building to be searched, he said

More than 70 medical staff were arrested and taken to an unknown area, according to AbuSafia, including hospital director, Dr Ahmed AlKahlot His claim was echoed in a statement by Gazas Hamascontrolled Health Ministry AlKahlot had spoken to CNN less than 24 hours earlier, alleging that Israeli tank shells had hit the hospitals maternity ward on Monday The strike killed two women and left two more so badly wounded their legs required amputation, Asked about the arrests, the Israel Defense Forces said that it continues to act against Hamas strongholds in the north of Gaza, among them the area of Beit Lahia

Kamal Adwan hospital is located in Gaza City, not Beit Lahia

The statement added that the IDF is taking all feasible precaution to mitigate harm to noncombatants, and is fighting against the Hamas terrorist organization, and not the civilians in Gaza or the medical teams operating there

Horrendous conditions

Israeli actions in and around hospitals in Gaza have come under fierce criticism, as medical workers and NGOS warn that the health system in the territory is barely functional and cannot tolerate any more strain

Last month, the Israeli army raided Gazas largest hospital, Al Shifa, in search of conclusive proof of the largescale command and control center it had claimed was there, as doctors rushed to evacuate patients and dozens of newborn infants in need of incubators

The IDF subsequently brought some reporters to see the tunnels it had uncovered inside the hospital compound, which also included several small underground rooms CNN has been shown the tunnel shaft but has not been inside the tunnels

At AlRantisi childrens hospital, medical staff were also told to leave, as the IDF conducted operations inside Israeli military officials later alleged that one room in the buildings basement was a Hamas armory, which had a handful of weapons and a chair with a rope next to it a claim Gaza health officials denied

Many medical centers serve as shelters for displaced Gazans seeking safety, in addition to caring for patients But those seeking refuge in hospitals are finding that this is just not the case, MarieAure Perreaut, the emergency coordinator for Doctors Without Borders in the enclave

While hospitals as a category are protected by international law, they may be viewed as legitimate military targets if found to be housing ablebodied combatants and weapons The Israeli military has said it only carries out operations in and around hospitals where they are being used by Hamas and other armed groups

According to Dr AbuSafia, he and just five other doctors were allowed to stay at Kamal Adwan Hospital to attend to patients in intensive care unit and premature babies

They asked us to gather in only one section or building and close all the doors and windows, and not to be near doors or windows, he said

But the care that the hospitals remaining staff can offer patients too weak to be moved has been minimal, he said, due to acute shortages of fuel, water, food, and medical supplies even before the siege Today the hospital has no water or power, he added, noting that doctors are working with primitive flashlights to follow up on the patients left in the hospital

Across the besieged enclave, only 11 hospitals remain even partially functional, according to Richard Peeperkorn, the World Health Organizations WHO representative in Gaza, in a press conference Tuesday

In just 66 days the health system has gone from 36 functional hospitals to 11 partially functional hospitals so, one in the north and 10 in the south, he said

In the same day, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he was extremely worried about reports of a raid at Kamal Adwan Hospital in Gaza after several days of siege, in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter

Several hospitals in northern Gaza have ceased operations in recent weeks, saying they received orders from the Israeli military to evacuate The Israeli military disputes issuing such an order

Fuel shortages have forced several hospitals in Gaza to close, while others have shut down due to airstrike damage,

The scene inside the AlNasr hospital ICU ward is chilling The tiny bodies of babies, several still attached to wires and tubes that were meant to keep them alive, decomposing in their hospital beds Milk bottles and spare diapers still next to them on the sheets

The video inside the hospital was filmed on November 27 by Mohamed Baalousha, a Gaza reporter for UAEbased news outlet Al Mashhad He shared an unblurred version with CNN, which shows the remains of at least four infants

Three of them appear to be still connected to hospital machines The bodies of the babies appear to be darkening and disintegrating from decay, with little more than skeletons left in some of the beds Flies and maggots are visibly crawling across the skin of one child

The circumstances around one of the most horrifying videos to emerge from the war in Gaza remain unclear, but after days of piecing together available information, using interviews, published statements and video, a chaotic scene can been painted of hospital staff trying to protect their most vulnerable patients, caught in the middle of a raging battle waiting for help that never arrived

Here is what CNN found

CNN geolocated the video to AlNasr hospital in northern Gaza This area has been largely unreachable to journalists in recent weeks due to the intensity of fighting but during the sevenday truce Baalousha says he was able to access the hospital to film what was left there

Ad Feedback

From early November, the AlNasr and AlRantisi childrens hospitals, which form part of the same complex, had become the frontline of fighting between Israeli and Hamas forces

In public statements and interviews, several medical staff and health officials from AlNasr said they had to hurriedly evacuate the hospital on November 10, under the direction of Israeli forces

Medical staff described having to leave young children behind in the ICU because they had no means to safely move them

A doctor associated with the hospital, who did not want to be named, told CNN that two of the children a twoyearold and a ninemonthold baby had died shortly before the evacuation but that three children were left alive still connected to respirators One of those left alive was two months old Several of the infants on the ICU had been suffering from genetic disorders, according to the doctor

The condition of those left behind alive both at the time the fighting reached the hospital and when the evacuation took place remains unclear

In a video on November 9, the head of AlNasr and AlRantisi pediatric hospitals, Dr Mustafa alKahlout, said AlNasr hospital had been struck twice sustaining a lot of damage

Kahlout warned oxygen to the ICU was cut off and reported at least one patient had died as a result, with others facing the risk of death

Its unclear whether oxygen cylinders, seen next to some of the beds in the video from the hospital, were functioning or whether supplies had run out

The situation is really bad, we are surrounded ambulances cannot reach the hospital, and ambulances that tried to reach AlNasr were targeted, Kahlout said, calling on international organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross ICRC, to intervene and save the medical staff and patients who remained in the ICU

Video shared on social media on November 9, which CNN verified, was filmed from inside AlNasr hospital and appears to show the aftermath of the building being hit

Another from November 10 showed an Israel Defense Forces IDF tank outside AlNasr, indicating the IDF was operating in the area Another video from the same date showed civilians holding up makeshift white flags attempting to flee the hospital amid gunfire, then being forced to run back inside It is not possible to tell from the video who is shooting

Satellite imagery reviewed by CNN from November 11 shows large craters around the hospital complex, indicating the area had been under bombardment, making evacuation difficult

But, in an audio recording of a conversation between a senior official at AlRantisi hospital and an officer from COGAT, which coordinates the Israeli governments activities in the Palestinian territories and Gaza, it appears Israeli forces instructed hospital patients and staff to evacuate

In the recording, released by the IDF on November 11, the Israeli officer assures the hospital official that ambulances will be arranged

The hospital official tells the COGAT officer that ambulances cannot reach the hospital, and the officer replies Ill arrange coordination with the primary aid center Dont worry, Im near the army, it will be okay

Will the ambulances take the patients and the medical staff the hospital official asks

No problem, the COGAT officer responds, in the recording

The hospital official then confirms that the COGAT officer is aware that people will be evacuating both AlNasr and AlRantisi hospitals, and the COGAT officer says yes, yes

But hospital officials say the ambulances never arrived

Many of the patients were carried out by their families, ambulances couldnt reach the hospital, Kahlout said in a news conference on November 14, following the evacuation

Three children were left in the ICU attached to hospital machines but without oxygen, Kahlout said

In an audio recording from November 10 released by Médecins Sans Frontières MSF a nurse who the organization said was volunteering in a personal capacity, said the hospital had been shelled, hitting multiple floors, water tanks, and electricity and oxygen stations

The nurse who CNN is not identifying for security reasons said AlNasr staff were given 30 minutes to evacuate by the IDF, adding no ambulances were able to reach the hospital

We walked out a little bit there was shooting around us, he said in the recording Then he said someone from the IDF told him Ill give you safe passage, you have from 1130am until 12 noon

So, we walked out with our hands up in the air carrying white flags and carrying families and children, the nurse said in the recording

He said he managed to carry one baby with him as he escaped and handed it to an ambulance headed for the AlShifa hospital But four children were left behind in the ICU according to the nurse, in a discrepancy from the number given by Kahlout

To leave my patient dying in front of my eyes is the hardest thing I have ever experienced, its indescribable, they broke our hearts, we couldnt help them, we couldnt take them, we barely left ourselves with our children, we are civilians, we are a medical crew, we are displaced civilians, he said in the recording

Over the past week, CNN has tried to speak to medical staff and hospital officials from AlNasr, but all have either said they are too afraid to speak or cannot be reached

The director of Gazas hospitals at the Hamascontrolled Ministry of Health, Dr Mohammad Zaqout, told CNN that people in the hospital were forced to leave by the IDF

We were forced to leave them behind to die because we didnt have a safe medical evacuation we informed them that these children were on beds and couldnt be evacuated We held other children in our arms while being forced to evacuate, Zaqout said

The IDF has strongly denied responsibility for the deaths of the children in AlNasr ICU Given that the IDF did not operate inside the AlNasr hospital, these allegations are not only false but also a perverse exploitation of innocent lives, used as tools to spread dangerous misinformation, the IDF said in a statement to CNN

Asked repeatedly by CNN why it hadnt provided ambulances for the evacuation, as the COGAT officer had promised in the recorded conversation with the hospital official, and if they were aware of the presence of children left in the ICU, as Zaqout alleged, the IDF did not directly respond

During an online QA for journalists Saturday, IDF spokesman Doron Spielman dismissed the story as merely a rumor

There were no premature babies that decomposed because of the IDF There were probably no babies that decomposed whatsoever, Spielman said But Hamas is in charge of Nasr hospital, we are not occupying Nasr hospital

Israel has repeatedly accused Hamas of using hospitals as command centers and even as places to hold hostages

Zaqout denies the allegation and has repeatedly called for neutral entities, human rights organizations, and media outlets to enter the hospitals and verify for themselves that they are used solely for civilian and humanitarian purposes

CNN cannot independently confirm what state the children were in when they were left at the hospital But Stefan Schmitt, a forensic scientist at Florida International University reviewed the video for CNN and said the level of decomposition of the infants was advanced

Schmitt said he believed the room had not been disturbed since the children were left Those remains decomposed in situ, meaning they decomposed there on those beds, he said You can see that from the bodily fluids that have leaked out over the time of decomposition

Schmitt also said one of the corpses appeared to be wrapped in fabric, possibly a shroud, noting there was no medical equipment attached to the body, suggesting the body may already have been dead or severely injured The room appeared to have been abandoned in a hurry, Schmitt continued, noting the infant car seat and what appears to be a bag packed for one of the children next to its bed

A statement from the Hamascontrolled Gaza Ministry of Health issued in response to the video of the babies remains said AlNasr nursing staff were ordered to leave by the IDF, who told them the ICRC was coming to evacuate the patients

Instead, their decomposed bodies were found in their beds, reads the statement These babies drew their last breaths alone and died alone

The ICRC told CNN it received several requests for evacuation from hospitals in the north of Gaza, but due to the security situation it was not involved in any operations or evacuations, nor did teams commit to doing so The ICRC added the footage of the deceased children was an unspeakable tragedy

Cataclysmic events like the Hamas onslaught on Israel trigger profound political shocks and strategic transformations that no one could predict at the time

The rocket attacks, hostage takings and mass killings inside Israel came as the global order was already at a pivot point, with the postCold War era swept away by Russias invasion of Ukraine and Chinas superpower ascent

The raw shock over what just happened the scenes of gunned down civilians at an Israeli music festival, the wrenching accounts of families torn apart and the fierce first burst of Israeli reprisal attacks on Gaza are transfixing the world

But politics is never still for long The sudden and bloody shattering of a rare interregnum of calm and hope for diplomatic breakthroughs in the Middle East is already shifting calculations in Israel, the United States, the Arab world and across the globeThe Hamas assault has been compared to the September 11 attacks in the United States in 2001 as a comparatively lowtech assault on civilians that breached the homeland of a more powerful and sophisticated adversary, partly by defying the imagination of threat assessors in a complacent national security and political establishment

The lesson of that historic trauma was that the political and military steps taken by American and other leaders when normal politics roared back to life did not just change the world through military action They unleashed extraordinary political forces inside nations like the United States and Britain, creating conditions that are still influencing society and elections

This may be where Israel finds itself now The Jewish state is no stranger to rocket attacks from Gaza or Lebanon or bus and suicide bombings But the Hamas invaders just shattered Israelis illusions of their own security more deeply than at any time since the Yom Kippur war in 1973 when Egyptian and Syrian forces attacked This sense of emotional violation will condition Israels response in the days ahead and will influence how the rest of the world reacts to its fightback

Compounding Israels national wound is the extreme political challenge now facing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who set himself up as the ultimate guarantor of Israeli security but whose long watch will now be mostly remembered for one of the most devastating defeats and intelligence failures in his nations history For now, the schisms in Israeli society, which have been caused by Netanyahus farright coalition and his attempts to reform the judicial system in a way that critics said threatened democracy, have closed in the wider cause of national unity But the veteran Israeli leader has an incentive to launch a devastating response to the attack to cover his political vulnerabilities as well to avenge Israels agony The excruciating reality that Hamas is holding Israeli hostages that it can use as leverage against Netanyahu makes the situation even more intense The longterm political consequences are impossible to predict

What we will do to our enemies in the coming days will resonate with them for generations, Netanyahu said in a national address on Monday

The Israeli leaders comments raised the immediate question of whether a relentless Israeli counterassault could all but eliminate Hamas in Gaza in the days ahead But another lesson from 911 is that wars launched in the dark weeks after an attack dont always turn out as hoped and risk rebounding against leaders who launch them Israel has already experienced the price of an incursion into densely populated Gaza, an urban warren of sprawling refugee camps, for instance And after 911, the Bush administrations war on terror caused aftereffects for years including war fatigue and cynicism about government that helped nurture the presidencies of both Barack Obama and Donald Trump

Those sentiments linger In launching his independent bid for the presidency on Monday, which could have unpredictable consequences in critical swing states, Robert F Kennedy Jr repeatedly slammed the military industrial complex and the long pipeline of continuous wars more than 20 years after 911

The world will have to react to Israelis reaction

Israels next moves will be critical So far, the overwhelming emotions have been empathy and horror But if Israels counterattack against Hamas leads to even greater civilian casualties in Gaza or if the enclave is cut off from water and electricity for days in an Israeli siege, the politics even inside allied nations where white and blue lights daub public monuments may begin to change

Joe Biden, one of the most unequivocally proIsrael Democratic presidents in living memory, is expected to address the attacks in televised remarks on Tuesday So far, he has buried his animosity with Netanyahu, who still hasnt visited the White House during Bidens tenure The Israeli leader said on Monday hes been in continuous contact with Biden since the attacks The US is surging air defense materiel and munitions to Israel and has offered intelligence support for hostage rescue operations As a show of support and deterrence to Israels enemies, Washington is moving an aircraft carrier group to the eastern Mediterranean

How Republicans are trying to blame Biden for the attacks on Israel

But at some point in the weeks ahead, the interests of the United States and Israel may diverge If evidence emerges, for instance, that Iran played a direct role in planning the assaults by its proxy Hamas, the pressure on Netanyahu for a direct strike against the Islamic Republic will become intense Washington will be concerned about the scale of any such action since the last thing that Biden needs as he embarks on his reelection race is for the US to get dragged into another Middle East war

The American president also needs to protect his political flanks, especially from a GOP trying to portray him as old and weak Republicans, led by exPresident Donald Trump, pounced on the Hamas attacks, seeking to saddle Biden with the blame over his attempts to defuse a US confrontation with Iran Trump also attempted to fuse an inflammatory US domestic issue the southern border with events in the Middle East by claiming without evidence that the same people who attacked Israel were streaming into the United States Another GOP presidential candidate, South Carolina Sen Tim Scott, repeated his claim that Biden was complicit in this actual war against Israel

Republicans have seized on the unfreezing of 6 billion in Iranian funds under a deal to free US hostages last month The administration insists the money hasnt been spent yet and can only be used to buy humanitarian and medical supplies under strict international monitoring But by blurring the facts, Republicans are creating a damaging public narrative designed to influence voter opinion This kind of hard knuckle politics can work Incessant conservative media coverage of Bidens handling of the chaotic US military withdrawal from Afghanistan is still frequently brought up at Republican campaign events by voters who may not be deeply familiar with the details of the US exit but see the drama as shorthand for incompetence

Biden must also be aware of political fallout on his left Progressive Democrats have been increasingly critical of Israel in recent years, both for its treatment of Palestinians in Gaza, which is controlled by Hamas, and the West Bank, which is led by the Palestinian Authority, and because of the extreme tilt of Netanyahus coalition, which is the mostright wing government in Israeli history Biden, whose own party has questioned his reelection bid, cannot afford to lose progressive support next year

Far reaching foreign policy consequences

Bidens legacy could also take a hit from the Israeli turmoil His effort to shepherd a normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia that could revamp the geopolitics of the Middle East looks at best stalled Saudi Arabia will not have the political room to negotiate with Netanyahu while hundreds of Palestinians are being killed in Israeli reprisal attacks in Gaza Netanyahu has even less bandwidth to make hard territorial concessions to the Palestinians in the West Bank that the deal would likely require to get over the line The historic nature of the proposed deal is one reason why Iran may have had a strong incentive to support Hamas attack, even if the US says at this point there is no concrete evidence proving its involvement

The consequences of the attack on Israel could also negatively impact another Biden priority the war in Ukraine While Israel will get highertech weapons from the US than Kyiv like interceptors for Iron Dome a prolonged regional war could further strain US reserve armories already depleted by shipments to Ukraine Biden might try to draw parallels between US support for Israel and his backing for Ukraine, another sovereign democratic nation facing outside attack But Republicans who already oppose more aid to Kyiv are likely to argue that Washington should prioritize its old friend and cannot afford to help both

All of these developments could precipitate wider strategic political reverberations The US has been trying to pivot away from the Middle East and toward Asia for a decade and a half But any sense in Beijing and Moscow that America is getting distracted by the region again will offer openings for US adversaries The possibility that China, Russia and Iran could find common cause against the United States has long preoccupied US foreign policy experts There is no formal antiUS alliance involving those three great adversaries But as the world appears to be organizing itself into democratic and autocratic blocs, the authoritarian leaders in all three countries have discovered military, economic and strategic synergies through their common antipathy to Washington And if the US is challenged or weakened in Europe, the Middle East or the AsiaPacific region, all three could benefit

In politics and international relations, everything is connected and one action sparks counterreactions So the war in Israel and Gaza will resonate far more widely than a cursed corner of the Middle East

The US government is not yet willing to draw a direct line between Iran and the shocking sneak attacks by Hamas militants on Israel outside the Gaza Strip, but President Joe Bidens domestic political rivals are convinced

Former President Donald Trump argued, falsely, that US taxpayer dollars went to Iran and were funneled to Hamas He also, with characteristic overthetop rhetoric, argued his administration brought so much peace to the Middle East And during a campaign appearance in New Hampshire, he tried to compare the violent attacks on Israel with the flow of asylumseeking migrants at the US border with Mexico although there is clearly no comparison between asylumseekers and terrorists killing hundreds

Sen Tim Scott, the Republican from South Carolina, told CNNs Wolf Blitzer Monday night that the Biden administration was complicit in the attack on Israel because of the same Iranian funds criticized by Trump

Bidens policies, according to Florida Gov Ron DeSantis, who was speaking in Iowa, were very deferential to the Iranians, the Iranians we now know were intimately involved in orchestrating these attacks

Former South Carolina Gov Nikki Haley, who was US ambassador to the United Nations for part of Trumps administration, said the US must support Israel to guard against Iran Israel is the frontline of defense for the Iranian regime and terrorists that want to hurt us and want to hurt our friends, Haley said, appearing on NBCs Meet the Press on Sunday

This is a domestic debate about Iran that will coincide with what could be a protracted war between Israel and Hamas

Why did Trump say taxpayer dollars went to Iran

Most of what Trump said is false US taxpayer dollars did not go to Iran

However, the Biden administration negotiated for the release in September of five Americans who had been held by Tehran What bought their freedom was the release of 6 billion in Iranian funds proceeds from the sale of its oil held in restricted South Korean accounts frozen by international sanctions on Iran Read more on the prisoner deal from CNNs Nadeen Ebrahim

The deal stipulated that the money would have to be used for humanitarian purposes and that Qatar, which helped broker the deal, would hold the money rather than having it go straight to Iran

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6 billion could have freed up money elsewhere

Critics, like Haley, have argued that if Iran got 6 billion for humanitarian purposes, that frees up money elsewhere

They go and spread terrorism every time they get one dollar, Haley said It doesnt go to the Iranian people It does go to terrorist attacks

The arguments are similar when it comes to the deal between Iran and Western countries regarding Irans nuclear program

That deal, engineered by former President Barack Obama and Biden during his time as vice president, was subsequently scuttled by Trump But it was never to send US taxpayer money to Iran rather, it was to lift some sanctions on Iran in exchange for controls on Irans nuclear program

Was Iran involved in the Hamas attacks

Iran has both commended the operation by Hamas and denied involvement, according to a report by Ebrahim

The US has not directly linked Iran to the attacks, but it does view Iran as broadly complicit, according to deputy national security adviser Jon Finer, appearing Monday on ABCs Good Morning America

Iran has given large amounts of support to Hamas, the group that controls Gaza and that the US and Western countries have labeled as a terror organization

Why would Iran have an interest in war between Hamas and Israel

CNNs national security analyst Peter Bergen effectively connects the dots, arguing Iran and Hamas have an interest in stopping a move toward normal relations between Israel and Arab nations

There appears also to be a larger play going on here, Bergen writes for CNN Opinion An attempt to end the rapprochement between Israel and the Arab states that began in earnest during the Trump Administration with the Abraham Accords

What were the Abraham Accords

This was the historic deal spearheaded by Trumps soninlaw Jared Kushner during the Trump administration, under which Arab nations including Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco and Sudan recognized Israeli sovereignty

Palestinian leaders, Bergen notes, opposed the Abraham Accords because it divorced their cause the creation of a Palestinian state from broader recognition of Israel in the Arab world

How Biden has continued Trumps Israel policy

The Biden administration has tried to capitalize on momentum from Trumps success with the Abraham Accords to negotiate a deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia

An active war between Hamas and Israel will seriously complicate that effort

I believe if Iran didnt stimulate or encourage it, it sure understands it is a huge beneficiary of it, The New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman told CNNs Fareed Zakaria on Sunday The last thing Iran wants was a USSaudiIsrael strategic alliance to counterbalance Iran Right now, thats no longer possible

A split in the GOP too

While most of the Republican presidential candidates focused on Biden with their criticisms, former Vice President Mike Pence argued this is a wakeup call for Republicans like Trump who have been moving the party toward a more isolationist worldview not only with regard to Israel, but also to Ukraine

Thats the debate here, Pence said Sunday on CNN Whether were going to shrink from our role as leader of the free world, or whether were going to lean in in this moment in Israel, and also in eastern Europe Were going to stand strong with our allies and stand up to our enemies

A UN Security Council vote on a resolution meant to spur more humanitarian aid into Gaza has been delayed again and is now expected Wednesday, according to two sources familiar with the matter

Intense negotiations were underway at the United Nations ahead of an expected vote Tuesday on a resolution calling for a halt in hostilities to allow much needed aid to enter Gaza, according to diplomats

Diplomats had been working behind closed doors to finalize a resolution drafted by the United Arab Emirates

The vote was originally scheduled for Monday, but was delayed a day to allow more time for negotiations

The delay into Wednesday suggests agreement hasnt yet been reached on language that could gain a yes vote from the United States, or at least an abstention, which would allow the measure to pass

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Were still working through the modalities of the resolution, US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told CNN during a Tuesday afternoon briefing at the White House Its important for us that the rest of the world understand whats at stake here and what Hamas did on the 7th of October and how Israel has a right to defend itself against those threats

The draft resolution is said to have originally included a call for a cessation of hostilities to allow muchneeded aid to enter Gaza Diplomats were hopeful that changing the language to suspension of hostilities could gain American support

The US has vetoed previous measures at the UN Security Council and voted against a call for a ceasefire in the larger UN General Assembly

If the US eventually allows the resolution to pass, it would amount to an important signal to Israel including from its top ally of the growing international outcry over the humanitarian situation in Gaza

During the Security Council meeting, a senior US diplomat said that while the attacks by Hamas on October 7 were atrocities that must be condemned, civilians and journalists must still be protected and vital humanitarian aid needs to reach civilians

Deputy Ambassador to the UN Robert Wood did not imply how the United States will vote on the upcoming resolution calling for a suspension of hostilities in Gaza to allow for the delivery of critically needed humanitarian aid

Wood also expressed concern about the alarming increase in Israeli settler violence in the West Bank, saying the United States condemns the violence by settlers and urges the Israeli government to investigate the violence and hold the settlers accountable

Earlier this month, the United States vetoed a resolution in the 15member UNSC that included the word ceasefire in the text Wood told the Security Council at the time it was because there was no mention of the October 7 Hamas attacks in the draft

As one of the five permanent members of the UNSC, a US veto means the resolution will not pass

According to Nusseibeh, who was involved in drafting the text and leads the 22member Arab group as a nonpermanent member of the UNSC, intensive efforts to pass the latest resolution come amid a critical need to stop hostilities and allow in aid as the humanitarian crisis in the enclave reaches catastrophic levels

Every single day, innocent people in Gaza are struggling desperately for want of food, water, medicine and fuel Members of the UN Security Council have seen the consequences of this humanitarian catastrophe firsthand, and the need for more aid could not be clearer, Nusseibeh said

This Council resolution responds to that need by opening border crossings, the transport of aid by land, sea, and air, and a UNled mechanism that would streamline inspection, monitoring, and approvals It underlines the critical importance of stopping hostilities to allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid and we will continue to aggressively pursue that goal

Nusseibeh also said, These deliverables are important to save lives, and our approach from the start has been focused on ensuring adoption That has been the basis of our engagement with Council Members, including the US, in the negotiations with whom we have been discussing this text closely and in good faith alongside the concerned Arab countries

Last week, the wider United Nations General Assembly voted to demand an immediate ceasefire in wartorn Gaza, in a rebuke to the United States, which has repeatedly blocked ceasefire calls in the Security Council While the General Assembly vote is politically significant and seen as wielding moral weight, it is nonbinding, unlike a Security Council resolution

Both Hamas and Israel have committed war crimes in the past month, the United Nations human rights chief said, as thousands of Palestinians fled south amid Israels intensifying offensive against the Islamist militant group

The atrocities perpetrated by Palestinian armed groups on October 7 were heinous, brutal and shocking, they were war crimes as is the continued holding of hostages, said Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The collective punishment by Israel of Palestinian civilians amounts also to a war crime, as does the unlawful forcible evacuation of civilians, he added

Israel declared war on Hamas on October 7 after militants killed 1,400 people in Israel and kidnapped about 240 others, according to the Israel Defense Forces IDF

The ensuing Israeli assault on Gaza has plunged the strip into crisis, with mass displacement and severe shortages of food, water, fuel and medical supplies

The IDF has repeatedly called on civilians to move to the southern half of the strip to avoid the fighting, and has opened daily evacuation corridors to allow them to do so, as it intensifies attacks on Hamas in Gaza City and northern Gaza, saying it would strike the militants wherever necessary

That has caused a growing exodus in the past week of Palestinians fleeing south

Civilians on Wednesday described unbearable conditions after traveling miles on foot through the battered enclave

One teenage girl compared the mass movement to the Nakba, or catastrophe, the Arabic term for the expulsion of Palestinians from their towns during the founding of Israel

A man who did not provide his name told CNN that he and his neighbors had lived through horrifying days and the war had left nothing left safe

Speaking Wednesday, Türk urged both sides to agree to a ceasefire to allow the delivery of aid to Gaza, the release of hostages by Hamas, and the political space to implement a durable end to the occupation

Even in the context of a 56yearold occupation, the current situation is the most dangerous in decades faced by people in Gaza, in Israel, in the West Bank but also regionally, he said

The Israeli military has pushed back against accusations of war crimes, saying its strikes on Hamas targets followed international law and sought to minimize civilian casualties

Israels attacks have killed at least 10,515 people and injured more than 26,000 others in Gaza since the war began, according to a Wednesday report by the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah, drawing from sources in the Hamascontrolled enclave

Women, children and the elderly make up about 74 of those deaths, the report added Its unclear how many combatants are included in the total, and CNN cannot independently verify these figures

Türk delivered his comments after visiting the Rafah crossing on the GazaEgypt border the only border crossing not controlled by Israel In recent weeks, it has been opened to allow the limited entry of aid, and the exit of foreign nationals and severely injured Palestinians from Gaza

He said the Rafah crossing is a symbolic lifeline for the more than 2 million people in Gaza and called for more aid to be delivered, saying The lifeline has been unjustly, outrageously thin

In Rafah I have witnessed the gates to a living nightmare, he said in a statement A nightmare where people have been suffocating, under persistent bombardment, mourning their families, struggling for water, for food, for electricity and fuel

The main UN agency operating in Gaza said Thursday it was able to deliver medical supplies to AlShifa hospital, Gazas largest medical facility, despite huge risks to our staff and health partners due to relentless bombardments

The UN Relief and Works Agency UNRWA described the conditions in the hospital as disastrous, saying there were almost two patients for every bed

Hospital wards are overflowing, with patients being treated on the floor, and tens of thousands of displaced Gazans seeking shelter in the facilitys parking lots and yards, it said

Aid organizations have also highlighted the dangers of delivering supplies within Gaza The International Committee of the Red Cross ICRC on Tuesday said its convoy had come under fire but did not apportion blame Two trucks were damaged in the attack and a driver sustained minor injuries, the ICRC said

The Palestine Red Crescent Society PRCS later said Israel was responsible for firing on the convoy

The IDF has not responded to CNN questions about this incident But it has previously rejected accusations that it deliberately targets medical transport and blamed Hamas for operating from nearby, underneath and within densely populated areas Thousands of Palestinians fled northern Gaza on Wednesday, traveling miles on foot through the battered enclave in a growing exodus as Israel intensifies its ground and air campaign

Streams of people women, children, the elderly and disabled made their way down Salah Eddin Street, one of the two northsouth highways in Gaza, along an evacuation corridor announced by the Israel Defense Forces

One teenage girl compared the mass movement to the Nakba, or catastrophe, the Arabic term for the expulsion of Palestinians from their towns during the founding of Israel

It was the fifth day in a row that the IDF opened an evacuation window, and numbers of people fleeing south have increased each day

The UN said 2,000 had fled south on Sunday, rising to 15,000 on Tuesday The Israeli government said 50,000 Gazans travelled via the evacuation corridor Wednesday That number could not be independently verified, but a CNN journalist at the scene said the numbers leaving were larger than on Tuesday

Israel has been ramping up its offensive inside Gaza, following the October 7 attacks that left 1,400 people in Israel dead

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant claimed Tuesday that IDF troops were at the heart of Gaza City and targeting Hamas infrastructure and commanders there It is unclear where exactly Israel is fighting

Gaza is the biggest terror stronghold that mankind has ever built This whole city is one big terror base Underground, they have kilometers of tunnels connecting to hospitals and schools, Gallant said We continue to dismantle this capability

The IDF has been bombarding Gaza for weeks, saying it hit 14,000 terrorist targets in the densely packed territory

A man who did not provide his name told a CNN journalist in southern Gaza that he and his neighbors had lived through horrifying days He said that they had left their home in northern Gaza and moved several times, but that it was impossible to escape the airstrikes

This war left nothing safe not churches, not mosques or anything Today, they dropped the leaflet ordering us to leave to the alleged safe area Now we are beyond this area of Wadi Gaza, and we are still hearing bombardments There is no safe place in Gaza

We are seven families All of our houses are gone Nothing is left We couldnt take anything no clothes, no water, nothing The way here was very difficult If something falls, you are not allowed to pick it up You are not allowed to slow down Dead bodies everywhere

Baraa, a 16yearold girl, said that she had been walking for a long time

It felt like the Nakba catastrophe of 2023, she said, using the Arabic term for the expulsion of Palestinians from their towns during the founding of Israel

We walked by people who were ripped to parts, dead bodies We walked beside tanks The Israelis called us, and they were asking people to take off their clothes and throw their belongings Children were very tired because there was no water

CNN has asked the IDF about the allegation that evacuees were made to remove clothing and get rid of belongings

We came under heavy shelling and had no choice but to leave our area, Hani Bakhit said We ended up using donkey carts because there were no cars, fuel, or drinking water available Nothing is left for us They forced us to leave by cutting off all available resources, he said, referring to Israeli forces

People who have nothing to do with the resistance are being bombed and so they are fleeing to the south, Khader Hamad said They are all children, newborns, women People carried few possessions in the arms or on their backs Some sat on carts drawn by donkeys On Tuesday, some could be seen carrying white flags and holding aloft identity documents

Donkey carts are the only means of transportation left, Abu Ida said There is no solar power or fuel left for cars, but also those who have cars are afraid to use them I cannot walk because I have diabetes, theres no way I can walk on my feet

A woman who did not provide her name said we are being destroyed

No one cares about us Maybe we are safe now, but Im not sure about those who are still behind I dont know where my family is My siblings are behind me Out of fear, I couldnt look behind Not right, not left

We came from Al Shifa Hospital, and we saw death on the way Dead bodies, destruction everywhere Amos Shani Atzmon says he doesnt blame Palestinians in Gaza for hating Israel right now

They have really good reasons When you see cities on fire and are getting bombed I had one close friend killed in Gaza and I am thinking about the people whose entire families died in bombing, he said

An Israel Defence Forces IDF reservist, Atzmon, 26, was called up just hours after Hamas launched its brutal terror attack on Israel, murdering around 1,200 people and kidnapping 253 others

Israel swiftly retaliated to the October 7 assault with a massive aerial bombardment campaign, followed by a ground operation More than 27,000 people have been killed in Gaza since, according to the Hamascontrolled Health Ministry in the enclave According to UN agencies, 400,000 Gazans are at risk of starving

The ministry does not distinguish between Hamas fighters and civilians, but says about 70 of the casualties are women and children Israel estimates it has killed about 10,000 Hamas militants since October 7 CNN is not able to independently confirm those numbers

The international community, including some of Israels closest allies, are increasingly horrified at the scale of the violence inflicted on civilians in Gaza

The International Court of Justice ICJ found in a preliminary ruling that South Africa had a right to pursue its genocide case against Israel, and that Palestinians had a right to be protected from genocide While it has not yet ruled on whether Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, the ICJ said that at least some of the rights claimed by South Africa and for which it is seeking protection are plausible

It ordered Israel to take all measures to limit the death and destruction caused by its military campaign, prevent and punish incitement to genocide, and ensure access to humanitarian aid

Regardless, little has changed on the ground

Atzmon said he is the leftwing guy in his unit Like tens of thousands of others, he had spent most of last spring and summer protesting against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his plans to overhaul Israels judiciary

Netanyahus government is the most rightwing in Israels history, rejecting the idea of a Palestinian state and supporting Jewish settlements inside the West Bank

Atzmon, meanwhile, wants Israel to work towards a twostate solution The Palestinian people will never stop fighting us until they have their own autonomy And I think the end goal needs to be that, he said

His political views are sometimes difficult to square with the realities of being a soldier, fighting on behalf of a government he doesnt support He says hes been grappling with this since he started forming his political opinions around the age of 15, anticipating his military service something almost everyone in Israel must complete

Im devastated about the death of people in Gaza, kids, the elderly Just normal men aged 26, like me, we dont want to die But I have the right to defend myself and to defend my family, my friends, my loved ones, he said, rejecting the notion that the Hamas terror attack was an act of resistance against the Israeli blockade Im not saying this is not a complex situation But Im 100 sure that Im on the right side of history, and that Im trying to defend people

What happened in the kibbutzim felt like the most inhuman thing I ever witnessed So when Im facing this kind of evil, I felt, and I still feel, that entering the war is the only way Because these are not people I can speak with or comprehend,

Hundreds of people were murdered in Beeri, Nir Oz, Kfar Azza and other kibbutzim near the Gaza perimeter

Atzmon said he wants Netanyahu, who is on trial for bribery, fraud and breach of trust, out of the office the sooner the better He should have resigned on the 7th of October I wanted to wake up on the 8th and watch him on TV telling people I have failed you and Im sorry Im stepping down, but that didnt happen, he said, adding that he would have welcomed nearly anyone else in the role

Studying to become a social worker, Atzmon is passionate about his political beliefs Yet as a soldier, he has fought shoulder to shoulder with people whose opinions couldnt be further from his own

Military service is mandatory for all Jewish citizens and for male Druze and Circassian citizens of Israel Arab citizens and ultraorthodox Jews are exempt from service, although they may choose to join

The strict conscription laws mean the military is politically as diverse as Israeli society People who wouldnt cross paths otherwise are suddenly thrust together and forced to overcome their differences

Emmanuel, a 35yearold reservist currently serving in a combat unit in and around the Gaza Strip, is as passionately rightwing as Atzmon is leftwing

Unlike Atzmon, Emmanuel is still on active duty and is officially prohibited from speaking to journalists He has therefore asked CNN not to publish his full name

He believes Israel will need to control Gaza for years to come, agreeing with Netanyuahu who said he wants Israel to have overall security responsibility in the strip for an indefinite period after the war ends

Emmanuel said the West Bank could serve as a blueprint for the future of Gaza The fact that he refers to the area by its biblical name and ancient Israelite kingdoms Judea and Samaria is just a small reminder that in this region of divisions and complexities, the words one chooses speak volumes of ones convictions

Using the biblical name of the ancient homeland of the Jewish people is one way the Israeli government tries to legitimize Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank, which are considered illegal under international law

Atzmon, on the other hand, calls it the West Bank and says he is very sure that it is under occupation

The Palestinians should control their own area like they do in some parts of Judea and Samaria, but where Israel has access to every village and every city, Emmanuel told CNN in a phone interview, speaking from his base near the Gaza Strip If we want to enter Ramallah, it is not a problem We enter Ramallah, we neutralize the threat

Some of Netanyahus coalition partners are going a step further, proposing to build Jewish settlements in Gaza

The issue of Jewish settlements in the West Bank is already a major fault line within Israeli society and in the countrys diplomatic relationships The idea of building settlements in Gaza has alarmed Israels allies, with the United States top diplomat rebuking the plans

Netanyahu himself has so far rejected the idea of new settlements in Gaza as unrealistic, saying in an Englishlanguage statement that Israel has no intention of permanently occupying Gaza or displacing its civilian population

But Emmanuel supports that idea

We must establish new settlements Not because we want to wipe out the Palestinians No We must have a real clear win over our enemies that everybody will understand This is the price that you pay if you mess with us, he said

Over 19 million people in Gaza, or nearly 85 of the population, are estimated to be internally displaced, according to the United Nations Efforts to force them put of their homes permanently would be a breach of international law and are among the arguments presented by South Africa in its ICJ case against Israel

And the second reason is security We know from Judea and Samaria that its easier to control the security in the area if you have settlements there, he said

The divisions and arguments within the Israeli society over the future of Gaza and the West Bank have become even deeper and more heated since the October 7 attacks

Not everyone gets involved, however

For 19yearold combat soldier Mendel, the political disagreements seem a bit meaningless at this point

The politics it really doesnt matter Youre in the army and youre there to protect the people and protect each other And it doesnt matter what you think, or what you look like or where youre from, he told CNN in an interview at a Jerusalem retreat center run by Never Alone, an organization that provides support to lone soldiers without family in Israel

An American from Long Island, Mendel decided to join the IDF after living in Israel for a few years

Unlike Emmanuel and Atzmon, Mendel does not have previous military experience He was drafted just a few months before the war broke out and has since been deployed to Gaza as part of the Netzah Yehuda Battalion an IDF unit that is specifically designed to accommodate religious servicemen He has also asked CNN not to publish his full name due to his active service

He said that when being drafted, he didnt think he would be involved in a war But things have changed on October 7, he said

They are still holding hostages there What do you want us to do If we back out and they still have our hostages What would you do if that was you What would you want your family doing if that was you

Difficult conversations

According to the IDF, 224 Israeli troops have been killed in Gaza since the ground operation began in late October

Among them, Atzmon said, was his best friend, who was killed in a battle in southern Gaza in late December

Atzmon told CNN the two had many conversations about the war and the civilians caught up in it something he regards as part of their duty as soldiers

Its our obligation to think about it and discuss it because the distance between fighting for your loved ones and killing people for revenge is really, really small, he said during an interview in Jerusalem on Wednesday, just a few days after returning from his deployment

He said he believes that individual soldiers and the military in general must continually have conversations about what is proportionate force

Because if were not, if were entering Gaza and doing whatever we want out of pure revenge, then were going to be as bad as Hamas And were not I am not going to let them turn me into a murderer, he said

But many outside Israel argue the limits of proportionality have been crossed In an unprecedented display of coordinated dissent, more than 800 officials from the United States and Europe signed a scathing criticism of Western policy towards Israel and Gaza, accusing their governments of possible complicity in war crimes

Emmanuel said he too sympathizes with innocent civilians But he said he believes fighting the war the way it is currently conducted is the only option

He said that successive Israeli governments were wrong to believe that keeping Gaza sealed off and under blockade would manage the situation

I dont believe that Churchill or Roosevelt thought they can manage Hitler Theres no managing your enemies Either we let them wipe out our country or we defeat them, he said And to be clear, we are not at war with the Palestinian people in Gaza Our war is with Hamas Nobody wants to kill an innocent civilian, an innocent woman, an innocent child but if we have to fight a war, there are casualties

Mendel, by far the youngest of the trio, said he feels strongly about the horrible injustice of innocent people dying

Wars shouldnt happen, Hamas should not have started this and none of this would have happened, he said And I dont think that starting it justifies any civilians dying, but its a war and war is a horrible, brutal thing, but its either that or they would have massacred the rest of us with smiles on their faces

Most of all, he said he just wants the war to end He said he misses his family, his mom especially

She is the best of all, he said And she makes the best challah in the world, he added, referring to the traditional Jewish braided bread served on special occasions

Mendel has some two years left of his military service Whether the war will end by the time he finishes is anyones guess

More than 800 officials from the United States and Europe have signed a scathing criticism of Western policy towards Israel and Gaza, accusing their governments of possible complicity in war crimes

In a statement obtained by CNN, the officials say there is a plausible risk that our governments policies are contributing to grave violations of international humanitarian law, war crimes and even ethnic cleansing or genocide

They accuse their governments of failing to hold Israel to the same standards they apply to other countries and weakening their own moral standing in the world

Among them are around 80 United States officials and diplomats, a source told CNN

In an unprecedented display of coordinated dissent since Israels war against Hamas began nearly four months ago, the signatories call on their governments to use all leverage to secure a ceasefire and to stop saying that there is a a strategic and defensible rationale behind the Israeli operation

The public letter, released Friday, comes a week after the International Court of Justice ICJ found in a preliminary ruling that that South Africa had a right to pursue its genocide case against Israel, and that Palestinians had a right to be protected from genocide While it has not yet ruled on whether Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, the ICJ said that at least some of the rights claimed by South Africa and for which it is seeking protection are plausible It ordered Israel to take all measures to limit the death and destruction caused by its military campaign, prevent and punish incitement to genocide, and ensure access to humanitarian aid

The statement shows the depths of concerns and outrage and just horror that all of us are witnessing, a US official with more than 25 years experience, who signed the letter, told CNN on Friday

The talking points that keep being delivered day after day are not cutting it

The US official told CNN that the signatories were motivated by their shared experience of having their concerns be ignored by their governments and by the appropriateness of public dissent by civil servants when ignored internally

The official added that the ICJs decision to hear a genocide case lodged against Israel was validation for the authors concerns Israel has strenuously denied accusations of genocide in Gaza

What was really important for those of us on the US side was to link arms with the people in Europe who believe their governments are following the US lead, and feel constrained by that, the official said So we thought it was important that US officials continue to make clear their concerns with government policy on this The statement, which does not list its signatories, says that it was coordinated by civil servants in European Union institutions, The Netherlands, and the United States, and endorsed by civil servants in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom

Despite the letter not listing its authors, the US official told CNN many colleagues feared losing their jobs, and that the lower number of US signatories reflected stronger protections for official dissents in Europe

CNN has asked the US State Department, the European Union, and the Dutch Foreign Ministry for a response to the statement CNN has also reached out to the Israeli government for a response

A senior British civil servant told CNN of the letter We feel that politicians have responded to the evolving situation, evinced by the Foreign Secretarys words this week

The Dutch Foreign Ministry, in a statement to CNN, said that while civil servants are entitled to freedom of expression, they are subject to some limitations under Dutch law

It is only natural that the debate in society about the conflict between Israel and Hamas also exists within our ministry We feel that there should be scope for this debate and we encourage staff to enter into dialogues internally And these dialogues are taking place

We are obliged to do everything in our power

In the letter, the officials say that they raised concerns internally within their governments and institutions, but their professional concerns have often been overruled by political and ideological considerations

We are obliged to do everything in our power on behalf of our countries and ourselves to not be complicit in one of the worst human catastrophes of this century,

Israels policies, they argue, are counterproductive to its own national security goals

Israels military operations have disregarded all important counterterrorism expertise gained since 911 and that the operation has not contributed to Israels goal of defeating Hamas and instead has strengthened the appeal of Hamas, Hezbollah and other negative actors

They say that Western support for Israel has come without real conditions or accountability

Our governments current policies weaken their moral standing and undermine their ability to stand up for freedom, justice, and human rights globally and weaken our efforts to rally international support for Ukraine and to counter malign actions by Russia, China and Iran, they say

Finally, they call on their governments to develop a strategy for lasting peace that includes a secure Palestinian state and guarantees for Israels security, so that an attack like 7 October and an offensive on Gaza never happen again

US policy in the Middle East can no longer be described as an attempt to stop the IsraelGaza conflict from triggering a bigger regional war That hope died weeks ago

The critical task now for President Joe Biden as he mulls retaliation over the deaths of three Americans in an attack by suspected Iranian proxy forces in Jordan Sunday is to prevent that regionwide war from tipping out of control

The president told reporters on Tuesday that he had made a decision on how to respond to the attack and warned he held Tehran responsible in the sense that theyre supplying the weapons to the people who did it But expressing the balancing act he faces in seeking to punish the perpetrators, downgrade their capabilities and restore deterrence, he added I dont think we need a wider war in the Middle East Thats not what Im looking for

But it is indisputable that the United States is already embroiled in a war in the wider Middle East, less than three years after Biden officially decreed the end of a twodecadelong combat mission in Iraq that exhausted the US and caused deep political trauma

It is also clear that the Biden administrations effort to prevent an escalation is not working US strikes against Iranianbacked militia throughout the region, which followed more than 160 attacks on American military facilities, did not deter Sundays drone strike And missile and drone attacks against commercial shipping in the Red Sea havent stopped despite rolling US airstrikes against their launch sites and infrastructure in Yemen

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So Biden has now arrived at the unenviable position that presidents often face when all potential options before them are bad and the very task of seeking to slow a deepening crisis may end up exacerbating it

The catalogue of violence that has erupted outside Gaza where tens of thousands of Palestinians have been killed after 1,200 Israelis died in Hamas terror attacks on October 7 underscores the grave potential of the war

Hezbollah, a proIranian group based in Lebanon, has been waging a lowgrade war against Israel On Monday alone, it said it had launched 13 attacks on targets in northern Israel The Israel Defense Forces said that evening it carried out airstrikes on Hezbollah targets in Lebanon

Two months of Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping have disrupted global supply chains and raised the cost of the cargo trade, risking a major economic impact The US is leading a coalition of nations to protect trade

The US and Britain launched strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen this month and Washington has carried out multiple followups But even Biden has admitted that the strategy has not stopped Houthi attacks

The US also launched strikes against targets linked to Irans Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Syria

The Biden administration has also carried out attacks on Iranbacked groups in Iraq, severely straining relations with the Baghdad government and raising concerns that US troops in the country to fight terrorism could be asked to leave

Israel expanded its own war by carrying out a drone strike that killed a senior Hamas leader in Beirut, according to US officials, fueling tensions in Lebanon a nation beset by severe economic, political and security crises

Iran has blamed Israel for an attack that killed a number of Revolutionary Guard officers in Damascus, Syria

If there is an upside to this spiraling military activity its that, as serious as it is, its unfolding as a set of controlled escalations that has yet to acquire its own destructive momentum Some worstcase scenarios havent occurred for example, a massive onslaught of missile attacks by Hezbollah against Israeli cities The group has a far greater capacity to hurt Israel than Hamas does

And while the weekend attack that killed the three Americans is tragic for their families and their nation, there has not so far been a largescale attack on US interests for instance, catastrophic damage to a US naval ship with huge loss of life that could multiply the intensity of the conflict on multiple fronts The calibrated escalations have fueled an impression in Washington that Iran doesnt want a fullscale regional conflagration any more than its archenemy the United States does

But if the progression of the conflict has been steady, rather than sudden, its not a given that it will stay that way

I think its very important to note that this is an incredibly volatile time in the Middle East, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday, before adding I would argue that we have not seen a situation as dangerous as the one were facing now across the region since at least 1973, and arguably even before that

Aaron David Miller, who spent years as a Middle East peace negotiator for presidents of both parties, is even less hopeful He told CNNs Jim Acosta on Sunday Its going to get worse before it gets worse, I suspect

Bidens impossible choices

As the country absorbed the loss of Sgt William Rivers, 46, Specialist Kennedy Sanders, 24, and Specialist Breonna Moffett, 23, on Monday, Biden shared on social media a photo of him in the Situation Room after receiving a national security briefing

He doesnt lack for advice outside the White House Hawkish Republicans like South Carolina Sen Lindsey Graham are demanding he attack Iran on Iranian soil GOP presidential candidate Nikki Haley says he should target leaders of the IRGC Bidens likely 2024 election foe Donald Trump is simultaneously blasting Biden as weak and accusing him of dragging the US into another Middle Eastern quagmire The expresident is not that different from some progressives in voicing that fear Also on the left, however, is dismay from some at Bidens refusal to demand a ceasefire in Gaza

Rep Jim Himes, the top Democrat on the House Select Committee on Intelligence, said on CNNs The Lead Monday that Iran understood that there was always the risk of fatalities when its proxies attacked US bases A lot of us have spent time thinking what happens when there are fatalities and now we are in that world, said the Connecticut lawmaker The response is going to be important and hopefully calibrated to send a very strong signal without increasing dramatically the odds that we get into a shooting war with Iran

Many politicians, experts and commentators have repeatedly speculated about the options in the last 24 hours, often citing the idea that the US needs to send a tough message but must also avoid sending the conflict into an even worse place But one lesson from the last few months, and indeed the disastrous last 20 years of US policy in the Middle East, is that formulations and assumptions that make sense in Washington rarely play out as anyone expects in that treacherous region

This is why Bidens dilemma is so acute How exactly does he find the sweet spot between deterrence and disastrous escalation Will the reprisals he does take put US forces at even greater risk Or will Iran just ignore them Whenever a president takes military action, they must consider whats next not just how an adversary will respond immediately but in months to come and how the US is prepared to counter those reactions

US officials told CNNs Oren Liebermann, Natasha Bertrand and Katie Bo Lillis Monday that the American response was likely to be more powerful than previous US strikes in Iraq and Syria against Iranian interests, but they have suggested it is unlikely the US will strike within Iran Blinken on Monday predicted the US response would be multileveled, come in stages and be sustained over time

If there is one ray of light right now, its Mondays news that a broad framework for a hostage release and potential ceasefire in the war in Gaza has been presented to Hamas The emerged from proposals from Israel, Hamas, Qatar and Egypt along with additional ideas from the United States It could see a sixweek pause in the conflict, the freeing of civilian hostages in Gaza and corresponding releases of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails Despite some reservations from Israel and tough details still pending, one official told CNNs Alex Marquardt, I sense optimism

Such a critical diplomatic moment only raises the stakes for Biden not to upset things as he mulls his military options

The political context

Bidens decision making cannot be divorced from the political context at home No president can afford to look like hes lost control when US troops are dead This is especially the case for Biden with accusations of weakness at the heart of Trumps 2024 case against his successor

GOP critics have long accused Biden of appeasing the Islamic Republic and see recent events as the result The only answer to these attacks must be devastating military retaliation against Irans terrorist forces, both in Iran and across the Middle East Anything less will confirm Joe Biden as a coward unworthy of being commanderinchief, said Arkansas Sen Tom Cotton

Haley called on Biden to directly take aim at the IRGC leadership Find one or two of them that are making the decisions It will chill all of them when you do that, the former US ambassador to the United Nations said on Newsmax

The rationale for attacking Iran would be that incremental and calibrated attacks on Iranian proxies havent worked and that Iran is a mortal threat to the United States and its allies and could only be deterred by direct military action Still, the lesson from Trumps assassination of Iranian intelligence chef Qasem Soleimani in 2020 is that it didnt prevent Iran from expanding its regional threat Indeed the network of proxies threatening the US and its allies were the brainchild of Soleimani And Trump didnt dare to strike him inside Iran The attack took place in Baghdad

Theres no sign the US will attack Iranian soil The White Houses top national security spokesman John Kirby told reporters repeatedly on Monday the US has no interest in a war with Iran or its clerical regime And the consequences of American strikes on Iran would likely be so escalatory probably unleashing Tehran proxies like Hezbollah with full bore attacks on Israeli and US interests and a consequential major USIran war that its an unthinkable possibility Its easy for Republicans especially those like Haley, whose path to the White House looks dim to advise hitting Iran Its Biden who will be responsible for the fallout And on a purely strategic level, risking a major Middle East war that could cause massive US casualties to avenge the deaths of three soldiers, as terrible as their deaths are, would not represent a sound equation

While Beltway pundits speculated about sinking Irans navy or targeting its leadership, the most likely outcome is a range of punishing attacks against the capabilities of its proxies on a scale not yet seen

But Biden still must wrestle with this unanswerable question How does he assert US power in a widening regional war in a way that doesnt make the conflict even more dangerous, expansive and likely to careen out of control

President Joe Biden issued an executive order targeting violent Israeli settlers in the West Bank whom he has said have undermined stability in the area, a US official and source familiar with the matter told CNN

The new directive, first reported by Politico and expected to be announced Thursday, will impose sanctions on several individuals accused of having participated in the violent acts

The order targets four individuals accused of directly perpetrating violence or intimidation in the West Bank, a senior administration official said, including people accused of initiating and leading a riot setting buildings, fields and vehicles on fire assaulting civilians and damaging property

The State Department announced the names of the Israelis targeted by the executive order, which blocks their financial assets and bars them from coming to the US They are David Chai Chasdai, Einan Tanjil, Shalom Zicherman and Yinon Levi

The White House notified the Israeli government of their plans ahead of the order, an official said

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Officials said they had compiled evidence they said offered proof of the individuals role in the West Bank violence that would withstand judicial review, including information from public reporting

Chasdai, according to the State Department, initiated and led a riot, which involved setting vehicles and buildings on fire, assaulting Palestinian civilians, and causing damage to property in Huwara, which resulted in the death of a Palestinian civilian

Tanjil was involved in assaulting Palestinian farmers and Israeli activists by attacking them with stones and clubs, resulting in injuries that required medical treatment, according to a State Department fact sheet

Zicherman, according to video evidence, assaulted Israeli activists and their vehicles in the West Bank, blocking them on the street, and attempted to break the windows of passing vehicles with activists inside He cornered two activists, injuring both of them, according to the State Department

Levi led a group of settlers who engaged in actions creating an atmosphere of fear in the West Bank, according to the fact sheet

He regularly led groups of settlers from the Meitarim Farm outpost that assaulted Palestinian and Bedouin civilians, threatened them with additional violence if they did not leave their homes, burned their fields, and destroyed their property, it said Levi and other settlers at Meitarim Farm have repeatedly attacked multiple communities within the West Bank

Its not clear when each of these acts occurred The US has no plans to target Israeli government officials for sanctions, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters Thursday

Biden has condemned these acts of violence in the past, and the issue is one that the president has personally discussed in recent months with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Netanyahus office said in a statement Thursday that the sanctions were unnecessary

Israel acts against all lawbreakers everywhere, so there is no room for exceptional measures in this regard, the prime ministers office said, adding that the absolute majority of Israeli settlers in the West Bank are lawabiding citizens

The order comes as the president faces backlash from key parts of his political coalition for his backing of Israel in its war against Hamas in Gaza While the order is not expected to address the situation in Gaza, it will mark one of the more significant actions Biden has taken to critique Israel since the war began in the wake of the October 7 terrorist attack by Hamas and could be a signal from Biden toward Muslim and ArabAmerican voters who are upset with his refusal to call for a ceasefire

In December, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced a new policy to prevent extremist Israeli settlers responsible for violence in the West Bank from coming to the United States

The State Department can apply the policy to both Israelis and Palestinians who were responsible for attacks in the West Bank, Blinken said at the time

Ultimately, the new policy is expected to impact dozens of individuals and potentially their family members, State Department spokesperson Matt Miller said at the time

Settler violence against West Bank residents has been a primary flashpoint in the IsraeliPalestinian conflict since long before the October 7 Hamas attack When hundreds of Israeli settlers rampaged through the West Bank town of Huwara last February, the ensuing violence was so brutal that the Israeli military commander over the West Bank referred to it as a pogrom

The violence has sharpened since October 7, along with the fears of Palestinians that they would be subjected to revenge attacks Dozens of Palestinians were killed in the West Bank in the weeks immediately following the Hamas attack as settler violence intensified

An estimated 700,000 Israeli settlers live in the West Bank Its unclear which specific acts those targeted by Bidens executive order participated in

Biden has raised the issue of settler violence in almost every diplomatic conversation he has with Israeli leaders, a senior administration official said

These actions pose a grave threat to peace, security and stability in the West Bank, Israel, and the Middle East region, and they also obstruct the realization, ultimately, of an independent Palestinian state existing side by side with Israel, and by extension the enduring peace and stability for Palestinians and Israelis alike, the official said

Speaking at the National Prayer Breakfast on Capitol Hill Thursday morning, ahead of issuing the executive order, Biden acknowledged the suffering of both Israelis and Palestinians He said he understands the pain and passion felt by so many here in America and around the world in response to the trauma, the destruction in Israel and Gaza

We value and pray for the lives taken and for the families left behind, Biden said For all those who are living in dire circumstances, innocent men, women and children, held hostage or under bombardment, or displaced not knowing where the next meal will come from, or if it will come at all

As of early this week, the overall death toll in Gaza since October 7 had risen to 26,422 with 65,087 injured, according to the Hamascontrolled health ministry in Gaza More than 1,200 people were killed in the original Hamas attack on Israel and more than 200 were taken hostage

Not only do we pray for peace, he continued, were actively working for peace, security and dignity for the Israeli people and the Palestinian people

Biden said he was engaged in bringing hostages held by Hamas home day and night, and was also working to ease the humanitarian crisis and to bring peace to Gaza and Israel and enduring peace with two states for two peoples

Israel will begin pulling thousands of soldiers out of Gaza this week in preparation for a new phase of the conflict, the military announced Monday, though a top official warned that he expected the fighting to continue throughout the year

The announcement from the Israel Defense Forces marked the biggest known withdrawal of troops from the territory since the war against Hamas began and comes after the military said it was expanding operations in the central and southern Gaza Strip

A senior US official said Monday that the move shows signs of the countrys gradual shift to a lowerintensity phase of its war

The 551st and 14th brigades comprised of reservists will return to their families and civilian lives this week, the IDF said in a statement

The 828th brigade, which trains squad commanders the 261st brigade, which trains army officers and the 460th brigade, which trains the armored corps, will return to their scheduled training, the IDF said

The statement said the move is expected to significantly alleviate economic burdens and the troops to gather strength for upcoming activities in the next year, as the fighting will persist, and their services will still be needed

In a briefing on Sunday, IDF spokesman Rear Adm Daniel Hagari said the return of the reservists was aimed at ensuring planning and preparation for the continuation of 2024 understanding that we will be required for additional tasks and warfare throughout this year The objectives of the war require prolonged fighting, he added

The focus of Israels ground operation has moved to the center and south of the Strip, but fighting in the north continues, where an estimated 52 to 65 of structures have been damaged and 46,000 housing units completely destroyed, according to the UN

The IDF extended operations further into Khan Younis in southern Gaza last week The UN Relief and Works Agency UNRWA warned on Thursday that over 150,000 people have nowhere to go after the IDF warned residents in many parts of central Gaza that they must urgently leave

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Saturday that Israels war in Gaza is at its highest level and will continue for months, according to Israels Army Radio

Senior US officials told CNN in early December that they expected the current phase of Israels ground operation targeting the southern end of the Strip to last several weeks before it transitions, possibly by January, to a lowerintensity, hyperlocalized strategy that narrowly targets specific Hamas militants and leaders

The US has been pressing Israeli officials to begin the more surgical phase of fighting The Biden administration has warned Israel that it cannot replicate the kind of devastating tactics it used in the north and must do more to limit civilian casualties

More than 21,000 people have been killed in the enclave during Israels offensive, according to the Hamasrun Ministry of Health in Gaza

A US official said Mondays announcement appeared to reflect the start of a gradual shift to lower intensity operations in the north of Gaza that American officials had been encouraging

The official said the move reflected the success IDF forces have had in Northern Gaza in dismantling Hamas military capabilities Still, the official cautioned there was still fighting ongoing in the north and that it did not appear to reflect any changes in the south of Gaza

US officials are viewing the next few weeks as a critical period that will demonstrate Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus willingness to move to a lower intensity phase of going after Hamas in Gaza

Later this week, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is expected to travel to the Middle East to continue discussions with Israeli officials about the next phase of the war in Gaza, which American officials have made clear they expect to begin soon

With every passing day, we learn ever more horrifying details of what Hamas has perpetrated against Israeli civilians since last Saturday Now that our notion of what can happen in this troubled corner of the world has been shaken, proving that the inconceivable can become reality, questions loom Among them Is there a way to defy the odds in a different way, with an outcome to this conflict that overcomes enormous political and diplomatic obstacles to create more durable stability And, to that end, is there a way to prevent Iran from emerging as the victor in this terrible warAt this moment, the focus in Israel is on military and other security operations But behind the scenes, with a view toward what happens in the longer term, theres a pivotal role for diplomats and political leaders in the region and beyond

The agenda of Israel, the US and the international community after persuading Egypt to open the border to Gaza civilians so they can flee the fighting should include three extraordinarily difficult goals to start building a safer, more stable aftermath to the fighting healing the acrimony dividing Israelis, making progress in relations with Palestinian factions that are not opposed to living side by side with Israel and salvaging the normalization process between Israel and Saudi Arabia Achieving these would make the entire world more secure

These goals may seem out of reach, perhaps even impossible But, as Israels first prime minister David BenGurion once noted, in order to be a realist you must believe in miracles

We already know many of the losers in this terrible conflict the thousands of Israeli victims slaughtered and terrorized by Hamas the civilians in Gaza once again trapped as human shields the peace activists, whose foes will argue this latest violence proves that peace is impossible and the politicians and military leaders who will face a furious reckoning when this is over

But who will be the winner

The goals of terrorism are political, and the political ramifications of this conflict are global The United States may want to pivot away from the Middle East, but the Middle East refuses to play along

Iran, which for years has supported Hamas with money and weapons, has a strong stake in how this plays out in the weeks, months and even years ahead So far, neither the US nor Israel have found direct evidence linking Tehran to the attack, but the White House has described Iran as broadly complicit as a fullfledged sponsor of Hamas Israel and the US are being circumspect, because if they do find a smoking gun, if they make the accusation, that could amount to a casus belli, a justification for war, and they dont want another headon confrontation at this moment Irans Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei praised Hamas for the operation but, perhaps betraying some anxiety, publicly denied involvement in the attacks

And yet, this war could end up turning into a triumph for Tehran, a fervently fundamentalist, antiWestern dictatorship that has threatened to destroy Israel and has worked to encircle it with a ring of militant organizations in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria, all the while depriving its own people of many basic rights

The goals of Hamas, whose founding charter commits it to the destruction of Israel, align neatly with those of Irans theocracy Both Iran and the Palestinians have watched with alarm the growing ties between Israel and its Arab neighbors Whatever the principal objective of Hamas operation, its reasonable to believe that derailing that process, particularly the prospect of friendly ties between Saudi Arabia and Israel, entered the calculation

The perpetrators undoubtedly expect an implacable reaction from Israel, which would help to derail the process, with images of Palestinians killed by Israeli bombs filling the screens of Arab citizens everywhere, sparking outrage and making it far more difficult, perhaps impossible, for the Saudis to draw closer to Israel With Arab publics watching images of carnage in Gaza, the terrorist logic goes, it becomes politically impossible for Arab leaders to draw closer to Israel

An end to the normalization process would be a victory for Iran, and a victory for Iran now a member of the antiAmerican, antiWestern axis of autocrats, alongside China and Russia is the last thing the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia want

Iran and Saudi Arabia recently established diplomatic relations, but the longstanding rivalry and mistrust between them, as the standard bearers of Islams two main divisions, Shiites and Sunnis, did not suddenly disappear

If Riyadh were to announce that the talks with Israel are not dead, it would face strong blowback from many quarters, at home and abroad But Saudi Arabias de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman MBS, is not exactly risk averse

To ease the path for reconciliation with Saudi Arabia and for other important reasons, including the promotion of stability at home, and the need to one day solve the conflict with Palestinians Israeli leaders should be talking to Palestinians in the West Bank, probing the possibility of working together on a path forward It all seems barely fathomable now, but it will be necessary

Indeed, of the three difficult goals, this one may be the most difficult MBS may be prepared to face popular anger, but the head of the Palestinian Authority, President Mahmoud Abbas, is not Now in the 18th year of a fouryear term, he is deeply unpopular, his position tenuous

Many Israelis, too, will bristle at the notion of compromise with Palestinians, after having seen their men, women, children, toddlers, babies and elders massacred, and not hearing any condemnation from the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah

If Israels peace camp had already grown weaker over the years, Hamas has only made it more so

But nothing has weakened Israel more than its internal divisions, which tore the country apart after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu brought into his coalition rightwing extremist figures the only way he could hold on to power Interestingly, one of them, Itamar BenGvir, was Israels minister of national security when the country was caught totally unprepared

For months, Israelis had been protesting against a judicial overhaul a judicial coup, as critics called it promoted by Netanyahus ruling coalition, which would severely weaken checks and balances in the country, corroding its democratic underpinnings

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On Wednesday, in the midst of this crisis, the most serious one Israel has faced in decades, Netanyahu and former defense minister Benny Gantz announced an emergency unity government Thats the first step in bringing the country back together But that road, too, is long and steep Israelis face wrenching dilemmas, and they have diametrically opposed views about how to solve them If theres something they surely all agree about today, its that those deep divisions made the country more vulnerable

As the fighting rages on, the emotions are intense Grief, anger, fear But those whose job is to look beyond the immediate challenge, to consider the future beyond the crisis and look for ways to prevent it from returning in an even more devastating shape, must find a way to create a diplomatic and political miracle on the other side of the current nightmare

Israeli President Isaac Herzog spent his day on Friday meeting with highprofile leaders at the COP28 climate talks in Dubai The same day, his countrys army dropped leaflets around southern Gaza, warning residents to flee its combat operations against Hamas were resuming after a sevenday pause

Herzog was supposed to give an address that day calling for action on the climate crisis His slot came and went he didnt speak He was instead meeting with the likes of King Charles III and leaders of the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, the European Union, the United Kingdom and India, as well as the United Nations Secretary General

The discussions were private, but no doubt the top of Herzogs agenda was soliciting support, or at least tolerance, for Israels part in the war with Hamas, and helping secure the release of the remaining 136 hostages who were abducted from Israel by the armed group in its October 7 attack Since then, Israel has retaliated with enormous military might, in a war that has killed more children than all the conflicts around the world in a year put together

The IsraelHamas war is casting a shadow over the COP28 climate talks Friday only marked Day 2 of proceedings, yet the subject has been unavoidable in press conferences, speeches and even in the optics of photos and handshakes

Some participants walked around the summit venue wearing lanyards in the colors of the Palestinian flag Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and South Africas President Cyril Ramaphosa openly accused Israel of committing war crimes in formal speeches that were supposed to be about climate to thousands of delegates, in remarks publicized well beyond Dubai

Meanwhile, Israels allies, like UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, repeated the line that Israel has the right to defend itself Sunak met with at least four leaders about the war its unlikely he had much time left for climate

Its not surprising or even untoward that Herzog would spend his time at COP28 with influential leaders there are few opportunities as awash with powerful players as the first two days of the UNbacked talks But it is symbolic of an ongoing problem the world struggles to make room for the drudging issue of climate change when conflicts happening in the now use up so much time, money and attention

Already, the heat of the war has entered the talks The Iranian delegations left the summit because Herzog and the Israeli delegation were present, according to Iranian state media IRNA Iran doesnt recognize Israel Its not clear if its delegation plans to return

As 2023 is on track to be the hottest year on record, there is a growing sense of urgency that countries need to put aside their differences for the climate crisis the consequences of feuding while the planet fries in record heat and crumbles from deadly extreme weather events are just too grim to ignore The US and China, for example, agreed to resume a climate working group last month and pledged a major rampup of renewable energy after a freeze since August last year

But in reality, the scourges of conflict and climate change have become so intertwined even horrifically similar in their outcomes that addressing them together may be an inevitability

That point was made clearly by Jordanian King AbdullahII, who in his speech Friday warned that war would only worsen the Middle Easts acute water stress and food insecurity, already fuelled by the climate crisis

My friends, this years conference of the parties must recognize even more than ever that we cannot talk about climate change in isolation from the humanitarian tragedies unfolding around us, he said

As we speak, the Palestinian people are facing an immediate threat to their lives and wellbeing In Gaza, over 17 million Palestinians have been displaced from their homes, tens of thousands have been injured or killed in a region already on the frontlines of climate change The massive destruction of war makes these environmental threats of water scarcity and food insecurity even more severe

NorthSouth trust deficit

The wider, longerrunning IsraelPalestinian conflict has caused divisions globally along the lines of race, religion and ethnicity since the state of Israel was established in 1948 But at COP, the current war is also causing a Global NorthSouth divide, according to Ulrich Eberle, Director of Climate, Environment and Conflict at the International Crisis Group, a Brusselsbased think tank

The longstanding trust deficit between the US and the Global South has grown even deeper because of the Biden administrations unstinting support for Israels Gaza campaign, Eberle told CNN NorthSouth conversation at COP was never going to be easy, but the timing and severity of the war certainly doesnt help, and could distract attention from vital issues

In the early days of the war, US President Joe Biden was one of the most emphatic supporters of Israel and its right to defend itself But his administration has been cornered into softening that tone, as gruesome images of the toll on civilians in Gaza draw outrage against Israel from many corners of the world

The Middle East has long been wracked with conflict, but the climate crisis was one area that was helping repair old rifts The UAE a longstanding supporter of a Palestinian state had recently begun cooperating with Israel on climate

In 2021, Israel and the UAE signed a water for energy deal with Jordan that would involve an exchange of solar power for desalinated water Last month, Jordan pulled out of the deal, with its foreign minister, Ayman Safadi, telling Al Jazeera it couldnt possibly ratify it while Israel continues to kill children in Gaza

The question now is whether the heat of the war will leave the summit along with the world leaders who typically fly home after making big, bold statements at the start of talks or if two weeks of painstaking negotiations around the viability of our planet may just add to tensions among the wars key players,and their allies and foes

Its early days, but so far, the actual negotiations havent been too clouded by the conflict, according to Alden Meyer, a senior associate with the climate consultancy E3G

But its one more geopolitical stress on top of what you already have with Ukraine and other tensions like USChina relations And this has not been an easy space for a number of years, in terms of separating the need to act collectively on climate change, versus the conflicts in other arenas, whether its trade or vaccines or the debt crisis or armed conflict in a lot of parts of the world, Alden told CNN

Its not like this is a new dynamic, but its obviously a very intense issue right now

It should not be hard to categorically condemn Hamas terrorists depraved use of rape as a weapon of war against Israeli women and girls

And the idea that Israel could think that a ratio of two civilians killed for every Hamas fighter in Gaza would be a tremendously positive result is callous

But raging disputes on both these issues underscore the extreme politicization of the conflict and, more importantly, threaten to downplay the inhumanity of a war exerting a horrific toll on defenseless civilians

The first episode concerns Democratic Rep Pramila Jayapal, who was forced on Tuesday to issue a long statement walking back her comments to CNNs Dana Bash on Sunday that horrific rapes need to be balanced against civilian deaths in Gaza

The second drama stems from comments by Israel Defense Forces spokesman Jonathan Conricus, also on CNN, about Palestinian civilian deaths that the lieutenant colonel was also forced to clarify

The controversy over Jayapals remarks follows a period, predating the most recent Hamas attacks, in which some on the left have been criticized for seeming to be less inclined to condemn crimes against humanity carried out against Jews than other ethnic groups And progressives across the Western world, many of whom are supportive of Palestinians, have sometimes been less strident than they might have been in trying to eradicate antisemitism

Days of footage of the murderous Hamas rampage through kibbutz communities and grieving Palestinians pulling dead children from the rubble of their homes is hard to watch But if the world tunes out, the reality of the carnage risks being overshadowed by arguments about the relative weight of horror suffered by either side or related diplomatic and political pointscoring typical of Middle East conflicts

Emphatically condemning the evil that unfolded on October 7 should be an easy call, even for critics of Israel who decry its longterm policies toward the Palestinians And it hardly needs to be seen as an endorsement of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus hardline policies Similarly, efforts to mitigate the civilian bloodbath in Gaza shouldnt be seen as implicit acquiescence of theocratic Hamas fascism That neither of these is a given sums up the paucity of political debate about the war, its intractability and ultimately, the endlessly repeating tragedy of this conflict

Often, a desire to seek political advantage from the situation comes from those with no direct contact with the human agony of those in the firing line The plight of Palestinian civilians, for example, is sometimes coopted into selfserving anticolonialism narratives favored by the American left A backlash against American Jews over Israels conduct since the October 7 attack has many traumatized

Horrendous accounts of rapes

Reaction to excruciating reports of systematic rapes and genital mutilations perpetrated by Hamas fighters underscores how politics shapes responses to war

The imprecision of Jayapals remarks on CNN left the impression that she did not condemn these outrages strongly enough Florida Democratic Rep Jared Moskowitz told CNNs Jake Tapper on Tuesday, for instance, that it was almost like the congresswoman was concerned she was criticizing Hamas too much

After two days of criticism, Jayapal clarified and expanded on her comments at a time of growing Israeli fury at the United Nations and other institutions over a perceived sluggishness in condemning the atrocities

Let me be completely clear again that I unequivocally condemn Hamas use of rape and sexual violence as an act of war, Jayapal wrote This is horrific and across the world, we must stand with our sisters, families, and survivors of rape and sexual assault everywhere to condemn this violence and hold perpetrators accountable She added My comment about balance was not about rape, and not intended to minimize rape and sexual assault in any way It was about recognizing the tremendous pain and trauma of so many Israelis, Palestinians and their diaspora communitiesin this terrible war

The statement by Jayapal, who chairs the Congressional Progressive Caucus, was one of the clearest signs yet that the war in Gaza has carved deep political splits in the United States, especially in the Democratic Party, that threaten to endure through 2024 and could impact President Joe Bidens reelection hopes The president, whose administration has spent recent days urging Israel to ease the toll on Palestinian civilians, issued his own strong statement condemning the rapes on Tuesday He bemoaned reports of women raped repeatedly raped and their bodies being mutilated while still alive of women corpses being desecrated, Hamas terrorists inflicting as much pain and suffering on women and girls as possible and then murdering them

It is appalling, the president added

The lack of global attention to the sexual violence led Netanyahu to rebuke international institutions on Tuesday in a televised address when he exclaimed Where the hell are you

Awful accounts of the rapes and assaults were aired in an event at the United Nations Monday, hosted by Israel, that featured volunteers and soldiers giving harrowing testimony about the sexual mutilation of some of the dead bodies they encountered Former Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg warned, Silence is complicity, and added, Rape should never be used as an act of war

And former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, Organizations, governments and individuals who are committed to a better future for women and girls have a responsibility to condemn all violence against women

It is outrageous that some who claim to stand for justice are closing their eyes and their hearts to the victims of Hamas

How Israels defenders explain away civilian carnage

An unwillingness of some to fully recognize the horror of the rapes of Israeli civilians is mirrored by the way civilian casualties in Gaza are sometimes explained away

Israels closest supporters in the United States often point out, correctly, that Hamas embeds its forces in civilian areas in order to create international outrage when innocent people are killed in reprisal strikes against their positions The Israeli government insists it takes scrupulous steps to avoid killing civilians But this does not necessarily absolve Netanyahus government of the moral consequences that come in an offensive that has killed so many innocent people Almost 16,000 Palestinians have died since October 7, according to the Hamascontrolled health ministry in Gaza, although those figures dont distinguish between combatants and civilians There have been many, many thousands of innocent people killed in Gaza, White House National Security Council coordinator for strategic communications John Kirby told reporters on a virtual gaggle Monday

The Biden administration which has been stalwart in defending Israels right to defend itself against Hamas and in opposing a permanent ceasefire has warned its ally not to repeat in southern Gaza the devastation it wrought in northern Gaza during the stage of its operation, when tens of thousands of Palestinians fled to the south But the intensity of the fighting in Gaza and humanitarian destruction accounted by international aid agencies raises serious questions about whether Israel has listened

On the conservative right, South Carolina Republican Sen Lindsey Graham, speaking on CNN Sunday against a ceasefire, dismissed warnings that civilian Palestinian casualties would breed more terrorism, seeming to rationalize those casualties on the grounnds that Palestinians are taught from the time theyre born to hate the Jews and to kill themThis is the background to the comment by Conricus over the supposed ratio between Hamas fighters and civilians killed an assessment first reported by the AFP news agency on Monday Whether or not thats true, Conricus calling it tremendously positive appears callous Like Jayapal, Conricus issued his own walkback, saying that the IDF was seeking to kill as few civilians as possible and added Every loss of life is sad, I should have chosen my words more carefully

Léo Cans, head of mission for Palestine for Médecins Sans Frontières, painted a picture of utter human horror inside Gaza in an interview with CNN International on Tuesday He spoke of a collapsed health system, a lack of food, drinking water and refuge and of Palestinians being bombed in areas in which Israel suggested they would be safe Ironically, his language recalled the plea by Netanyahu for the outside world to take notice of the atrocities represented by Hamas rapes It is really an attack on humanity that is going on right now in Gaza, I am talking about the humanity of all of us, Cans told Isa Soares, speaking from Jerusalem

The world is watching what is happening there I am wondering, where is the international community Where are they to stop this indiscriminate and disproportionate bombing that is going on in Gaza right now

US officials told CNN on Tuesday that they expect Israels ground operation in Gaza will last several weeks before it transitions by January into a lowerintensity, localized strategy targeting Hamas militants and leaders But US officials remain deeply concerned over how an offensive that has carried a devastating toll will unfold

That timeline means that, not for the first time in this horrible war, civilians will bear the brunt

President Joe Biden on Tuesday decried sexual assaults committed by Hamas during its October 7 terror attack on Israel and called on all of us to condemn the acts

Over the past few weeks, survivors and witnesses of the attacks have shared the horrific accounts of unimaginable cruelty Reports of women raped repeatedly raped and their bodies being mutilated while still alive of women corpses being desecrated, Hamas terrorists inflicting as much pain and suffering on women and girls as possible and then murdering them It is appalling, Biden said at a fundraising event in Boston

The world, he said, cant just look away at whats going on Its on all of us to forcibly condemn the sexual violence of Hamas terrorists without equivocation

The presidents comments come as Democratic Rep Pramila Jayapal has faced fierce criticism for not more forcefully condemning the acts by Hamas underscoring a divide in the party over the ongoing IsraelHamas war

Jayapal, the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said in a new statement Tuesday that she unequivocally condemns Hamas use of rape and sexual violence as an act of war, following comments she made to CNNs Dana Bash on Sunday that set off a firestorm among her Democratic House colleagues

On State of the Union, the congresswoman condemned the rape of Israeli women by Hamas as horrific but noted that over 15,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli attacks in Gaza since the start of the war, saying I think we have to be balanced about bringing in the outrages against Palestinians

In her latest statement Tuesday, Jayapal said her comment about balance was not about rape, and not intended to minimize rape and sexual assault in any way

Let me be completely clear again that I unequivocally condemn Hamas use of rape and sexual violence as an act of war, she said in the statement This is horrific and across the world, we must stand with our sisters, families, and survivors of rape and sexual assault everywhere to condemn this violence and hold perpetrators accountable

Amid the controversy over Jayapals comments, two House Democrats are planning to introduce a resolution this week condemning Hamas use of sexual violence and rape against Israeli women

Biden on Tuesday also accused Hamas of refusing to release additional female hostages and ending the pause in fighting that the US helped broker last week

Let me be crystal clear Hamas refusal to release the remaining young women is what broke this deal and end the pause in the fighting Everyone still being held hostage by Hamas need to be returned to their families immediately Were not going to stop,

The wave of drones and missiles that flew towards Israel overnight on Sunday brought with it a new phase of tension, uncertainty and confrontation in the Middle East

Iran launched the unprecedented attack in response to a suspected Israeli strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria, earlier this month

It marked a new chapter in a discord between the two states that percolated for years and has spiralled since Israel declared war on Hamas last October

The next steps remain unclear, but Israel is facing pleas from its allies to step back from the brink of open warfare and choose a path of deescalation

Heres what you need to know

How did Iran attack Israel

More than 300 projectiles including around 170 drones and over 120 ballistic missiles were fired toward Israel in the immense aerial attack overnight Approximately 350 rockets were fired from Iran, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanons Hezbollah, according to Israel Defense Forces IDF spokesperson Daniel Hagari

However, 99 of the projectiles were intercepted by Israels aerial defense systems and its allies, according to the Israeli military, with only a small number reaching Israeli territory

Tehrans attack targeted the Nevatim airbase, an Iranian army official said on Sunday, alleging that this is where Israels early April strike on the Iranian consulate was launched from

Iranian ballistic missiles that reached Israel fell on the airbase in the south of the country and caused only light structural damage, Hagari said The base is functioning and continuing its operations following the attack, with planes continuing to use the base, Hagari added

A senior US military official told reporters Sunday that the US assessed theres no significant damage within Israel itself

US ships in the eastern Mediterranean Sea destroyed between four and six Iranian ballistic missiles during the attack and aircraft in the region shot down more than 70 Iranian oneway UAVs headed toward Israel The US Army Patriot missile battery shot down one ballistic missile in the vicinity of Erbil, Iraq, the official said

Why did the attack take place

Israel and Iran are longstanding rivals and have been engaged in a shadow war for years

Israels war on Hamas, waged since the militant group attacked Israel on October 7, has heightened those tensions

Iranianbacked forces in Iraq and Syria have launched attacks aimed at US military positions in those countries and Irans leadership has warned that attacks by its allies wont stop until Israels war in Gaza ends

But fears of a spiralling regional war spiked further in early April, when Iran accused Israel of bombing its diplomatic complex in Syria

That airstrike destroyed the consulate building in the capital Damascus, killing at least seven officials including Mohammed Reza Zahedi, a top commander in Irans elite Revolutionary Guards IRGC, and senior commander Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi, Irans foreign ministry said at the time

Zahedi, a former commander of the IRGCs ground forces, air force, and the deputy commander of its operations, was the most highprofile Iranian target killed since thenUS President Donald Trump ordered the assassination of IRGC Gen Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad in 2020

Iran Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Israel would be punished for the attack, while President Ebrahim Raisi said it would not go unanswered, state news agency IRNA reported The Iranbacked Lebanese militant group Hezbollah said the strike would be met with punishment and revenge

The region has been on edge ever since, with the US and Israel warning of intelligence that an Iranian attack was imminent

How have Israel and its allies responded to the Iranian strike

Israel reacted angrily to the unprecedented strikes, while praising its militarys response

But Israels allies in the West urged the country to work to deescalate the crisis, rather than respond in a way which could tip the situation into open warfare

US President Joe Biden spoke by phone with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, and made clear that the US would not participate in any offensive operations against Iran, a senior White House administration official told CNN

Biden told Netanyahu he should consider the events of Saturday night a win as Irans attacks had been largely unsuccessful, and instead demonstrated Israels remarkable capacity to defend against and defeat even unprecedented attacks

After a virtual meeting Sunday, leaders of the G7 condemned in a joint statement the Iranian attack, which it said risks provoking an uncontrollable regional escalation

We demand that Iran and its proxies cease their attacks, and we stand ready to take further measures now and in response to further destabilizing initiatives

What happens next

The decisions made by Israels War Cabinet will dictate the immediate next steps

The threeman group met Sunday and then again on Monday, and the attacks sparked a heated debate over how to respond, two Israeli sources told CNN

On Monday, the war cabinet reviewed military plans for a potential response during a nearly threehour meeting, an Israeli official said

The war cabinet remains determined to respond to Irans attack, but it is not clear at this point if a decision has been made on what that response will be However, there is a sense that Israel must act quickly, the official said

The IDF chief of staff Lt Gen Herzi Halevi said later on Monday that Irans attack will be met with a response, while IDF spokesman Daniel Hagari said the force will do all that is necessary to defend Israel and will do that at the time we choose

In addition to a potential military response, the war cabinet is also mulling diplomatic options to further isolate Iran on the world stage

One of the members, Benny Gantz said Israel will exact a price from Iran in a way and time that suits us

Israeli government hardliners have called for firm action Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich urged a response that resonates throughout the Middle East, and National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir said Israel should go crazy

Israel told the United States that its not looking for a significant escalation with Iran, a senior Biden administration told reporters Sunday

Theyre looking to protect themselves and defend themselves, the official said

On Sunday, Iran said a new equation in its adversarial relationship with Israel had been opened, and warned of a much bigger assault on the country should Netanyahu decide on a titfortat attack

We have decided to create a new equation, which is that if from now on the Zionist regime attacks our interests, assets, personalities, and citizens, anywhere, and at any point, we will retaliate against them, the Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps IRGC Hossein Salami told Iranian state TV The Zionist regime is a term Iran uses to refer to Israel

The Israelis have basically accepted a sixweek ceasefire proposal in Gaza, a senior Biden administration official told reporters Saturday A second phase would be worked out over those six weeks to build something more enduring

The sixweek ceasefire would allow for the release of hostages in Gaza deemed the most vulnerable, including women, the elderly and the wounded, and the flow of aid into the beleaguered coastal enclave

That official said there is a framework deal that Israel has more or less accepted The sticking point, the official said, is that Hamas has not yet agreed to a defined category of vulnerable hostages

US officials said Friday that talks to reach a ceasefire agreement to halt the fighting between Hamas and Israel in Gaza by Ramadan now just about a week away appeared to be on track, even after more than 100 Palestinians were killed Thursday as they tried to access food in Gaza City

And on Friday afternoon, President Joe Biden called for an immediate ceasefire

Were trying to work out a deal between Israel and Hamas on the hostages being returned and an immediate ceasefire in Gaza for at least the next six weeks and to allow the surge of aid to the Gaza Strip, Biden said at the White House during a meeting with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni

US officials said Friday there were no indications that the discussions had been significantly derailed because of the aid site deaths but that much hinges on an expected Hamas response to what has been discussed in Paris and Doha, Qatar, in the past week Qatar, Egypt, Israel and the US have been involved in those talks On Thursday, a Hamas official warned, however, that the negotiations could be affected

Ad Feedback

As international efforts to broker a ceasefire continue, more talks are planned in Cairo, two sources familiar with the matter said Saturday Negotiators from the US, Israel, Egypt and Hamas are expected to attend, a diplomatic source familiar with the discussions said Its not clear whether Qatar will attend

Discussions between Israel and Hamas would be indirect, in separate rooms Israel has asked Hamas for a list of the hostages, including who is living and who is dead Hamas has still not responded to last weeks Paris meeting, which was followed this week by technical meetings in the Qatari capital of Doha with teams from US, Egypt, Qatar and Israel

Also on Saturday, a White House official said Vice President Kamala Harris would meet Monday with Israeli war cabinet member Benny Gantz amid the US push for a temporary ceasefire

The vice president will discuss the urgency of securing a hostage deal, which would allow for a temporary ceasefire, and the need to significantly expand and sustain aid flows into Gaza, given the dire humanitarian situation, the official said, adding that Harris would reiterate that the US is prepared to increase aid through airdrops and a maritime corridor

Harris has been involved in the dayafter planning for Gaza and those discussions will continue Monday with Gantz, who is also expected to meet with national security adviser Jake Sullivan

Biden had said earlier in the week that he hoped thered be a ceasefire in Gaza by Monday, but he offered a mixed assessment of that possibility Friday, saying I think well get there, but its not there yet And it may not get there now

The US, meanwhile, is working with partners to scale up aid to Gaza On Saturday, the US and Jordan airdropped humanitarian aid into the besieged enclave, part of a sustained effort to get more aid into Gaza, including by expanding the flow of aid through land corridors and routes, US Central Command said

There were 66 bundles dropped, a US official said There was no water or medical supplies in the bundles, which were dropped in a location that the US assessed people in need were sheltering

Following the airdrops, Biden said on social media the amount of aid flowing into Gaza was not nearly enough, adding that the US will continue to pull out every stop we can to get more aid in

Calls are growing for an investigation into one of the worst single tragedies to occur during Israels war with Hamas took, after scores of Palestinians were killed trying to access food aid in Gaza City on Thursday

At least 112 people were killed and 760 injured in an incident where Israel Defense Forces IDF troops used live fire as hungry and desperate Palestinian civilians were gathering around food aid trucks, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza CNN is unable to independently confirm these numbers

The incident took place amid a backdrop of vast hunger and dire poverty in the besieged enclave, where food aid has been so rare as to frequently elicit panic when it arrives

But there are competing narratives surrounding the devastation that have been put forward by Israel and by eyewitnesses on the ground

The United Nations has said an independent investigation is required to establish the facts, and nations including France have backed that call

Heres what we know

What happened

The deaths occurred amid scenes of chaos on Haroun Al Rasheed Street in western Gaza City, where crowds of hungry Palestinians had gathered for food aid

A convoy of at least 18 food trucks arrived at around 430 am on Thursday morning, sent by countries in the region including Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, according to eyewitnesses

Civilians swarmed around the newly arrived aid trucks in the hope of getting food, and Israeli forces soon started shooting, witnesses said

The aid trucks tried to escape the area, accidentally ramming others and causing further deaths and injuries, the eyewitnesses added to CNN Ambulances struggled to reach those in need because rubble was blocking the way, one of those witnesses, Ahmad Abu Al Foul told CNN

The majority of the casualties occurred as a result of people being rammed by aid trucks trying to escape Israeli fire, according to Khader Al Zaanoun, a journalist in Gaza with the official Palestinian news agency, Wafa

Al Zaanoun, who was at the scene and witnessed the incident, said that while there were large crowds waiting for food to be distributed from aid trucks, the chaos and confusion that led to people being hit by the trucks only started once Israeli soldiers opened fire

Most of the people that were killed were rammed by the aid trucks during the chaos and while trying to escape the Israeli gunfire, Al Zaanoun said

The United Nations on Friday said many of the Palestinian civilians injured during the carnage suffered gunshot wounds, citing a UN team that visited the hospital where survivors were taken

UN Secretary Generals spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric told a news conference that from what they saw, in terms of the patients alive and getting treatment is that there is a large number of gunshot wounds The team did not have access to the dead bodies so could not determine if it was the same for those killed

What is Israel saying

Israel offered an evolving account of the incident as the day progressed

In its first comments, the IDF said the incident began when Palestinians attempted to loot the trucks Early this morning, during the entry of humanitarian aid trucks into the northern Gaza Strip, Gazan residents surrounded the trucks, and looted the supplies being delivered During the incident, dozens of Gazans were injured as a result of pushing and trampling, the IDF told CNN

Later on Thursday, an Israeli military spokesperson claimed in a briefing that there were two separate incidents involving aid trucks in Gaza Thursday

First, he said trucks entered northern Gaza and were rushed by crowds, with trucks running over people Subsequently, he said, a group of Palestinians approached Israeli forces, who then opened fire on the Palestinians

The truckloads went into the north, then there was the stampede, and then afterwards, there was the event against our forces Thats how things transpired this morning, the spokesman said

That timeline directly contradicts the eyewitness accounts, which suggested that the Israeli military opened fire on people near the trucks, causing drivers to pull away in panic

In a briefing Thursday, IDF spokesperson Daniel Hargari denied there had been a strike on the convoy He said that Israeli tanks had fired warning shots to disperse a crowd around an aid convoy in Gaza, after seeing that people were being trampled

He insisted that the tanks were there to secure the humanitarian corridor so the aid convoy could reach its destination

The IDF released a short video, which appears to show a tank driving parallel to the crowd, several meters away

As you can see in this video, the tanks that were there to secure the convoy sees the Gazans being trampled and cautiously tries to disperse the mob with a few warning shots, Hagari said

When the crowd started to grow and things got out of hand, the tank retreated to avoid harming Gazans, he added

I think, as a military man, they were backing up securely, risking their own lives, not shooting at the mob, he said

What is the humanitarian situation in Gaza

More than a half a million people in Gaza are on the brink of famine, United Nations agencies warned on Tuesday, as the war in the enclave stretches towards the fivemonth mark

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said at least 576,000 people across Gaza are facing catastrophic levels of deprivation and starvation Meanwhile, the UN World Food Programme WFP warned of a real prospect of famine by May, with 500,000 people at risk if the threat is allowed to materialize

Today, food aid is required by almost the entire population of 22 million people Gaza is seeing the worst level of child malnutrition anywhere in the world, Carl Skau, WFP Deputy Executive Director, told the Security Council during its Tuesday session One child in every six under the age of 2 is acutely malnourished

Aid has been so sparse that, when available, it has often prompted panic Jan Egeland, the SecretaryGeneral of the Norwegian Refugee Council, warned of chaotic scenes around aid trucks in Gaza, during an interview with CNNs Christiane Amanpour earlier this week

The chaos, yes, around the aid line is becoming worse and worse because theres so little aid coming in, he said

Today, Im pretty shaken actually from what I saw, he went on The minute we crossed the border you see the aid trucks going full speed down the road, being chased by gangs of youth who jumped the trucks and before our eyes, loot mattresses, blankets, food, et cetera, to the desperate people outside who want to get some aid

What has the international community said

The US State Department expressed condolences for those killed and injured and said the US was pressing Israel for answers

Far too many innocent Palestinians have been killed over the course of this conflict, not just today, but over the past nearly five months, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said at a press briefing

We have been in touch with the Israeli government since early this morning and understand that an investigation is underway, he said

Miller said the US is aware of conflicting reports about what happened and would only say the US knows that a commercial convoy not associated with the UN was delivering the aid

If theres anything that the aerial footage of todays incident makes clear, it is just how desperate the situation on the ground is, said Miller, calling for Israel to allow the entry of more assistance into Gaza, through as many points of access as possible, and to enable safe and secure distribution of that aid throughout Gaza

The UN has condemned the incident and said it must be investigated UN Secretary General António Guterres said he was appalled by the growing death toll in Gaza and reiterated calls for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and unconditional release of all Israeli hostages in Gaza

His spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said in a statement The desperate civilians in Gaza need urgent help, including those in the besieged north where the United Nations has not been able to deliver aid in more than a week

Saudi Arabia also condemned the incident, calling on the international community to take a firm stance by obliging Israel to respect international humanitarian law, while the United Arab Emirates called for an independent and transparent investigation

Colombia announced it would suspend the purchase of weapons from Israel following the deaths This is called genocide and is reminiscent of the Holocaust even if the world powers do not like to recognize it, Colombian President Gustavo Petro said in a post

French Foreign Affairs Minister Stéphane Séjourné supported calls for a probe into what happened Speaking to French radio station France Inter, Séjourné branded the events as undefendable and injustifiable

The French Foreign Affairs ministry also released a statement on Thursday saying France was waiting for all light to be shed on the acts mentioned, which are very serious

What this means for the war

Thursdays tragedy represented one of the deadliest single incidents in Gaza since Israels war against Hamas began

And it came at a critical time for the conflict, with negotiations between Israel and Hamas on a deal to pause fighting and allow humanitarian aid into Gaza reaching a potentially pivotal moment

Hamas senior member Izzat AlRisheq warned that the killing of people collecting aid from trucks in Gaza could lead to the failure of ongoing talks

Negotiations are not an open process, he said in a statement published by the Hamas on Telegram

We will not allow for the pathway of the negotiationsto become a cover for the enemys continued crimes against our people in the Gaza Strip, AlRisheq said

At the State Department briefing, Miller also said the incident indicated how necessary it was to reach a potential temporary ceasefire as part of a hostage deal to allow more aid in

We continue to work day and night to achieve that outcome, including through calls President Joe Biden held this morning with President Al Sisi of Egypt and the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim, as well as one Secretary Blinken held earlier today with Qatari Prime Minister Al Thani, Miller said

Every leader on those calls agreed that this terrible event underscores the urgency in bringing the hostage talks to a close

President Biden said Monday during an appearance at an ice cream shop in New York City that he hoped there would be a ceasefire in the IsraelHamas conflict by next Monday, though officials from Israel, Hamas and Qatar which is helping mediate negotiations distanced themselves from that timeline

Biden said Thursday there are two competing versions of what happened that his administration is looking into When asked by CNNs Arlette Saenz at the White House on Thursday if he worried the deaths would complicate negotiations, Biden responded Oh, I know it will But he still expressed optimism that a deal on the hostages and a potential ceasefire could be reached soon

More than 30,000 people have been killed in Gaza since Israels war with Hamas began in October, the health ministry in the besieged enclave said Thursday, a bleak milestone that comes amid growing international pressure on Israel to halt fighting and fears of further bloodshed in the southern city of Rafah

The towering figure underscores a horrific, monthslong ordeal for Palestinians inside the strip, during which Israels bombing and ground campaigns have displaced the vast majority of the population and created a dire humanitarian crisis

In all, 30,035 people have been killed so far, the ministry said Thursday, adding that the number of injured is over 70,000

Israel is facing mounting pressure globally to halt the conflict, but its campaign in Gaza has retained the support of the United States, its key ally and largest supplier of military aid The US proposed a temporary ceasefire at the United Nations earlier this month, but has vetoed calls for an immediate halt in the conflict

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said Thursday there appears to be no bounds, no words, to capture the horrors that are unfolding before our eyes in Gaza

What is happening in Gaza is carnage Turk said, speaking at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva It is time well past time for peace, investigation and accountability, Turk said

The latest milestone preludes fears of more suffering in Rafah, Gazas southernmost city where more than 1 million people are crammed, and where Israel is expected to launch a fresh offensive

Gazas health ministry does not distinguish between civilians and fighters but has said in recent updates that around 70 of the casualties are women and children

Israel estimates about 10,000 Hamas fighters have been killed since October 7, when Israel declared war on the militant group More than 1,200 people in Israel were killed during Hamas attacks on that day, and more than 250 were kidnapped and taken hostage in Gaza

CNN cannot independently verify the casualty tolls in Gaza or the Israeli estimates of Hamas fighters killed

On Thursday, soon after the latest death toll figures were published, at least 53 people died and 120 were injured in Israeli gunfire in Gaza City as they were waiting for food, according to several eyewitnesses and the spokesperson for the Palestinian Red Crescent, Ahmad Abu Al Foul

Hungry civilians had swarmed around newly arrived aid trucks in the hope to get food, when Israeli tanks and drones started shooting at the people in Haroun Al Rasheed Street in western Gaza City, in the Sheikh Ajleen area

The aid trucks tried to escape the area, accidentally ramming others and causing further deaths and injuries, the eyewitnesses added to CNN Responding to CNN, the IDF said the incident is under review

Early this morning, during the entry of humanitarian aid trucks into the northern Gaza Strip, Gazan residents surrounded the trucks, and looted the supplies being delivered During the incident, dozens of Gazans were injured as a result of pushing and trampling, the IDF told CNN

Nearly five months on from Hamas October 7 attack, Israel has said that more than 100 hostages remain in captivity Its political and military leaders have pledged to press ahead with their objectives to return those hostages and destroy Hamas, despite international pressure to reduce the intensity of their campaign

Israeli war cabinet minister Benny Gantz on February 17 warned that Israeli forces will expand military operations in Rafah if hostages are not returned by Ramadan, which is expected to begin on March 10 or 11

The world must know, and Hamas leaders must know if by Ramadan our hostages are not home the fighting will continue to the Rafah area, Gantz said at a gathering of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations in Jerusalem

Fears that worst is still to come

Israels Western allies have grown increasingly concerned over the nature of its bombing and ground campaigns in Gaza, with even its most important partner, the United States, raising with increased regularity the plight of the millions of Palestinians caught in the path of its offensive

President Joe Biden remarked earlier this month that the Israel Defense Forces conduct has been over the top, his most direct rebuke to date

Biden subsequently told Netanyahu that the military action in Rafah should not proceed without a credible and executable plan for ensuring the safety of and support for the civilians, according to a readout of a phone call between the two leaders, and the US later proposed a UN resolution on a temporary ceasefire, though it has not supported calls by other countries for a ceasefire to be immediately implemented

As well as displacing the majority of Gazas 22 million people, the war has drastically diminished supplies of water, electricity and food, and cut off access to vital lifesaving care The hospitals in the enclave have become battlegrounds, with dozens of facilities no longer functional

The UN Humanitarian Affairs Coordination Office, OCHA, said on Tuesday that at least 576,000 people across Gaza are facing catastrophic levels of deprivation and starvation and are one step away from famine

Almost the entire population of 22 million people require food aid, according to the UN World Food Programme WFP, which added one in six children under the age of two is acutely malnourished

Gaza is seeing the worst level of child malnutrition anywhere in the world, Carl Skau, WFP Deputy Executive Director, told the UN Security Council on Tuesday

A sprawling tent city has meanwhile been formed around Rafah, as more and more displaced Palestinians make the trek to the city the last place to which they can flee north of the shuttered border with Egypt

In recent weeks, hopes for a ceasefireforhostages deal have repeatedly risen and then fallen, as highstakes diplomatic efforts to secure a pause in the fighting continue

On Monday, CNN reported Hamas had backed off some key demands in the negotiations for a hostage deal and pause in the fighting in Gaza following Israeli accusations that its position was delusional, according to two sources familiar with the discussions

Biden said that he hopes therell be a ceasefire in the IsraelHamas conflict by next Monday, saying that a deal was close but not done yet

However, officials from Israel, Hamas and Qatar have cautioned against Bidens optimism, suggesting that differences remain as negotiators work to secure an agreement

The United States is looking into possible airdrops of aid into Gaza as the humanitarian crisis there deepens and assistance fails to reach the people in the wartorn strip, two US officials told CNN on Wednesday

US officials have consistently said much more must be done in order for critically needed assistance to reach those in Gaza, where more than 2 million people are at imminent risk of famine, according to the United Nations

One US official said the prospect of airdrops is being seriously considered based on the conditions on the ground

Earlier this week, Jordan, Egypt, the UAE, Qatar and France airdropped relief aid on various areas in the Gaza Strip in a sign of how desperate the situation has become Axios first reported that the US is exploring the move

Top US officials have called on Israel to open additional crossings to allow aid to enter Gaza as the flow of trucks into the enclave trickled down to less than 100 per day last week, according to US Agency for International Development Administrator Samantha Power

It is absolutely clear, that as conditions continue to deteriorate in Gaza, for the Gazan people, two crossings is not enough, Power said Wednesday in a video message from the Kerem Shalom crossing

We are talking to Israeli officials about the need to open up far more crossings, far more passages into Gaza, so that vitally needed humanitarian assistance can be dramatically surged, Power said This is a matter of life and death graded Israels debt rating from A1 to A2 on Friday, underscoring the economic damage of the countrys war with Hamas, which has resulted in thousands of human casualties and stoked geopolitical tensions around the world

In a Friday statement, Moodys said the primary driver of its decision was an assessment that the ongoing military conflict with Hamas, its aftermath and wider consequences materially raise political risk for Israel as well as weaken its executive and legislative institutions and its fiscal strength, for the foreseeable future

While an A2 rating is still considered investment grade, the downgrade will likely make it more expensive for Israel to borrow money

In midOctober, less than two weeks after Hamas deadly attack on Israel on October 7, Moodys warned that Israels credit rating was in danger of a downgrade

At the time, Moodys said that while Israels credit profile had been resilient to military conflict in the past, the severity of the current military conflict raises the possibility of longer lasting and material credit impact

On Friday, the credit ratings agency said its decision was based on Israels projected higher budget deficit due to increased military spending, saying it expects Israels defense spending to be nearly double the level of 2022 by the end of 2024 and potentially rise even higher in the coming years

While there are currently negotiations underway to secure the release of the hostages against a temporary ceasefire and more humanitarian aid into Gaza, there is no clarity on the likelihood, time frame and durability of such an agreement, the agency said

Moodys also warned of the significant risk of an escalation of the current conflict, including the potential involvement of Hezbollah, an Islamist group with paramilitary forces to the north of Israel

Conflict with Hezbollah would pose a much bigger risk to Israels territory, Moodys said

As they watch airstrikes and hotbarreled howitzers pound targets in Gaza, check and recheck their personal weapons, communications and webbing, there can be very few among the thousands of Israeli soldiers poised for combat who dont quietly wonder Is this a trap

Hamas, and its backers in Tehran, would have certainly planned to meet a fierce Israeli ground offensive after the terrorizing infiltration of Israel

Its possible even probable that the singular horrors inflicted on so many civilians were intended by Hamas to guarantee a massive Israeli response, no matter the cost to civilians in Gaza

Israels next moves will determine the shape of things to come perhaps for decades It all comes down to Gaza

Hamas has riddled the Strip with networks of tunnels It will have laced the landscape above ground with booby traps, and will have plans to meet the IDF with anything from swarms of suicide bombers to snatch teams to take soldiers hostage

US generals and other officials have been sharing their experiences of urban warfare on a large scale with Israel

It took Iraqs military backed by American, British and other special forces along with relentless air strikes nine months to drive ISIS out of Mosul in 2017

The northern Iraqi city was largely emptied of civilians but fighting was house to house ISIS used tunnel systems it had built to ambush government troops who painfully took Mosul brick by bloody brick

The bombmaking skills of Hezbollah, the Lebanese militant group and close ally of Hamas, have metastasized across the Middle East In Gaza, Israeli troops will know they face improvised explosive devices built with charges that can cripple a tank Theyll know that Hezbollahs abilities to destroy armor will have been further refined since Israel last did serious battle in Lebanon in 2006 and was shocked by the sophistication of the militia

Hamas now has antiaircraft capabilities Israels Apache helicopters providing close support to infantry will be vulnerable to one man with a SAM surface to air missile

No doubt Hamas also has crews of propaagandists ready to make kill videos of their attacks on Israeli troops Nothing is more likely to inflame, or radicalize, angry young men than films of gore and daring ISIS taught us that Phase two

Its safe to assume that Hamas would have planned for widespread carnage in Gaza Indeed that may be the objective of phase two after the October 7 attacks

Any miscalculation in continuing genocide and forced displacement can have serious and bitter consequences, both in the region and for the warmongers, said Irans Foreign Minister Hossein AmirAbdollahian on Sunday

His words arent meant as analysis theyre a threat

The White House knows this A trap sprung against Israel could have wide and dangerous consequences leading to the sort of Clash of Civilizations that followed 911

A major concern for President Joe Biden will be the welfare of US hostages in Gaza and for the other 200plus souls held by Hamas and other groups in the enclave

But since the weekend, CNNs own sources in Washington have reflected concerns that a largescale Israeli ground operation risks igniting a conflagration that could burn out of control of the sort that took hold in Iraq after the USled invasion to topple Saddam Hussein

Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, has, for many years, drawn a straight line between Hamas and the socalled Islamic State He already sees the IsraelHamas conflict as a clash of civlization Hamas are the new Nazis They are the new ISIS and we have to fight them together just as the world, the civilized world, united to fight the Nazis and united to fight ISIS, he said at a press conference during the visit of British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak this week

Hamas latest atrocities were a Grand Guignol of horror, but the militant movement isnt ISIS Hamas has in fact worked hard, and violently, to snuff out ISIS elements in Gaza who represented a form of political Islam that it deeply opposed

Hamas does hope to establish a Palestinian state based on the teachings of Islam But it has no pretentions to a caliphate Crucially it also has no history of attacks outside Israel and the Palestinian territories, nor has it harnessed the internet into worldwide attempts at radicalization

But Hamas is committed to the destruction of the Jewish state World leaders have recoiled from its latest atrocities and have been vocal in supporting Israel

The struggle against terror groups must be without mercy, said French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday in Israel

But he added a caveat that, arguably, is rooted as much in realpolitik as it is in ethics An effort to avoid getting the West sucked into a conflict that could, or would, be seen as a war against Islam again

That struggle, he said, must be without mercy, but not without rulesSome 1,400 people were killed in in Israel during the Hamasled raids Since then, Israeli strikes have killed more than 6,400 people in Gaza and injured a further 17,000, according to information from Hamascontrolled health authorities in Gaza and published by the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah The Israel Defense Forces say that theyre trying to minimize civilian casualties

A state of neartotal siege has been imposed on the 23 million population The UN says 14 million people have been displaced inside the thin strip of land

A ground operation by Israel, though, would inevitable mean these figures shoot up On both sides

There have been proPalestinian marches throughout the world protesting at the level of destruction visited already on Gaza by Israel If a land incursion gets underway it will be much worse and the protests more loud

Meanwhile Israels enemies all dedicated to the destruction of the state itself have been meeting in Lebanon

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah met a deputy head of Hamas, Saleh AlArouri, and the secretarygeneral of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Ziad AlNakhla, on Wednesday

An assessment was made of what the parties of the resistance axis must do at this sensitive stage to achieve a real victory for the resistance in Gaza and Palestine and to stop the treacherous and brutal aggression against our people, Hezbollah said in a statement afterward

One can be sure that minders from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Brigade, Tehrans leading international military and intelligence arm, were on hand The Quds brigade has trained, funded and guided all three groups for many years

Theyll be looking to exploit Israels next moves in Gaza as their own phase two of the October 7 attacks

Hezbollah has already been drawing Israeli forces away from an exclusive focus on Gaza by skirmishing along Lebanons southern border The US has blamed Iran for sending Iraqi proxies to hit American logistics bases in Baghdad The cauldron of conflict has been kept simmering with attempts by the Iranianbacked Houthis in Yemen to fire missiles towards Israel, which were shot down by the US

Americans and many European nationals are being told to leave many Middle Eastern countries close to Israel even the Australians too have three planes on standby to handle evacuations

John Kirby, the spokesman for the US National Security Council, said Monday that the administration was watching very, very closely for signs Iranianbacked militia groups are planning to ramp up attacks on US military forces stationed in the Middle East

Consumed by rage

Iran may be trying to draw US Washingtons attention away from the Israeli theater but it may also be trying to goad the US into more conflict

Thats a conflict that the US is trying to avoid Biden, according to CNNs own reporting, is advising caution in talks with Israels PM He has reinforced those private discussions with public counsel

You cant look at what has happened here to mothers or fathers or grandparents, sons, daughters, children, even babies and not scream out for justice justice must be done but I caution this, while you feel that rage, dont be consumed by it, he said After 911, we were enraged in the United States While we saw justice and got justice, we also made mistakes

Those mistakes led to the USled invasion of Iraq, a widespread belief that Islam was under attack from the West, chaos in the Middle East, the socalled Islamic State or Caliphate itself and worldwide terror attacks

When President Biden warns the Israeli government not to repeat the mistakes it made in Afghanistan, he is speaking from significant lived experience As we all know now, the US overreacted after 911 and lost so much of the goodwill initially generated in the immediate aftermath, whether that was in terms of the war of choice in Iraq and its aftermath or the expansion of the war in Afghanistan, said Karin von Hippel, director of the Royal United Services Institute and a former adviser to the US military on combating terrorism

Thats the conventional wisdom

Martin Sherman, head of the Israel Institute for Strategic Studies and a longtime advocate of a harder line against his countrys regional rivals or enemies, disagrees

He believes that Israel should go into Gaza, and hard

I dont think that the Arabs will ever really come to terms with Israel the minimum that Israel can strive for is to be greatly feared and the best it can hope for is to be grudgingly accepted, he said

The IDF soldiers poised in their mustering points for what may be a major battle in Gaza might also wonder if, years from now, their sons may be back there again, striking out to be greatly feared

The warnings from senior UN officials came after Israeli airstrikes on Gaza killed more than 700 people in 24 hours, the highest daily number published since Israeli strikes against what it called Hamas targets in Gaza began two and a half weeks ago, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah on Tuesday

UNRWA director of communications Juliette Touma told CNN that the agency was sheltering some 600,000 people across Gaza UNRWA is their only lifeline, Touma said

The UNRWA director for Gaza Tom White told CNN that aid workers would have to decide what aspects of lifesaving aid they could and could not provide to civilians

Do we provide fuel for desalination plants for drinking water Can we provide fuel to hospitals Can we provide the essential fuel that is currently producing the bread that is feeding people in Gaza he said

UNRWA was founded in the wake of the 1948 ArabIsraeli War to provide essential services for Palestinians who had been made refugees by the conflict It began its operations in 1950 and its mandate has since been repeatedly renewed

As well as humanitarian aid, UNRWA also provides schooling to almost 300,000 students in Gaza, according to figures from the 202122 school year Recent fighting has meant that schools have become places of refuge for thousands of Gazans who have fled their homes

But White warned that fuel shortages could lead to the agency winding down its operations, even as some humanitarian supplies begin to arrive through the Rafah crossing White did not specify exactly when that process would begin, but stressed that the agency cannot operate without fuel Even if convoys come into Gaza, we wont have the fuel in our trucks to collect that aid or distribute that aid, he said

We need to find a solution to the fuel otherwise our aid operation will come to a stop, White told CNN

A deepening crisis

The deteriorating health environment, lack of sanitation, and consumption of dirty, salty water in Gaza is raising fears of a health crisis in which people could start dying from dehydration as the water system collapses while bombs continue to rain down

Just eight out of 20 aid trucks scheduled to cross into Gaza on Tuesday made the journey, UNRWA said No specific reason was provided as to why the other 12 trucks didnt make it through the Rafah crossing

Since the start of the Israeli siege two weeks ago, six hospitals in Gaza have been forced to close due to a lack of fuel, the World Health Organization said on Tuesday

Among those at risk of dying or suffering medical complications are 1,000 patients dependent on dialysis and 130 premature babies and other vulnerable patients who depend on a stable and uninterrupted supply of electricity to stay alive, WHO said in a statement

The Israel Defense Forces IDF on Tuesday ruled out any fuel being allowed to enter Gaza, saying Hamas would coopt fuel for its operational infrastructure and to continue its rocket attacks

Israel has also disputed that there are fuel shortages in Gaza Responding to the UNRWAs post on X about low supplies, the IDF posted an aerial photo of what it said were fuel tanks in Gaza, and claimed they held more than 500,000 liters of fuel CNN is unable to verify the IDF claim

Israels leadership has vowed to wipe out Hamas in response to its October 7 deadly terror attacks and kidnap rampage in which 1,400 people, mostly civilians, were killed and more than 200 taken hostage

In the wake of the assault, Israel launched a sustained aerial bombardment of Gaza that has killed more than 6,400 people and injured a further 17,000, according to information from Hamascontrolled health authorities in Gaza and published by the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah

More than 700 of those were killed in Gaza in the previous 24hour period, according to Palestinian officials Those killed included 305 children, 173 women and 78 elderly individuals, the ministry said

Some two million people are crammed into the 140 square mile coastal strip that makes up Gaza, half of whom are children

Al Jazeera said its bureau chief in Gaza, Wael AlDahdouh, lost his wife, son, and daughter in what it said was an Israeli airstrike The blast hit a house in the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip where the family was taking shelter after being displaced, according to Al Jazeera

CNN cannot independently confirm the source of the blast at the house and Al Jazeera did not provide evidence linking it directly to an Israeli strike The IDF has not yet responded to CNN requests for comment

No international consensus

On Wednesday, United States President Joe Biden described killing innocents as a price of waging war, and urged Israel to try to avoid civilian deaths

Im sure innocents have been killed, and its a price of waging war, Biden said Wednesday during a press conference in the Rose Garden

Israel should be incredibly careful to be sure that theyre focusing on going after the folks that are propagating this war against Israel, rather than civilians Its against their interests when that doesnt happen

Biden also said that he had no confidence in civilian death figures provided by the Hamascontrolled health ministry in Gaza I have no notion that the Palestinians are telling the truth about how many people are killed, he said

Meanwhile, a spat has broken out between Israel and the UN, after Secretary General Antonio Guterres appealed for a ceasefire and said he was concerned about the clear violations of international humanitarian law we are witnessing in Gaza

Guterres condemned Hamas horrifying and unprecedented terror attack on October 7, but said it cannot justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people

It is important to recognize the attacks by Hamas did not happen in a vacuum, Guterres said in remarks to the UN Security Council on Tuesday

His comments sparked a furious response from Israeli officials Israels ambassador to the UN GIlad Erdan said Guterres was not fit to lead the UN and called for him to resign immediately

Nearly three weeks since the outbreak of fighting, the UNs Security Council remains divided on how to proceed with the crisis Two differing resolutions on the matter, introduced by the US and Russia, both failed to pass on Wednesday

The draft resolution from the US called for humanitarian pauses, not a ceasefire, to allow for aid to reach Gazan civilians The US previously vetoed a Brazilian draft calling for a humanitarian pause

The US has rebutted calls for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, with National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby telling CNN on Monday that Hamas must first release hostages held in Gaza

Talks to secure the release of a large number of hostages being held by Hamas in Gaza are ongoing, CNN reported Tuesday, citing two sources familiar with the matter and one Western diplomat familiar with the deliberations, but the talks are being complicated by a number of factors

The US, Israel, Qatar, Egypt and Hamas are engaged in the ongoing deliberations Four hostages two American and two Israeli have been freed so far But the hope now is to reach a deal for a bigger group of hostages to be released at once

Israel has so far held off on making a ground incursion into Gaza, and the US has pressed Israel to further delay to allow for the release of more hostages held by Hamas

Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen said outside the UN Tuesday it was Israels mission to bring the hostages home

While we are still here, there are babies that are in captivity, twins, holocaust survivors, and we have one mission To bring them home, Cohen said

US military advisers have also urged Israelis to avoid an allout ground assault in Gaza, and steer Israel away from the type of brutal, urban combat the US engaged in against insurgents during the Iraq War, in an effort to keep the Israelis from getting bogged down in bloody, housebyhouse fighting, multiple sources familiar with the matter told CNN

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appeared to tell soldiers on Tuesday a ground offensive was still on track, saying, we stand before the next stage, it is coming

In a television address Wednesday, Netanyahu spoke for the first time since the October 7 attack about his own role in the security breakdown

Everyone will have to give answers, me too This will happen after the war, he said As the prime minister, Im responsible to secure the future of the country, and now its my role to lead the country and the people for crushing victory on our enemies

It is a month since Hamas launched its unexpected and brutal attack on Israel More than 1,400 Israelis were killed in the assault, and more than 240 were taken hostage, according to a count by Israeli officials The Ministry of Health in Ramallah says more than 10,000 Palestinians have died in the military campaign launched in response by Israel

Palestinian authorities dont make a distinction between combatants and civilians but vulnerable groups children, health workers and journalists are among those who make up much of the grim and still growing death toll

The conflict began when Hamas militants launched their deadly crossborder surprise attack on Israel on October 7, in what has been described as the deadliest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust In response, Israel responded with air and land attacks on the Gaza Strip, which have resulted in 10,305 deaths, according to a spokesperson for the Palestinian Ministry of Health in the besieged enclave CNN cannot independently verify the numbers released by the ministry

Thousands more Palestinians have been killed in Gaza in the last month than those who died in conflicts with Israel over the last 15 years

Children are nearly half of all casualties

Gaza has one of the youngest populations in the world, with 47 under 18 years old, and the health ministry is reporting that as of November 6, 4,104 children have been killed UN officials estimate that as of November 5, about 1,270 children have been reported missing and may be trapped under rubble

If the health ministry numbers are correct, the number of children killed since the conflict began has exceeded the number killed annually in armed conflicts globally in the past four years, according to UN data

By comparison, 477 children died in Ukraine in 2022, and 83 have died this year as of October 8, according to reports compiled by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

In the densely populated Gaza Strip, home to more than 2 million people, airstrikes have forced about 15 million people about twothirds of the population to flee their homes, according to UN figures

The Israeli Defense Forces IDF told people in the northern part of the Gaza Strip to evacuate to the south on October 13 Hospitals, shelters, schools and refugee camps are overwhelmed A lack of electricity, fuel, food and clean water is creating a humanitarian crisis, UN officials have warned

On October 31, an Israeli airstrike targeting Hamas commanders and infrastructure in Gazas largest refugee camp, Jabalya, left catastrophic damage and killed many The camp in northern Gaza was bombed for the second time the next day, killing at least 80 people, according to the director of Gazas Indonesian hospital According to a statement by the IDF, the initial airstrike killed several Hamas members, including Ibrahim Biari, whom it described as one of the Hamas commanders responsible for the October 7 attack on Israel Hamas denied one of its leaders was present

Attacks on health care

Attacks on health care can include incidents such as an Israeli airstrike that hit an ambulance outside the AlShifa hospital, the largest health facility in Gaza, which Israel said was directed at a Hamas cell At least 15 died and 50 were wounded, according to the Hamasrun authorities in Gaza

Health care attacks tracked by the World Health Organization can also include threats and efforts to prevent people from accessing care, removal of health care equipment, and other forms of violence that affect health care

A deadly blast at the AlAhli Hospital in Gaza resulted in a large number of casualties Both the cause of the blast and casualty figures are contested the Gaza health ministry said 471 died, while an initial US intelligence assessment said the number of dead was between 100 and 300 Palestinian officials and some Arab leaders blamed an Israeli airstrike, but Israel said it was the result of a misfired rocket from the Islamic Jihad militant group, a rival to Hamas A forensic CNN investigation concluded the blast was likely the result of a rocket fired from inside Gaza

Ukraine experienced nearly 600 attacks on health care in March and April 2022, the first full months after Russia launched its attack on that country, according to WHO data By comparison, there have been more than 200 such attacks in occupied Palestinian territory since October 7, but far more people have died

The Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah has reported 192 health workers have been killed and 113 healthcare facilities hit UN officials said 14 hospitals and 51 primary healthcare centers are out of service as of November 6, due to damage from airstrikes or a lack of fuel

There is absolutely no safe space for journalists

As of November 6, the Committee to Protect Journalists has tracked 37 deaths of journalists and media workers in occupied Palestinian territory since Oct 7, making it the deadliest period for journalists covering conflict since CPJ began keeping its numbers in 1992

There isnt any real precedent for this, said Arlene Getz, the editorial director at CPJ

The single deadliest event for professional journalists was the Nov 23, 2009, killing of 58 people in Ampatuan town, Maguindanao, in the Philippines 32 of those were journalists and media workers, according to the CPJ

It just feels like there is absolutely no safe space, Getz said Its dangerous to go to a refugee camp to report, places that used to be safe to go to

CPJ is counting deaths of working journalists and media workers in the region as related to their line of work, which is the same way it handled the killing of journalists in Ukraine beginning in 2022 By comparison, 13 journalists were killed in 2022 in Ukraine

Getz said CPJ sometimes struggles to confirm deaths because they frequently rely on family members for verification

Often, our sources for material like this, for confirmation of circumstances and deaths, are family members, Getz said In attacks where families have been killed alongside the journalists, it can be hard to find people who can speak to it

Of those killed in Gaza, 32 were Palestinian, four Israeli and one Lebanese, according to the CPJs latest figures An additional eight journalists were reported injured and 11 were missing or detained

From the United Nations to NGOs and even influencers, critics of the way Israel is waging war against Hamas in Gaza are not in short supply even US President Joe Biden has decried its indiscriminate bombing But if theres one area where Israel is arguably beyond reproach, its in the consistency of its stated war aims

Destroy Hamas so it cant fulfil its goal of repeating the October 7 massacre

Bring back the remaining hostages held by Hamas

There are other aims, such as reestablishing deterrence to Israels foes, and reassuring Israelis the state can still protect them But those were the main ones until last week

In recent days, a third objective has unashamedly wormed its way into the open getting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reelected

It began in earnest about a week ago, when US calls were growing for the Palestinian Authority PA, which administers parts of the Israelioccupied West Bank, to take control of postwar Gaza Netanyahus response Not on my watch

In comments to lawmakers, the prime minister claimed the Oslo Accords a series of pacts between Israel and the Palestinians which laid the groundwork for discussions on a possible future Palestinian state, and which he previously said he would honor had caused as many deaths as Hamas October 7 massacre, though over a longer period

Later that day, Netanyahu whose reputation as Mr Security lies in tatters, and whose popularity has plunged was at it again

Gaza will be neither Hamastan nor Fatahstan, he said, referring to Fatah, the largest Palestinian faction, which was instrumental in the signing of the Oslo Accords, and continues to control the PA, which administers parts of the Israelioccupied West Bank

His ambassador to the UK was even clearer When Sky News asked Tzipi Hotovely if Israel supports a twostate solution, she replied The answer is absolutely no

Why the focus on a failed, 30year old agreement All Jewish Israelis are unanimous about the need to dismantle Hamas, Yohanan Plesner, President of the Israel Democracy Institute IDI, tells CNN Bibi Netanyahu needs to find a new raison detre to remain relevant So hes going back to the Oslo process

Hes going back to the huge justified skepticism of any kind of solution that will hand over our security interests to the other side And trying to position himself as the guardian of those security interests Its a relatively shrewd political manoeuvre

Alas, says Plesner, it comes at the expense of the national interest He believes that, in practice, there arent really any major differences in how the US, Europe or Israel sees the war ending with the defeat of Hamas, or the interim stage that comes immediately after witness the British and German foreign ministers call for a sustainable ceasefire, which, among other things, requires the pieinthesky assumption that Hamas might lay down its arms And so, says Plesner, Netanyahu is trying to pronounce differences that are irrelevant at this point to improve his political lot

Or, to put it as Bibi author Anshel Pfeffer did on X, formerly known as Twitter Whats happening is Netanyahu consciously squandering what little international support Israel has mainly from the US to continue the war against Hamas in a vain attempt to save his own political career by picking a fight with Biden

Netanyahus fortunes may be decided sooner rather than later

On Tuesday, Plesners IDI published a survey that found almost 70 of Israelis want to see the country hold new elections as soon as the war with Hamas ends

More worryingly for Netanyahu, the survey also showed 31 of his own Likud voters say they will vote for a different party next time 16 of those will vote for a different political bloc entirely

Netanyahu, of course, has been written off before Hes always proved the doubters wrong

But after widely being blamed for the failures that allowed October 7 to happen on his watch, he now seems unable to fulfill one of his central war aims bringing the hostages home During the course of his governments weeklong truce with Hamas, 110 hostages were freed and 240 Palestinian prisoners released But only one rescue attempt that of female soldier Ori Megidish has been successful Repeated attempts to rescue others have failed, culminating in the IDF mistakenly killing three Israeli hostages

Even before that debacle, IDI found only around onethird of Israelis believe its possible to retrieve the remaining Israeli hostages, who number over 100

That tragedy may in turn hamper Netanyahus ability to fulfil his other war aim of destroying Hamas On Saturday evening, thousands of protesters descended on the renamed Hostages Square in Tel Aviv They demanded the prime minister and his government do more to bring their lovedones home, and to make this the governments number one priority not the destruction of Hamas

Ultimately, Netanyahu will probably do whatever gives him the best chance of staying in office Its not power for power, says Plesner

He thinks he has a hugely important role in Israeli and Jewish history Legacy is extremely important And he wouldnt want his legacy to be the October 7 attack Like it or not, though, it almost certainly will be

The truce that saw the return of 50 Israeli women and children from captivity in Gaza, as well as dozens of other nationals, has been extended for two more days, officials said Monday, as the hardnegotiated initial fourday pause concluded successfully following a latenight release of captives

Eleven Israelis were freed by Hamas on Monday, the Red Cross and the Israel Defense Forces IDF said, bringing the total number of freed hostages to 69 Thirtythree Palestinian prisoners were also freed, bringing the total number of Palestinian women and children released from Israeli prisons over the course of the truce to 150 Several dozen truckloads of aid were also able to reach the besieged enclave in what had been the first respite for Palestinians in the nearly two months of war

Qatars foreign ministry spokesperson Majed AlAnsari confirmed the extension of the truce in a statement posted on X, with leaders in Israel and the US quickly welcoming the news

Hamas said it agreed with Qatar and Egypt to extend the truce for an additional two days under the same conditions reached before

Mark Regev, the senior adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, confirmed to CNNs Dana Bash that a twoday extension had been reached, adding that it would go into effect after Mondays hostage transfer was completed

Regev said that under the agreement, Hamas will release 10 hostages each day

For every 10 hostages released, were willing to give an extension of another day, and if Hamas will release Israeli hostages as agreed, we will extend thats the bottom line, Regev said

Regev said he believes the hostages released over the next two days would be women and children

My understanding is that theres still enough women and children in Gaza held by Hamas for the next 20 releases, Regev said

Regev credited US President Joe Biden for helping arrange the parameters of the deal

These were negotiated with the help of President Biden and we thank him for putting his effort and his office behind these arrangements I dont think we would have reached the deal without his input, he said

In a statement, Biden praised the extension and said he has been deeply engaged as the truce has played out He went on to thank the leaders of Israel, Qatar, and Egypt for their commitment to this process and in reaching the agreement for an extension

We will not stop until all of the hostages held by Hamas terrorists are released, he added

The White House also said they hope to see the pause extended further

The announcement followed a call Monday between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the prime minister of Qatar, who helped broker the original fourday truce, according to a source familiar with the discussions

The initial deal to secure the release of 50 women and children hostages was struck with the understanding that the cessation in fighting could be extended by additional days if Hamas was able to produce additional hostages, as CNN has previously reported

Israeli and US officials believed that there were more women and children being held in captivity than 50, but agreed to the terms of the deal as Hamas insisted that it needed to use the pause in fighting to gather up additional hostages

Two American women abducted by Hamas on October 7 are believed to still be in captivity, US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told CNN Monday

The White House had said three Americans were expected to be among the 50 hostages that Hamas would release over the course of the fourday pause, but only one fouryearold Abigail Edan was freed in the first period of truce It was not immediately clear why the two women had not yet been released, and whether they would be released during the twoday extension

An overwhelming majority of nations 120 countries voted on Friday for a United Nations resolution calling for a sustained humanitarian truce in Gaza, even as Israels military announced it is expanding ground operations in the besieged enclave

The announcement followed reports of intense aerial bombardment in Gaza, which Palestinian telecom company Jawwal said cut off its telecommunications network in the territory An eyewitness at Gazas Al Aqsa Martyrs hospital described the situation as being left in the dark with no connection to the outside world

Israel has vowed to continue ground raids over the coming days after ordering the complete siege of Gaza in the wake of Hamas October 7 terror attack that killed more than 1,400 people and saw some 200 people taken to Gaza as hostages Ongoing Israeli air strikes and a blockade of lifesaving fuel have since sparked dire warnings for the fate 2 million people trapped in Gaza

Israeli airstrikes have killed more than 7,000 people in Gaza since October 7, according to figures released Thursday by the Hamascontrolled Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza

In New York, UN member nations voted for a sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities in the war between Israel and Hamas, so that humanitarian aid can reach civilians in Gaza

Ad Feedback

The vote outcome prompted a burst of loud applause in the assembly hall where delegates had gathered to vote and debate The US, like Israel, has sharply criticized the effort and was one of 14 countries that voted against it on Friday

Jordan brought the resolution to the General Assembly after successive attempts to call for ceasefires and humanitarian pauses failed in the more powerful Security Council

The draft resolution calls for an immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities, as well as immediate, full, sustained, safe and unhindered humanitarian access, and asks Israel to rescind its order to evacuate northern Gaza It also calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all civilians who are being illegally held captive but does not name Hamas as the captor

While a general assembly vote is politically significant, it is not binding, and comes amid a lack of global consensus on how to resolve the crisis

Fridays resolution was criticized by the US and its allies for not explicitly criticizing Hamas Canadas lastminute amendment on Friday, which sharply denounced the militant group, failed to pass

Israeli ambassador to the UN Gilad Erdan called the resolutions passing a day of infamy for the UN It is the duty of this body to call out murderous terrorists by name, not hide them behind empty words Why are you defending murderers He asked

Ahead of the vote, Jordans Foreign Minister urged others to support the resolution, warning on social media that Israels expanding ground operations will be a humanitarian catastrophe of epic proportions for years to come, Ayman Safadi said

Millions will be watching every vote History will judge Civilian toll

Sewage is overflowing in the streets of Gaza and its population is facing the increasing threat of disease and hunger without access to outside supply lines, the United Nations has warned, adding that the aid so far permitted to enter Gaza amounts to nothing more than crumbs

Food and water are running out The streets of Gaza have started overflowing with sewage Gaza is on the brink of a massive health hazard as the risks of diseases are looming, said Phillipe Lazzarini, the head of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees UNRWA

The last remaining public services are collapsing, our aid operation is crumbling and for the first time ever, our staff report that people are now hungry

Some aid trucks have been able to enter Gaza through Egypt since the crisis began but Lazzarini said the deliveries were doing little to address the Gazans needs And while the initial aid deliveries have provided some food, water and medicine, Israel has not allowed the import of fuel, which the UN says is paralyzing its aid operations UNRWA officials said this week that without fuel, they would be unable to collect and distribute aid that reaches Gaza, warning they would be forced to wind down their relief efforts

We should avoid conveying the message that few trucks a day means the siege is lifted for humanitarian aid This is not true, Lazzarini added The current system in place is geared to fail What is needed is meaningful and noninterrupted aid flow

A total of 74 trucks have entered the strip since humanitarian aid transfers resumed several days ago, the Palestine Red Crescent Society PRCS said Thursday Eight more trucks were expected Friday, the UN said, adding that previously 450 trucks were going in each day

Israel says Hamas is stockpiling fuel for its own use and has called on the militant Palestinian group that governs Gaza to share it IDF spokesperson Lt Col Jonathan Conricus told CNN on Thursday that Hamas controls between 800,000 and perhaps more than 1 million liters of fuel of different types stored inside Gaza, according to Israeli military intelligence estimates CNN cannot independently verify the amount of fuel in Gaza

Lazzarini criticized Israels questioning that aid would be used solely for civilians, stressing that UNRWA has strict vetting mechanisms in place It pains me that humanitarian aid, a very basic right for people, is constantly questioned while at the same time despair is live streamed under our watch, he said

All our vendors and partners are vetted against the sanctions list We give aid to those who need it most Our convoys and their routes are notified and deconflicted, he said UNRWA does not and will not divert any humanitarian aid into the wrong hands

A 10person team of medical staff and experts from the International Committee of the Red Cross ICRC crossed into Gaza Friday, the organization said in a statement, warning that the humanitarian catastrophe is deepening by the hour The ICRC said it had enough equipment to treat several thousand wounded people and enough water purification supplies to treat 50,000 liters of water

Aid group the Red Crescent Society said Friday that it has completely lost contact with the operations room in Gaza and all our teams operating there amid the telecommunications blackout

Finding the right words

The deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza has sparked huge international concern but, nearly three weeks since the outbreak of violence, the world has so far failed to unite around a common position on the crisis

European leaders have stopped short of calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, instead appealing for humanitarian pauses

The health ministry on Thursday published a 212page report with more than 6,000 names describes as documented deaths since October 7 in Gaza The ministry blamed the deaths on Israels military aggression, after Israel, along with the United States, expressed doubts about the casualty numbers being reported out of Gaza, without providing evidence that they are exaggerated The list of 6,747 names gives the sex, age and identity card number of each of the victims

The maneuvering will begin when the conditions are right These conditions are complex because so is the campaign The troops are ready, Gallant said in a briefing in Tel Aviv

Meanwhile, six people were injured when a rocket struck the Red Sea resort city of Taba, in Egypt, early on Friday, according to official sources cited by Egyptaffiliated AlQahera News

The rocket hit an ambulance building and a residential area of the hospitals administration in the city, which shares its border with Israel It is unclear yet who fired the rocket

Hagari said at a press briefing Friday that Israel will cooperate with Egypt and the US to tighten the defense in the region against threats from the Red Sea area Hagari said an aerial threat had been detected in the Red Sea area, which he said he believed was the cause of the strike in Egypt

Israeli airstrikes rocked Gaza during a night of heavy bombardment after the Israel Defense Forces IDF said Friday it is expanding ground operations in the besieged enclave, where communications links have reportedly been severed

In a statement Saturday, the IDF said its warplanes hit 150 underground targets in northern Gaza overnight, striking what it called terror tunnels and underground combat spaces and killing several Hamas operatives

Among those killed was Asem Abu Rakaba, the man in charge of Hamas aerial assets, who had taken part in planning the October 7 attacks on Israel and directed the terrorists who infiltrated Israel on paragliders, the IDF said

The IDF is operating forcefully on all fronts and will continue striking Gaza City, IDF spokesperson Rear Adm Daniel Hagari said Friday, repeating previous warnings that civilians should evacuate as he announced the intensified ground operation

Gaza residents told CNN that the evenings airstrikes were the most intense they have experienced since Israel began to retaliate against Hamas October 7 terror attack around three weeks ago

Speaking to CNN by phone from near Gazas Al Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, one eyewitness, Salem Ahmad Ammar, told CNN that he and his wife had decided to separate in hopes that one would survive to care for their kids

Dont know if I will live to see the daylight tomorrow morning, Ammar said I split from my wife, and the kids went to her parents house, and I came to the hospital here in the event we die in different places and maybe one of us would live and our kids will live Difficult choices we are making

A substantial ground offensive has been expected ever since the attacks, in which Hamas killed more than 1,400 people and saw some 200 people taken to Gaza as hostages However, it is not yet clear whether the IDF announcement of an expanded operation signals the start of that push

Mark Regev, senior adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, told CNN that an expansion of ground operations in Gaza means Israels army is beefing up the pressure on Hamas He told CNNs Jake Tapper that pressure will increase and continue to increase until we achieve our goal

This is the third night of Israeli ground actions in Gaza, as it amasses thousands of troops on the border with the enclave It comes after weeks of bombardment and blockading Gaza, precipitating what aid agencies call a humanitarian crisis

Hamas has vowed to retaliate if Israeli ground troops enter Gaza Izzat alRishq, a senior member of the Hamas political bureau, vowed that Hamas is ready to defeat Israeli soldiers if they enter the territory

Ghazi Hamad, a senior Hamas official, told the Associated Press on Thursday that Hezbollah and other allies were expected to play a bigger role as the IsraelHamas war rages Hezbollah now is working against the occupation, he said, adding a rare public appeal We appreciate this But we need more in order to stop the aggression on Gaza We expect more

Concerns have risen that Israels army may target Gaza hospitals after it alleged that the enclaves largest medical center, Al Shifa, is the site of a Hamas command and control center a claim that Palestinian authorities in Gaza and Ramallah, as well as doctors at the hospital, have denied

Hagari claimed Hamas of directing rocket attacks and commanding Hamas operations from bunkers underneath the hospital building, and appeared to suggest such hospitals could be on Israels target list When medical facilities are used for terror purposes, they are liable to lose their protection from attack in accordance with international law, Hagari said

The Director General of the Gaza Health Ministry, Dr Medhat Abbas, told CNNs Eleni Giokos that Gazas hospitals, are used to treat patients only and are not being used to hide anyone Hamas also rejected the claim, calling on the United Nations, Arab and Islamic countries to immediately intervene to stop the madness of bombing and destroying the medical system

Mustafa Barghouti of the Palestine National Initiative based in Ramallah said Israel was lying They keep lying to justify criminal acts against a civilian population, now they want to justify attacking people in a hospital he told Sky News

And Mads Gilbert, a Norwegian physician who has worked at the Shifa hospital on several occasions, including during three periods of open hostilities between Hamas and Israel, called the allegations old

We heard these unsubstantiated claims during the 2009 and 2014 attacks We have never seen any single sign or proof, weve had zero restrictions on filming and photographing in Shifa, and have never been controlled in any ways, he told CNN

The world is facing a historic moment

The intensified bombardment began Friday evening, local time A CNN team on the ground in southern Israel, close to the border with Gaza, reported a series of large explosions rocking Gaza City in the north of the enclave, and unusual, intense and sustained military activity and hearing heavy machine gunfire

Gaza appears largely cut off from the world, with communications in the enclave badly disrupted by airstrikes, according to Palestinian telecoms company Jawwal Londonbased monitoring firm NetBlocks has also reported that the last standing major internet operator in the region, Paltel, has experienced damage to its international routes

Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh accused Israel of cutting communications and internet to Gaza on Friday in an attempt to create darkness so that crimes can be committed in preparation for an IDF ground operation

The world is facing a historic moment Shtayyeh told CNN, and called on the global community to act to stop aggression and massacres to come

Several aid organizations and UN agencies say they have now lost contact with local staff in Gaza

DirectorGeneral of the World Health Organization WHO Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the organization had been unable to communicate with its staff and health facilities, health workers and the rest of our humanitarian partners on the ground

Catherine Russell, executive director of UNICEF, said on X, formerly Twitter, that she is extremely concerned about her team in Gaza after losing touch with them All humanitarians and the children and families they serve MUST be protected, Russell added

Médecins Sans Frontières MSF, also known as Doctors Without Borders, said it had lost contact with some Palestinian colleagues in Gaza, while the International Committee of the Red Cross said it was deeply worried for the safety of its staff and civilians

Without information in a communication blackout, people dont know where to go for safety Blackouts impede humanitarian and medical personnel from working safely and effectively, the Red Cross said

International news agencies also expressed concern after the IDF said it cannot guarantee the safety of journalists reporting from Gaza, Reuters reported on Friday

At least 29 journalists have been killed during the IsraelHamas war since October 7, making it the deadliest period for reporters covering conflict in decades, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists CPJ

The continuous bombardment of Gaza since hostilities broke out after the bloody October 7 attack has led to a crisis in the impoverished and denselypopulated enclave

More than 2 million people are affected, the UN Relief Works Agency for Palestine Refugees UNRWA the main UN agency in Gaza warned on Friday, adding that amid food and water shortages, sewage is overflowing on the streets More than 7,300 people have been killed and 18,500 more injured in Israeli attacks on Gaza since October 7, according to figures released Friday by the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah drawn from sources in the Hamascontrolled enclave

The ministry says children, women and the elderly make up 70 of those killed

Fiftythree UN staffers have also been killed since fighting began, with 14 dead in the past 24 hours, according to an UNRWA statement Friday

Gaza hospitals have been forced to work with dwindling resources and power shortages eyewitnesses at Al Aqsa Martyrs hospital said on Friday the institution had been plunged into darkness

One eyewitness said Gaza has been left in the dark with no connection to the outside world, adding the hospital has received the bodies of 11 people killed and dozens injured from the intensified bombardment They expect casualties to rise

Another eyewitness, Alla Majhool, said she came to the hospital because her 4yearold niece was injured in a previous strike

I am terrified and shaking, I cant call my family and sisters to check on them, all we hear is explosions, Majhool said Its dark and there are no communications, we dont know where the airstrikes and artillery shelling is hitting

The Palestine Red Crescent Society said it has completely lost contact with the operations room in Gaza and all our teams operating there

Phillipe Lazzarini, the head of UNRWA said earlier on Friday that while aid has begun to trickle into Gaza from Egypt through the Rafah crossing, deliveries so far amounted to nothing more than crumbs

Efforts to free hostages ongoing

As the intensified bombardment began, Jordanian foreign minister Ayman Safadi urged nations to vote for a UN resolution calling for a halt to the fighting, saying on social media that the outcome of any Israeli ground operation will be a humanitarian catastrophe of epic proportions for years to come

Millions will be watching every vote, he said History will judge

An overwhelming majority of 120 nations voted for the resolution, which calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities in the war between Israel and Hamas and for aid to be allowed to flow unrestricted into Gaza The US and Israel sharply criticized the resolution text, however, for not explicitly criticizing Hamas

Israels ambassador to the UN Gilad Erdan asked the assembly, Why are you defending murderers

Israel just endured the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, and according to a majority of the socalled family of nations, Israel has no right to defend itself,Israels expanded ground operation comes amid ongoing efforts to free hostages held by Hamas in Gaza Earlier on Friday, a source touted significant progress in negotiations

When asked about a possible deal, IDF spokesperson Hagari told reporters to disregard rumors He dismissed reports that a hostage deal was close to being brokered as psychological terror and a cynical use of Israeli civilians by Hamas

The White House said it would not be appropriate to weigh in on Israels expanded military campaign

We have, of course, certainly seen Israel undertake varied operations on the ground in the last couple of days, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters Friday But again, were not going to get into the habit of chiming in from the sidelines here on what theyre trying to do on the ground

Kirby declined to say if Israel had informed the US before launching an expanded ground operation into Gaza Friday He also declined to say if the Biden administration has confidence that Israel has fully considered the ramifications of a ground incursion

But Kirby said the US had held active conversations with Israel about a humanitarian pause to allow for the release of hostages We are working as hard today as we were yesterday and the day before and the day before to get these hostages home,

Six months into Israels war with Hamas, President Joe Biden is becoming ever more entangled in a foreign crisis that he cannot control but which is having deep consequences for US domestic politics and is weighing heavily on his reelection bid

The omnipresent geopolitical risks of the war were thrown into high relief over the weekend with US officials warning of a potential retaliatory attack in the region by Iran after an Israeli strike on Irans embassy complex in Damascus, alongside pledges from Israel to escalate on the northern border with Lebanon even as it continues its operations in Gaza to rout Hamas, the Tehranbacked group that killed more than 1,200 Israelis and took more than 200 hostage in its unprecedented October attacks Talks are set to begin again in Cairo this week in the shadow of growing international upset over human consequences of the war, in which more than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed

US forces in the region and Israel were on high alert for possible attacks by Iran in reprisal for the killing of two senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps officers in Damascus last week in a strike the US attributes to Israel Any action by the Islamic Republic, against Israel or US interests could spark the fullscale Middle East war the White House dreads Even if Iran doesnt hit back, lowergrade clashes are already simmering across the region The US has struck Iranian clients in Yemen, the Red Sea, Syria and Iraq, while Israels northern border, where it regularly trades missile fire with Hezbollah forces in Lebanon, is become increasingly dangerous Israel is facing what its former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett told CNN on Sunday is an Iranian octopus of terror

In another example of a drama any president would prefer to avoid in a reelection year, Biden is locked in a showdown with an Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu did bend to his pressure after a highstakes phone call last week to open up new aid routes into Gaza Israel also announced Sunday that it was pulling back from the Khan Younis area in Gaza, leaving behind a moonscape of destruction The moves followed a storm of international anger following the killing last week of seven aid workers, one Palestinian and six foreigners, including one American But Netanyahus previous resistance to curtail Israeli operations despite Bidens repeated calls means the administration has put him on notice that it could shift its own Gaza policy depending on how many Palestinian civilians are killed in the coming weeks

The gruesome humanitarian crisis which is helping fuel criticism of both Israel and Biden is meanwhile reaching a point of no return World Food Programme Director Cindy McCain told CNNs State of the Union on Sunday that children are dying as we speak and that even if massive aid is pumped into Gaza, many will suffer a lifetime of medical aftereffects Were literally on the brink of going over the edge, over the cliff, with famine and not being able to recover from it, McCain said, adding that the WFP had massed food for 11 million people just outside Gazas borders We just need to get it in, McCain told CNNs Jake Tapper Thats why these crossings are so important, and more crossings are needed

Bidens political backlash

At home, Biden has been facing a severe backlash from progressive, young and Arab American voters that could put his reelection hopes in several key swing states in jeopardy Regular interruptions from hecklers and protests at his campaign events are providing a foretaste of the disruption that could cause a disastrous primetime distraction for the president at the Democratic National Convention if the conflict is still raging in August Attempts by the White House to mitigate the problems last week only highlighted it when a Palestinian American physician walked out of a gathering with Biden intended to celebrate Ramadan, the Muslim holy month

Now, Biden, who is instinctively one of the most proIsrael presidents of the modern era, is facing increasing political pressure from Democratic officeholders, including some of his closest allies, to do more to rein in the Israelis by raising the prospect of conditions for billions of dollars in US arms shipments Republicans meanwhile reacted fiercely to the president leaning on Netanyahu in their phone call last week, accusing Biden of deserting one of Americas closest friends And exPresident Donald Trump, the presumptive GOP nominee, will be sure to twist any widening of the war to sharpen his narrative that things are tumbling out of control under his successors watch and that only he can stop World War III

Bidens call to Netanyahu on Thursday was the most significant moment yet in the Presidents evolving handling of the war Previously, he had repeatedly criticized Israels tactics in Gaza and called for the country to shield civilians but has been loath to unveil consequences for Netanyahus unwillingness to listen

CNNs MJ Lee reported Sunday that the president listed several things he needed Netanyahu to do immediately, including opening the Erez crossing in Gaza and the port of Ashdod in southern Israel to humanitarian aid Joe, were gonna do it, a person familiar with the conversation said in characterizing Netanyahus response

But Biden has an imperative political need for the war to end soon, reflected in his call for an immediate ceasefire Netanyahus determination to flush out all Hamas fighters, even with an offensive in the Rafah area of Gaza that the US fears will be a civilian bloodbath, means tensions and distrust between the White House and Jerusalem remain high

John Kirby, the White Houses national security communications adviser, told CBS Face the Nation on Sunday that the allies remain at odds on the planned incursion we have been very clear with the prime minister and his team that we dont support a ground operation in Rafah, that there are other ways, other options that they need to look at for how theyre going to go after the Hamas threat that still is in Rafah, he said Kirby also downplayed the Israel withdrawal from Khan Younis Its hard to know exactly what it tells us right now, he told ABC News This Week Theyve been on the ground for four months The word were getting is theyre tired They need to be refit

The threat of a new clash with Iran

Weeks of no breakthroughs in tortuous ceasefire negotiations involving Israel, Hamas, key Gulf states and the US have reinforced the impression that the war is far from ending Asked by CNNs Fareed Zakaria whether Netanyahu is prolonging the fighting to head off a personal and legal reckoning, Bennett refused to break ranks I think that the decisions are being made for the right reasons You know, one can disagree with one decision or another, but by and large the goal is to defeat Hamas, he said We cant finish this war when Hamas is standing We cant have an organization that explicitly said that it wants to destroy the Jewish nation and has done the worst thing possible and said that its going to try and do it again and again So, we have to eliminate Hamas

The likelihood of the war dragging on will further frustrate Democrats who worry about its impact on Bidens already fraying electoral coalition Israels attack on the World Central Kitchen convoy last week appeared to galvanize action in Washington a way that months of civilian carnage in Gaza had not This may be partly to do with the influence of WCK founder, chef and restaurateur José Andrés, who has deep contacts in the US capital and a prominent international media profile

President Biden you can and America will stand behind you, support the right of Israel to defend themselves on this massive attack But at the same time, I would say that President Biden also can be defending and supporting the right of Palestinians not to die just trying to be getting a piece of bread, Andrés said on ABC News You can be a friend of Israel, and at the same time, you can be telling your partner in the Middle East, you cannot be conducting war in such a way You cannot be destroying every building, every hospital, every school, every university This encapsulation of Bidens dilemma by the celebrated chef is one that the president has struggled to reconcile throughout the conflict and, despite his increasing attempts to sway Netanyahus choices, seems no nearer to resolving

Since the attack on the WCK convoy, more and more Democrats have been signaling to Biden that his unwillingness to impose greater control on Netanyahu is unacceptable Many of the public statements seem also designed as coded warnings to the White House about the political risks the president runs

I was glad to see the president, at least as reported out, finally say to President Netanyahu that, if you dont follow my requests, that there will be consequences, Democratic Sen Chris Van Hollen of Maryland told CBS Face the Nation You shouldnt be shipping more weapons to the Netanyahu government when theyre not meeting their commitments, including the delivery of humanitarian aid, or if theyre not complying with international law

Van Hollens comments followed those of another key Democrat, Delaware Sen Chris Coons, last week Coons, who is very close to Biden, signaled openness to imposing conditions of how Israel uses American arms

Biden is not alone in facing increasing political duress Netanyahu endured a second straight weekend of mass political protests over his handling of the war and his failure to bring home more than 100 hostages who are still held in Gaza or are unaccounted for The fragile coalition that keeps him in power is under stress from his left and his right amid growing calls from his critics in Israel and the United States for an early election

Tensions with Netanyahu are playing out at the same time as both the Israeli and US governments are warning that Iran may be poised to avenge the Damascus attack last week In his comments to CNN, Bennett did not admit that Israel carried out the attack in Damascus but implicitly justified it

Iran is an octopus of terror Its head is in Tehran and then it sends its tentacles all around Israel and the Middle East In Lebanon, they have Hezbollah In Gaza, they have Islamic Jihad and a bit of Hamas The Houthis all around And theyve been pounding Israel using their arms while their head was sort of immune, he said So the age of immunity for Irans head is over

Concern about a direct Iranian entry into the war crosses party lines in Washington Ohio GOP Rep Michael Turner, who chairs the House Intelligence Committee, was deeply critical of Bidens stewardship of the conflict and criticism of Israel But appearing on CNNs State of the Union, he also appeared to criticize the attack in Damascus, which many observers see as a test by Israel of Irans red lines

The strike, on what Iran identified as a consulate building in Damascus, was legitimate given the Islamic Republics record of fomenting terrorism, Turner said But he added It still is very unwise As we were trying to put pressure on Iran to keep them out of this conflict, both with US presence, and with our response to the attacks on our own troops, this certainly does escalate the issue throughout the entire region

Israeli ground forces are inside Gaza after entering the enclave overnight, as Palestinians experienced what they have described as the most intense round of airstrikes since Israel began its retaliation against Hamas October 7 terror attack

Israeli forces went into the Gaza Strip and expanded the ground operation where infantry, armor and engineer units and artillery with heavy fire are taking part, Israel Defense Forces IDF spokesman Rear Adm Daniel Hagari said Saturday morning

The forces are in the field and continue the fighting, he added, without giving further details

Hagaris words confirm the military operation has undergone a significant expansion after what it had earlier described as two targeted raids, which took place on Wednesday night and Thursday night Both those raids saw ground forces withdraw after a few hours

However, it does not appear as though any major ground offensive aimed at seizing and holding significant amounts of the territory is yet underway In a fresh call for Gazans to move south, the IDF spoke of an impending operation

Israels Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said his country had entered a new phase in the war

Tonight, the ground in Gaza shook, he said in a statement

We attacked above ground and below ground We attacked terrorist operatives at all levels, in all places The instructions to our forces are clear the operation will continue until a new order is given

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Saturday that the goals of this stage of the war are to destroy Hamas and return the more than 200 hostages the militant group took on October 7 and still holds in Gaza

Netanyahu confirmed he spoke with family members of the hostages and said he vowed to them that he would exhaust all options to return their loved ones home

Near the Gaza border, staging grounds once teeming with hundreds of Israeli tanks, armored personnel carriers and bulldozers have mostly emptied out when a CNN team visited

CNN also observed some tank units returning from the direction of Gaza, back to their forward operating positions

The IDF said on Saturday that its warplanes hit 150 underground targets in the north of the enclave, striking what it called terror tunnels and underground combat spaces and killing several Hamas operatives

Hagari said Gazans who had moved south of Wadi Gaza, a waterway bisecting the center of the strip, were in an area he called a protected space, and would receive more food, water and medicine today, though he did not give any details

More than 2 million people live in the enclave, which spans just 140 square miles and is one of the most denselypopulated places on Earth For weeks, people living in the territory have faced Israeli airstrikes and a growing humanitarian situation, with shortages of water, food and fuel

At least 7,650 people have been killed and more than 19,450 more injured in Israeli attacks on Gaza since October 7, according to the latest figures released by the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah, drawn from sources in the Hamascontrolled enclave

Mourning in Gaza

Gazans mourned the loss of their loved ones on Saturday following a night of intense Israeli airstrikes, with many gathering at Al Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al Balah in central Gaza

Video captured by CNN shows multiple bodies, including those of children, covered in white shrouds or thick blankets, placed on the ground in the hospital yard

Dr Khalil AlDikran told CNN the hospital had received 22 bodies overnight and hundreds of injured He said people had brought the dead and the wounded to hospital using everything from bikes, cars and donkey carts

Hospitals have lost contact with each other, he said, after communications networks were cut across the strip People are desperate to find some news about their loved ones and their families, he added

AlDikran said that after a pause of several hours, airstrikes had resumed again in central and northern Gaza, adding that artillery fire had continued uninterrupted through the night

The IDF on Saturday conducted heavy artillery strikes against northern Gaza, with multiple explosions heard every minute

A CNN team on the ground at an Israeli checkpoint near the strip perimeter witnessed intense and continuous explosions and air power Smoke could also be seen rising from the enclave Some of the explosions were so strong that the impact could be felt physically where the team was, around a kilometer less than a mile from the border

The IDF reserve soldiers manning the position told CNN that Friday night was by far the most intense night of bombing

Israeli troops have cleared out a large perimeter around the Gaza Strip, fearing incoming antitank weapons

Aid agencies lose contact

Communications in the enclave have been severely disrupted, leaving aid agencies out of touch with their staff on the ground

The World Health Organizations WHO DirectorGeneral, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, on Saturday morning that reports of the intense bombardment are extremely distressing He added We are still out of touch with our staff and health facilities Im worried about their safety

He said that it is not possible to evacuate patients or find safe shelter under such circumstances, and the blackout is also making it impossible for ambulances to reach the injured

The WHO posted on social media that health workers, patients and civilians in Gaza spent the night in darkness and fear as they were subject to a total communication and electrical blackout

The organization said hospitals across Gaza are operating at maximum capacity, unable to take in new patients whilst also sheltering thousands of civilians

There are more people wounded every hour, the WHO said But ambulances cannot reach them in the communications blackout Morgues are full More than half of the dead are women and children

It reiterated a call for immediate humanitarian ceasefire, adding that safe passage must also be ensured for desperately needed medical supplies, fuel, water and food into and across Gaza

Several United Nations agencies have also reported losing contact with their local staff in Gaza

Elon Musk said SpaceXs Starlink satellite communications network would support internet connectivity for internationally recognized relief organizations in the besieged enclave

In response, Israels Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi said that the government will use all means at its disposal to fight this In a statement posted on X, Karhi wrote there is no doubt that the service would be used by Hamas for terrorist activities

While communications are largely severed within the territory, according to the local telecoms provider Jawwal, those with Israeli or international SIMs appear to have some patchy connections

Fate of hostages remains unclear

The expanded operation has left families of the more than 200 hostages taken to Gaza fearful for their loved ones

A group lobbying for the families of Israeli hostages spoke of the most terrible of all nights as emotions spiked with the IDFs expansion of its ground operation

Anxiety, frustration, and especially enormous anger that none of the war cabinet bothered to meet with the families of the hostages to explain one thing whether the ground operation endangers the wellbeing of the 229 hostages in Gaza, said the Hostages and Missing Persons Families Forum

Hagari told reporters on Friday that the IDF had notified the families of hostages about the expanded operations and reiterated the military was committed to the national task of returning all hostages

Prior to the expanded ground campaign, diplomatic sources familiar with the Qatarled negotiations to release hostages told CNN that there has been significant progress in the talks but issues still remained

Majed AlAnsari, the spokesperson for Qatars Ministry of Foreign Affairs and advisor to the Qatari Prime Minister, told CNNs Becky Anderson on Saturday that the escalation on the ground is making the situation considerably more difficult

Qatar and Egypt have been mediating between Israel, the US and Hamas to release the hostages held by the militant group Four hostages have been freed so far

The White House said on Friday it was having active conversations with Israel about a humanitarian pause to help get hostages out of Gaza

In a Saturday news conference, families of the hostages said they told Netanyahu in a meeting they would accept an everyone in return for everyone deal, which would secure the immediate release of all hostages

We clarified to the Prime Minister that an immediate exchange of everyone for everyone is a deal the families would consider and one that has broad support from all of Israel, family representatives said in a statement Bring everyone home now

Such an agreement would involve the release of hostages in exchange for Palestinians currently held in Israeli prisons The Palestinian Prisoners Club, a nongovernmental organization dedicated to addressing the concerns of Palestinian detainees in Israeli detention centers, estimates that this amounts to 6,630 people

On Saturday, Hamas released a statement stating the group was immediately ready to engage in such a comprehensive trade, though this type of deal would be hugely controversial in Israel Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu unveiled a plan for Gazas future postHamas, which includes the complete demilitarization of the enclave, closing off the territorys southern border with Egypt, as well as the overhaul of Gazas civil administration and education systems

CNN has obtained a copy of the plan, which Netanyahu presented to members of Israels security cabinet Thursday night It was distributed as a basis for discussion, the prime ministers office told CNN, in preparation of further talks, and comes after Netanyahu faced weeks of criticism for having no concrete plan for a postwar Gaza The plan comes as Israel sent a negotiating team, led by Mossad Director David Barnea, to Paris on Friday to pursue talks over a potential ceasefire and hostage release deal that may put an end to the fourmonth long war

More than 29,000 people have been killed in Gaza since the war began, according to the ministry of health in the enclave Hamas October 7 attack killed 1,200 people in Israel, according to Israeli authorities

A number of principles are outlined in the document, from changes on the security and civil levels to more longterm plans about who governs the territory

On the security file, the envisioned plan includes Israel closing off Gazas southern border with Egypt, giving Israel complete control of entry and exit from the enclave At present, Egypt controls access to and from Gazas southern border via the Rafah crossing

Netanyahus plan says Israel will cooperate as much as possible with Egypt, in coordination with the United States

It is not clear whether Israel has obtained Egypts signoff on that element of the plan, or any part of it But an Israeli official told CNN that the plan was aligned with the US

There has been no immediate official US reaction to the proposal

The plan asserts, as Netanyahu has said before, that Israel will have security control over the entire area west of Jordan, which includes all of the West Bank and Israel, as well as Gaza

The Palestinians have long sought an independent state in the occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza

Israel will be responsible for realizing and overseeing the demilitarization of the Strip, the plan says, except for what is required to maintain public order

On the civil level, Netanyahu details an overhaul of Gazas civil administration and education systems, including an apparent cutoff of funding from Qatar to Gaza which a previous Netanyahu government approved and facilitated

The local entities running the civil service will not be identified with countries or entities that support terrorism and will not receive payment from them, the plan says

While it is likely a reference to Qatar, it is not clear if it would also apply to the Palestinian Authority, a revitalized version of which the US has said should run Gaza in the future

The Netanyahu plan also calls for deradicalization in the education system, which Israel and its allies have long accused of promoting antisemitism and hatred of Israel

The plan repeats that Israel will work to shut down UNRWA, the main United Nations agency supporting Palestinian refugees, and work to replace it with responsible international aid agencies

Israel accuses about a dozen UNRWA employees of being directly involved in the October 7 Hamas attack The agency employs about 13,000 people in Gaza

Finally, the plan reiterates Israels insistence that it will not be forced by the international community to recognize a Palestinian state, a possibility the United Kingdom and US President Joe Biden have begun to float

Israel outright rejects international dictates regarding a permanent settlement with the Palestinians, the Netanyahu outline says, asserting that recognition of a Palestinian state now would be a huge reward to unprecedented terrorism

Is the plan realistic

Many of the proposals are opposed by key parties US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has already rejected the idea of a buffer zone Egypt has rejected the suggestion that Israel could control its border with Gaza And the United Arab Emirates has said that without a clear roadmap towards an independent Palestinian State ruled out by Netanyahu it wont help foot the bill for Gazas reconstruction

Netanyahus vow to eliminate UNRWA, the UN aid agency that supplies most international aid to Gaza, would have been difficult to achieve even before October 7 Now, as the UN warns that almost all of the population of Gaza is at risk of imminent famine, the task would be enormous

There is no mention in the plan of the Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the occupied West Bank Netanyahu has previously rejected the suggestion that it could take control of Gaza It is not clear whether he would now accept a reconstituted version taking over and it is far from clear this would be accepted by Palestinians, more of whom voted for Hamas in elections in 2006

For now, Netanyahus priority remains destroying Hamas and returning more than 100 hostages kidnapped on October 7 who remain in Gaza getting hostage talks back on track is a key goal of the top delegation that Netanyahu sent to Paris on Friday The US and others hope a deal will forestall a ground operation in Rafah that could push the death toll in Gaza to well above 30,000

Most observers believe that once the war is over, elections in Israel are inevitable, which Netanayhu and his allies are predicted to lose But it is far from clear that a different leader war cabinet member and former opposition leader Benny Gantz is touted as the favorite would have much of a different vision for Gaza

Israel and Hamas have reached a deal for a fourday pause in fighting and the release of at least 50 women and children held hostage in Gaza, marking a major diplomatic breakthrough nearly seven weeks after the start of a conflict that has spiraled into a grave humanitarian crisis in the enclave

The deal, as laid out by key negotiator Qatar in a statement, would see hostages held captive by Hamas released in exchange for a number of Palestinian women and children in Israeli jails The truce, meanwhile, would also allow the entry of a larger number of humanitarian convoys and relief aid, the statement said

The starting time of the pause in fighting would be announced within the next 24 hours, the statement added An Israeli official told CNN Wednesday that the truce is slated to begin at 10 am local time 3 am ET on Thursday

There is an option for the pause to last as long as 10 days, but Israeli officials believe it is unlikely to last that long

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said when the deal was approved that for every additional 10 hostages who are released, there will be an additional day of a pause in the fighting

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The US and Israel will also both pause drone flights over Gaza for six hours each day as part of the deal to secure the release of 50 women and children hostages from Gaza, deputy national security

Qatars lead negotiator Minister of State Mohammed AlKhulaifi said the agreement should prompt the international community to seize this brief window of opportunity to generate further momentum for the diplomatic track

The announcement has been greeted with relief and heightened anticipation from the families of those taken hostage, who now await further news about their loved ones

It has also been met with positive reaction on the international stage Egyptian President Abdelfattah ElSisi reiterated Egypts commitment to finding a sustainable solution for the Palestinian people, while Qatars prime minister said his country hopes the development will establish a comprehensive and sustainable agreement that will put an end to the war and the bloodshed

Jordans foreign ministry said it hopes the foreignmediated deal will be a step that leads to a complete cessation of the war in Gaza In Russia, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov welcomed the deal, saying that Moscow views it positively and describing it as the first good news from Gaza in a very long time

How the agreement will unfold

A source familiar with how hostages are expected to leave Gaza told CNN that the first swap is expected to take place Thursday 10 am Israeli time Some 50 Israel hostages including some with dual nationalities are expected to be released over the fourday pause Ten is the minimum number of hostages to be released each day, but that could be higher

The first swap is the most crucial to see that the mechanism is working as was agreed, the source said

Every evening before the next days release, Israel and Hamas will give the Red Cross the list of hostage and prisoner names being released the next day, they added

Hostages will be brought by the Red Cross to Rafah where they will be met by specially trained Israeli soldiers They will verify that the hostages released were the ones expected and on the list The families of the hostages will not be notified until the identities of the hostages released have been confirmed, the source said

Hostages will then be taken by helicopter to several designated hospitals in Israel where there will be special areas and rooms for the hostages, closed to the public There, their families will finally be able to see them after over six weeks in captivity

Hamas is holding 239 hostages captive in Gaza, including foreign nationals from 26 countries, according to figures from the Israeli military The mass abductions at gunpoint took place during October 7, when Hamas militants struck across the border in a coordinated and bloody surprise attack killing around 1,200 people the largest such attack on Israel since the countrys founding in 1948

Prior to the deal, only a handful of hostages had been released

Israel responded to the attack by declaring war against Hamas and imposing a blockade on Gaza that cut off supplies of food, water, medicines and fuel, while launching a relentless air and ground assault Some 12,700 people have been killed in Gaza since October 7, according to data from the Palestinian health ministry in the West Bank, which draws on information from Hamasrun health authorities

The newly announced deal followed weeks of negotiations that included the United States and Egypt, and was approved by Israels cabinet in the early hours of Wednesday morning following a sixhour meeting an Israeli official described as tense and emotional

Some 150 Palestinian prisoners would be released over four days during the initial hostage release if terms are met, the government said

Just hours away from the first set of hostages being released from Gaza, US officials have a working list of 10 hostages that they believe are likely to be released on day one, a source familiar says It was not clear whether any of the three American hostages including 3yearold Abigail Edan would be released on the first day

The deal is structured in such a way that each day, a group of hostages to be released would be handed off to the Red Cross the Red Cross would then take the group to a designated border point, which will largely depend on the location of those hostages, the source familiar said

Many of the first 50 hostages are expected to come out through Egypt, they said The first two days of the hostage release will be treated as a testing period, the source said, to make sure the process is working By day three, there is expected to be intense discussions about a potential second phase of the hostage release beyond the initial group of 50

The deal followed mounting pressure on the Israeli government from the families of the hostages, who have demanded answers and action from Netanyahu It also comes amid growing international pressure for more humanitarian support for the people of Gaza

Hostages families anxiously await the release

Even as the details of the release remained unclear, some family members of the hostages held by Hamas expressed relief and anticipation as they waited to learn whether their loved ones would be included in the negotiated release

Anat Moshe Shoshany, whose grandmother was kidnapped from kibbutz Nir Oz on the back of a moped, said hearing of the hostage deal gave her so much hope

I really do hope to see someone walking out of there alive, Shoshany said We want a chance to see our loved ones back This is all we want and I really hope this is just the first step in this mess

Liz Hirsh Naftali, the greataunt of Abigail Edan, the 3yearold US citizen being held hostage by Hamas, told CNN that the situation has been excruciating

We have spent the last seven weeks, seven weeks, worrying, wondering, praying, hoping, she said

The family hopes Abigail, who is the youngest American hostage held by Hamas, can come home by Friday, her fourth birthday

We need to see Abigail come out and then we will be able to believe it, Naftali added

US President Joe Biden welcomed the deal in a statement Tuesday night in Washington, saying it should bring home additional American hostages He pledge he will not stop until they are all released

Three Americans could be among the 50 women and children freed as part of the deal, senior US officials said Ten Americans remain unaccounted for, including two women and a 3yearold girl, according to a senior administration official The official didnt name the girl

A US official also said there are various locations where the hostages will be brought out, but declined to provide further detail

The IDF spokesperson Conricus said the list of hostages to be released in the deal are all Israelis some with dual nationalities He added that the Palestinian prisoners set to be released are not serious offenders

Israel on Wednesday released a list of 300 prisoners that could be released, leaving open the possibility of a second phase of exchanges of prisoners for hostages after the initial fourday period

The vast majority of the Palestinian prisoners listed as eligible for release in an exchange for Israeli hostages are male teenagers aged 16 to 18 children under the United Nations definition although a handful are as young as 14 Some 33 are women, according to a CNN count

The list of names published by Israel also lists the charges under which the prisoners are being held Throwing stones and harming regional security are among the most common, but others include support for illegal terror organizations, illegal weapons charges, incitement, and at least two accusations of attempted murder

The publication of the list starts a 24hour period during which legal petitions against the release of Palestinian prisoners can be filed to Israels Supreme Court, after which point the process is expected to begin

The total number of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails is approximately 8,300, according to Qadura Fares, the head of the Palestinian Prisoners Club, a nongovernmental organization

Of those 8,300, more than 3,000 are being held in what Israel calls administrative detention, which Amnesty International says can be extended indefinitely

Potential for longer pause

The arrangement for a second phase of exchange built into the deal has the potential to create a longer humanitarian pause than just the four days originally stipulated, officials and statements from the US, Israel and Qatar have suggested

The hostages deal, as it is structured, includes a pause, a humanitarian pause over a number of days, four to five days at least And theres the potential with additional releases for that to be for that to be extended, but that will also be dependent upon Hamas releasing additional hostages, according to a senior US official, who added this incentivizes the release of all hostages

The pause will also allow for additional, muchneeded humanitarian convoys and relief aid to enter the enclave

Those would include fuel designated for humanitarian needs, according to Qatar, which did not provide further details on the volume of aid expected

In its statement Wednesday, Hamas said the deal involves the entry of hundreds of trucks carrying aid relief, medical supplies and fuel to all parts of Gaza

Israel has been highly reluctant to allow fuel into Gaza since October 7, citing concerns Hamas will use it to power its operations, and only last week agreed to allow minimal deliveries to power sewage facilities and water supply systems

Humanitarian groups have for weeks called for fuel to be allowed into Gaza, arguing it is critical for cooking food and maintaining operations at hospitals, which have struggled to keep patients, including neonatal babies alive, amid power outages, supply shortages and bombardment

Governments across the world and international organizations have also been ramping up pressure for increased aid deliveries to the struggling enclave

Even though Israel and the US believed there were more than 50 women and children hostages, both sides agreed that they needed to move ahead with securing the release of those 50 and hope that the deal might incentivize Hamas to release more after the initial group

Hamas goes dark

But hours after McGurks meeting with Netanyahu, everything went dark

The Qataris who had been playing the main mediating role couldnt get a hold of Hamas When the group finally resurfaced, Hamas threatened to derail the talks It demanded that the Israel Defense Forces, which had gone in to raid AlShifa hospital, leave the hospital grounds IDF declined but indicated that it would keep the hospital running

Once the talks resumed, Biden who was in San Francisco having just finished a summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping placed one more call to the emir of Qatar His message Time was up The emir gave Biden his assurances that he would do everything possible to close the deal

The next day, McGurk met in person with the emir in Doha to examine the text of the final deal that by this point was around half a dozen pages long It laid out how women and children would leave in the first phase, as well as incentives for Hamas to release more hostages beyond that CIA Director Bill Burns was dialed in to the meeting by phone

Israels war cabinet approved the deal after making minor changes on Sunday, and the text of the agreement was passed on to Hamas for the last time by the emir of Qatar

The emir made clear This is the final offer

On Tuesday morning, Hamas responded to their Qatari interlocutors They approved the deal

A pilot negotiation

While efforts to negotiate a deal began in the immediate days after Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, the groundwork for the deal started coming together weeks later, after the Biden administration had confidence that communication with Hamas via the Qataris was effective Officials would later describe this as their pilot negotiation

On October 23, the White House had successfully secured the release of two American citizens from Gaza Natalie and Judith Raanan As the mother and daughter made their way across Gaza, national security adviser Jake Sullivan, principal deputy national security adviser Jon Finer and McGurk were huddled in Sullivans office, tracking the Raanans movements in real time Sources described their multihour journey as excruciating

When the women arrived at the border, Charge dAffaires Stephanie Hallett was waiting for them At this point, Biden placed a call to Natalie Raanans father to share the joyful news, and later in the day, he would speak with both women

That day would serve as proof to Bidens top national security officials that the White House had successfully established a means of communicating and negotiating with Hamas via Qatar And it triggered what would ultimately become the weekslong effort to secure the release of a larger group of hostages

Foundations of a deal

After the Israelis delegated the director of Mossad to negotiate on the hostages, back in the US, Burns, too, became intimately involved

In Doha, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani engaged directly with senior Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh, a person familiar with the discussions said

In multiple phone calls in October, Biden impressed upon Netanyahu that there was a path for a large group of hostages to be released On October 24, Hamas appeared to agree to the parameters of a deal to release women and children hostages American and Israeli officials furiously deliberated whether Israel should delay its ground invasion

Ultimately, Israel wasnt convinced At this point, they still had no proof of life of any of the hostages that Hamas claimed to have, and they also didnt buy Hamas claim that they couldnt determine the identities of the hostages until there was a pause in fighting

Israel began its ground invasion on October 27

In the weeks that followed, the US, Israel and Qatar went back and forth with Hamas, negotiating with the group about every detail of a possible deal the timeframe, number of hostages, safe passage corridors and surveillance

Blinken returned to Israel in early November to press the Israeli government to accept humanitarian pauses, something that the US argued would advance progress on the hostages Although there was an agreement in principle after Blinken met with Netanyahu and the war cabinet, the Israeli prime minister publicly rejected the idea just hours after that meeting It took days of pressure from the US for the Israeli government to institute and acknowledge tactical pauses

The talks at times seemed to move painfully slow, as each step of the communication moved from Doha, Qatar, or Cairo to Hamas in Gaza, then back again, before being relayed to Israel and the US

Every step of this is like pulling teeth, one official said at the time

Behind the scenes, the hostages were the key issue that prevented Israel from initially agreeing to a humanitarian pause, because the Israeli government did not want to signal any kind of relief in exchange for hostages, a senior State Department official said

Numerous different permutations of a deal were discussed

Israeli and US officials initially insisted that all women and children come out in the first part of the release Hamas would only guarantee 50 and refused to produce identifying information about the hostages By the time that Burns met in Doha with the emir of Qatar and David Barnea, the director of the Mossad, the fact that there was no identifying information about the hostages was a major sticking point

On November 12, Biden informed the emir of Qatar that the negotiation could not move forward without this information in what a senior administration official described as a very important and very intense call Shortly after, Hamas finally relented, seemingly guaranteeing that any final deal would entail the release of 50 women and children hostages

Next steps

While the deal reached this week only returns 50 women and children, US officials projected confidence Tuesday that the agreement will ultimately pave the way for additional hostage releases

There are 10 Americans who remain unaccounted for, including two women and a 3yearold girl Pressed by CNN on the remaining Americans, a senior administration official said the White House remains determined to get everybody home, and suggested that the deal is structured to very much incentivize the release of everybody

An agreement to release hostages from Hamas would unlock the potential for delivery of more humanitarian assistance into Gaza, State Department spokesperson Matt Miller said Tuesday

After their safe passage, the released hostages will be given medical attention in Israel, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters, suggesting that some could have longerterm medical needs following six weeks in abhorrent conditions Then there will be efforts to repatriate citizens to their home countries and connect them with their families

For any American citizens released, Kirby said, after medical care is prioritized, the US State Department will provide consular assistance

It could be 24 to 48 hours before the Biden administration has confirmation as to whether the two American women and orphaned American 3yearold were among those released, one US official said

Some Hamas officials are signaling that the militant group could give up armed struggle against Israel if the Palestinians get an independent state in territories captured by Israel in the 1967 war

The messaging suggests a softening of Hamas position as its fate hangs in the balance with Israels pummeling of the Gaza Strip, which Hamas ruled before the war The Palestinian militant group has long called for the Jewish state to be destroyed

Basem Naim, an Istanbulbased member of Hamas political bureau, told CNN on Thursday that the group would agree to disarm if an independent Palestinian state was established

If an independent state with its capital in Jerusalem, while preserving the right of return for refugees, is created Al Qassam could be integrated into a future national army, he said, referring to the groups armed wing

Hamas has traditionally rejected a twostate solution that would see a Palestinian state established alongside Israel and has instead advocated the creation of a Palestinian state in all of historic Palestine that today encompasses Israel, the occupied West Bank, occupied East Jerusalem and Gaza

Mustafa Barghouti, President of the Palestinian National Initiative, said he wasnt aware of Hamas offering to lay down its arms before, but said it would be a significant move if true

Its significant in the sense that Palestinians are resisting occupation because there is an occupation, he told CNN If the occupation is not there, they dont need to resist it, he said, referring to Israels military control of territories captured in 1967, where millions of Palestinians live

Offer criticized as PR stunt

Efraim Inbar, president of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, said the demand for Palestinian refugees return to their ancestral homes in what is today Israel would be a nonstarter as it would amount to the destruction of the state of Israel where Jews form a majority

He characterized Hamas offer as a public relations stunt aimed at Western nations

They see that theres a lot of support in the Western world for the Palestinians and they try to show that theyre the good guys, and Israel are the bad guys, and Israel will say no, he said

The United States and European states may use this to ask Israel to give them a chance, he said, but Israel is likely to take the gesture with a grain of salt

Indirect negotiations between Hamas and Israel to release the remaining 133 hostages have stalled

US President Joe Biden, along with leaders from 17 other countries called on Hamas to release the hostages in a rare joint statement on Thursday, urging the group to accept the terms of a deal they say would bring an immediate and prolonged ceasefire in Gaza that would facilitate a surge of additional necessary humanitarian assistance to be delivered throughout Gaza and lead to credible end of hostilities

On Wednesday, senior Hamas official Khalil alHayya told The Associated Press in Istanbul that the group would accept a fully sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the return of Palestinian refugees in accordance with the international resolutions

Israel captured the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza in the 1967 war Those territories are considered under international law and by most of the international community as occupied, and they are where the Palestinians want to establish a future state Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has long opposed such a prospect, arguing that it would endanger his countrys security

Naim told CNN on Thursday that Hamas seeks to join the Palestine Liberation Organization PLO provided that the group would undergo reforms in its charter and administration

Hamas has refrained from joining the PLO, an umbrella grouping of Palestinian factions that signed peace agreements with it in the 1990s

Barghouti said Hamas indicated as far back as 2007, when it led a Palestinian national unity government, that it is willing to accept a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders Hamas, he added, has also been in favor of joining the PLO, but such a move wouldnt automatically amount to recognition of Israel or the Oslo Accords that the PLO signed with it in the 1990s

Hamas has not issued an official statement outlining the concessions its officials have touted and it is unclear if statements made by its officials abroad reflect the thinking of its military wing on the ground in Gaza

Laying down of arms is certainly the position of Hamas if the conditions are met, Naim said Asked if that amounts to a shift in Hamas position, Naim told CNN the position is reflective of the groups messaging since the start of the IsraelHamas war

Israel has so far failed to achieve its stated goal of eliminating Hamas from the Gaza Strip, with no top leaders from the group captured or killed, but it has significantly diminished its military capabilities and its ability to rule there as its bombing campaign leaves the enclave in ruin

Last week, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said at a news conference in the Qatari capital Doha that Hamas is willing to function solely as a political party once a Palestinian state is created, citing meetings between the group and Turkish officials

He called on Hamas to express their stances clearly

Inbar, from the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, said that after October 7, Israelis treat Hamas as a hostile entity and want to see it defeated We understand that they will try to rebuild the military infrastructure after Israel destroys it, he said, adding that Israel will continue to mow the grass, a reference to occasional military operations to diminish Hamas military capability

The world is once again talking about a Palestinian state

The issue has caused a deep rift between Israel and its closest ally, the United States US President Joe Biden keeps pressing for a twostate solution to the IsraeliPalestinian conflict, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejects any talk of an independent Palestine Meanwhile, the United Kingdom said it would consider recognizing a Palestinian state, while Saudi Arabia insists that without a resolution to the statehood question, there can be no normalization of ties with Israel

In all that back and forth about their future, the voice of the Palestinian people has been largely missing Watching world leaders debate their fate, many Palestinians are not holding their breath Theyve heard it all before

Khalil Shikaki, the director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research PCPSR, said that most Palestinians are beyond the point of putting their hopes into statements made by foreign leaders, regardless of how friendly they might sound

No rhetoric, no matter from where, is going to be helpful at all to convince the Palestinians that there is a viable political process that could end the Israeli occupation and give them statehood in their own country, he told CNN in an interview in Ramallah, the administrative center of the Palestinian Authority in the Israelioccupied West Bank

What they need to see is action on the ground, he said They want to see Israeli occupation ending and the two most important signs of Israeli occupation are the settlement construction and the control over land

Israel captured the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza in the 1967 war It later annexed East Jerusalem and withdrew its troops and settlers from Gaza

Under the Oslo Accords peace agreement, the West Bank has been split into three distinct areas, depending on who is in charge The plan was for Israel to gradually hand over control over more and more areas, but that has never happened Israel has full administrative and security control over 60 of the West Bank area, which it continues settling its citizens in

More than 700,000 Jewish settlers live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, land on which the Palestinians, along with the international community, want to establish a future Palestinian state, along with Gaza The settlements are considered illegal under international law and are widely seen as one of the main obstacles to a twostate solution

Netanyahus government, the most rightwing in Israels history, has been supportive of the settlements, offering tax breaks and other incentives to encourage more Jewish settlers to move to the West Bank The states longtime position is that the settlements are not illegal and that the land isnt occupied, because it was not a fully recognized part of a sovereign state before Israel took over in 1967

And while the areas where settlements encroach on Palestinian land have always been prone to violence, settler attacks on Palestinians have spiraled out of control in recent months, raising the ire of the US

This spike in settler violence against Palestinians which has gone largely unpunished by Israeli authorities has prompted the US to take a harder stance Earlier this month, Biden issued an executive order imposing sanctions on four settlers accused of directly perpetrating violence or intimidation in the West Bank

Diana Buttu, a Palestinian political analyst and human rights lawyer, who served as a legal advisor to the Palestinian negotiating team in the early 2000s, said the sanctions are a sign that the needle might be finally moving on Palestinian statehood

Its slow, but its going in the right direction And its going to pick up and its going to have a snowball effect and believe me, its already starting, she said

Buttu said the decision by South Africa to file a genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice ICJ over the war in Gaza was a game changer In late January, the ICJ found in a preliminary ruling that South Africa had a right to pursue its case, and that Palestinians had a right to be protected from genocide While has not yet ruled on whether Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, the ICJ said that at least some of the rights claimed by South Africa and for which it is seeking protection are plausible It ordered Israel to take all measures to limit the death and destruction caused by its military campaign, prevent and punish incitement to genocide, and ensure access to humanitarian aid

The ICJs decisions are binding, but it has no way of enforcing them

Israel will ignore the ruling, but the world cant, Buttu said, pointing to largescale demonstrations in support of Palestinians that have been taking place in cities across the world for months

Were going to start seeing more action to hold Israel accountable Were going to start seeing more action to isolate Israel, to put sanctions on Israel, to not welcome Israel It started already, she said, referring to states that have put curbs on weapons sales to Israel

But Shikaki said that while they are a powerful symbolic move, the sanctions against the four settlers wont make most Palestinians believe the US is serious about a twostate solution

Unless the entire state of Israel is sanctioned, Palestinians will not see this as anything other than a simple token measure to deceive them, he said The United States will have to take much more comprehensive measures against the entire settler population before Palestinians begin to see this as meaningful change

Sentiment on the streets echo Shikakis research Rushing down the street in central Ramallah, just around the corner from a renowned falafel shop, 26year old Sojoud paused to explain why she didnt feel particularly hopeful

I dont think it will get any better as long as there is the presence of the occupation and settlers, she told CNN The political situation here is bad too The Palestinian factions must unite among themselves before talking about a twostate solution

That view is shared by many Palestinians A survey conducted by the PCPSR in December showed that more than 60 of Palestinians want the Palestinian Authority PA the interim government established by the Oslo Accords signed with Israel in the mid 1990s to be dissolved Meanwhile, support for the longtime PA President Mahmoud Abbas has collapsed

It has plummeted beyond what we have seen throughout his presidency In the West Bank, 92 are now demanding his resignation, Shikaki said Even within his own political party Fatah, a clear majority wants him to resign

Endless cycle of promises and violence

Orient House in East Jerusalem, set in a lush garden just a short walk from the Old City, was once the unofficial headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organization PLO

The building was a powerful symbol of the Palestinians presence in Jerusalem and their aspiration for an independent state with the eastern sector of the city serving as its capital It was largely here that the plans for a future Palestinian state and its institutions were drawn up

Nearly 23 years ago, at the height of the Second Intifada, or uprising, Orient House was shuttered by the Israeli Police The building now sits empty, the garden overgrown and a big rusting lock hanging on its ornamental gate

Like many other Palestinian institutions and civil society organizations once based in this area, the tenants of Orient House have either been evicted or forced to relocated to the West Bank

Just down the road from Orient House is PASSIA, or the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, one of the last remaining Palestinian think tanks in East Jerusalem

Adnan Joulani, PASSIAs executive director, said he believes the current calls for the Palestinian state are little more than an attempt by world leaders to divert attention from the more pressing issue at the time, which is ending the fighting, ending the killing, ending the genocide of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip

The reason that I dismiss the idea that this is a sincere call for a Palestinian state is because Ive seen it many, many times in the past, he said, pointing to the periods of the First Intifada and the Second Intifada, which led to failed peace talks

Everybody was talking about a path to peace, roadmap to peace if only the violence would stop Well, guess what The violence did stop and yet the idea of resolving the conflict died with the stopping of the violence, he said

Because if it is true, if this conflict has really awakened a sincere desire by the international community, by British Foreign Secretary David Cameron and Biden, for the establishment of a Palestinian state, then unfortunately, this is a validation and vindication of the path of resistance by Hamas

The White House has set its sights on Israels settlers, a controversial movement that has grown in power over the years and is seen by the outside world as a major impediment to peace between Israel and the Palestinians

On Thursday, the State Department announced the first round of sanctions targeting Israeli settlers accused of perpetrating violence in the West Bank The sanctions block their financial assets and bar them from entering the US

The sanctions mark one of the more significant moves Biden has taken to critique Israel since the IsraelHamas war started on October 7, when the Palestinian militant group launched an attack on Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking more than 250 hostages

Israels subsequent assault on Gaza has so far led to the death of more than 27,000 Palestinians in the territory Much less in the public eye, during that period, at least 370 Palestinians have been killed in the occupied West Bank, including 94 children Almost all of them were killed by Israeli troops, but settler violence in the West Bank has also jumped sharply since the war began, with settlers burning cars, destroying infrastructure and assaulting and killing Palestinians

Since the war, the White House has doubled down on a longstanding US position supporting the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, which Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejects

Only four settlers were targeted in the US move But there are 700,000 of them living in the West Bank and, according to the international community, the presence of every one of them there is illegal The Palestinians want the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza for a future state, a position that is supported by much of the rest of the world

Heres all you need to know about Jewish settlers and why theyre so controversial

What are West Bank settlements

During the 1967 war, Israel captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria Soon after, it began establishing Israeli communities in those territories

Today, it retains control of East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the West Bank, and imposes a land and maritime siege on Gaza Those territories are considered by the international community as occupied by Israel

The West Bank is home to 33 million Palestinians and it is where the bulk of Jewish settlements are Israel has continued to expand settlements over decades despite signing a series of peace agreements with the Palestinians in 1990s called the Oslo Accords that envisaged the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza as part of a negotiated resolution to the IsraeliPalestinian conflict

There are 146 settlements dotted throughout the West Bank excluding East Jerusalem, many of which encroach on Palestinian villages and, in some cases, privately owned Palestinian land Some are built in close proximity to Palestinian population centers and one, in Hebron, sits in the heart of a Palestinian town In East Jerusalem, there are 14 Israeli neighborhoods, which the international community considers illegal

The prevalent view among the Palestinians and Israels allies in the West is that the settlements are a major obstacle to peace, making a contiguous, whole Palestinian state in the West Bank impossible

Who are the settlers

Settlers are Jewish Israelis who live in the Israelioccupied territories, mostly in communities built by the Israeli government Many of them are ideologically driven and believe they have a divine right to live on the land as stipulated by the bible, though other settlers opt to live in the West Bank because it offers a lower cost of living and the Israeli government subsidizes housing costs There are more than 450,000 Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank

Settlers in the West Bank fall under Israeli civilian rule and have their own road and transportation networks, while Palestinian residents fall under Israeli military rule, are forced to go through Israeli military checkpoints, and are largely barred from entering Jewish settlements The dual system one for Jews and one for Palestinians has been criticized by Israeli and international humanitarian groups as being a system of apartheid, a charge Israel strongly denies

Many of the settlers are armed and some have engaged in deadly attacks against Palestinian civilians Since the start of the IsraelHamas war, at least eight Palestinians have been killed in settler attacks

The influence of settlers in Israeli politics has grown tremendously over the years The current Israeli coalition government includes two settlerbacked parties, both of whose leaders live in the West Bank and have pushed for the expansion of Jewish communities in occupied territory

Calls for Jews to resettle Gaza have also picked up steam since the start of the IsraelHamas war, supported by some Israeli ministers, but Israel has said its official position remains that it does not plan to reoccupy or settle the territory

How much of the West Bank does Israel control

After Israel signed the Oslo Accords with the Palestinians, an interim Palestinian government was established in the West Bank and Gaza, known as the Palestinian Authority PA, based in the city of Ramallah That treaty split the West Bank into three areas A, B and C The PA formally retains full administrative and security control of Area A, which accounts for 18 of the territory In Area B, which makes up 22, the PA has administrative control while Israel has security control And in Area C, which is 60 of the West Bank, Israel retains full security and administrative control

What are settlement outposts

While all Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank are considered illegal under international law and by much of the international community, Israel distinguishes settlements it has authorized from those it hasnt The vast majority of settlements are built by government order, but some unauthorized settlements, known as settlement outposts, have been established by ideologically driven Israeli civilians with the hope that they will one day be authorized by the government Israel occasionally cracks down on them, but it often retroactively legalizes them once they grow into communities

There are 144 outposts in the West Bank, according to Israeli rights group Peace Now More than 20,000 Israelis live in them, according to the Israel Policy Forum

What is the legal status of settlements

The settlements are illegal under international law The Fourth Geneva Convention, which concerns civilian populations during a time of war, states in Article 49 that, The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies

United Nations Security Council resolution 2334, which the United States did not veto, and was passed in December 2016, reaffirms this position It states that settlements have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation under international law The resolution references previous Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 446, 452, 465, 476, 478, 1397, 1515, and 1850 Of these, 465, 476, and 478 established that settlements have no legal validity in 1980

Israel, along with a few legal analysts, disputes that settlements are illegal

In 2012, the Israeli government, under the direction of Prime Minister Netanyahu, published the Levy Commission Report, which summarized this legal position The report rejected the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the West Bank, arguing that the West Bank was never a legitimate part of any Arab state

Consequently, those conventions dealing with the administration of occupied territory and an occupied populations sic are not applicable to Israels presence in Judea and Samaria West Bank, the report read

This is not a position that any country or international forum has accepted

Ibrahim Wadi, 62, and his son Ahmad, 24, were on their way to a funeral for four Palestinians shot dead by Israeli settlers in their occupied West Bank community, when their car came under attack

The father and son were driving through the small village of Qusra, just south of Nablus, which has become a focal point of violence over recent days, when they themselves were fired upon by armed settlers on Thursday Family members told CNN that the men were transferred to a nearby hospital and died of their wounds soon after

They are among at least 61 people, including children, to be killed in the occupied West Bank since October 7, when Hamas launched its unprecedented, surprise assault on Israel, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health there More than 1,250 have been injured

Hamas attack has left more than 1,400 people dead in Israel, mostly civilian, with at least 199 believed to be held hostage inside Gaza, according to Israeli authorities

Israel announced a complete siege of the enclave in response, carrying out widespread airstrikes across the Gaza Strip that left at least 3,478 people dead and threatening a ground invasion, according to the health ministry in Gaza, which is controlled by Hamas Meanwhile, tensions are mounting in the West Bank, where Palestinians have been killed in confrontations with both Israeli forces and settlers

Hani Odeh, Qusras mayor, told CNN that settlers roam freely in the village under the protection of Israeli police He said he had informed a member of COGAT, Israels Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, that he was going to attend the funeral, along with Ahmad and Ibrahim

A few hours beforehand, the Israeli official told him to take a different route than the one they would usually take, to avoid settlers in the area But to Odehs surprise, the road to which they were diverted was filled with settlers, who eventually shot and killed Ahmad and Ibrahim in their car

Odeh told CNN he watched the attack happen from his own vehicle while Israeli soldiers patrolled the street He went up to one officer, urging him to disperse the settlers, but no one did anything He said it felt like a trap

CNN reached out to COGAT and the IDF for comment on Odehs claims but have yet to receive a response

Brig Gen Daniel Hagari, the Israeli militarys spokesperson, said last week that the military was on high alert in the occupied territory, adding it was preparing to thwart any potential attacks Anyone who challenges us in Judea and Samaria will be met with huge force, Hagari said, using the Jewish biblical names for the West Bank

A surge of attacks

CNN spoke with residents in the West Bank who say they are fearful of a wave of violence from the Israeli military and security forces, as well as revenge attacks by the estimated 700,000 Israeli settlers living in the area The latest killings come against the backdrop of a year in which the West Bank has seen a surge in settler attacks, including one that an Israeli military commander called a pogrom

Even before the war with Hamas, the West Bank had been boiling Following a wave of Palestinian attacks on Israelis last year, Israel launched regular incursions and raids into the West Bank targeting what they said were militant strongholds The resulting violence left a record number of both Palestinians and Israelis dead, numbers not seen in at least a decade

Days after the deadly violence in Qusra, home to around 7,000 people, residents are still reeling Photographs commemorating the six people who were killed plaster the walls of homes and buildings A bleak emptiness fills the air

Torched cars, broken water pumps and ransacked electricity lines surround an apartment building on the edge of the village where the first four killings took place Inside the floor is littered with glass, and bullet marks scar the walls

Armed settlers attacked the building on October 11, triggering calls for help from residents When several neighbors arrived at the scene, the settlers opened fire and four people were shot dead Musaab Abu Raidi, 19, Obaida Abu Srour, 18, Hassan Muhannad, 22, and Moath Odesa, 29

Inside the apartment building, Rabeea, 19, and her brother, Abdulrahman, 12, watched with horror as the attack unfolded The siblings, who asked that CNN not use their last name for fear of reprisals from Israeli settlers, recounted how settlers lobbed rocks and fired at the building as they hid inside with their mother

Their older brother and his 6yearold daughter were injured and receiving treatment at a hospital nearby Odeh, the mayor, told CNN that they were among 12 people to be hospitalized after the attack

Rabeea said her brother cant sleep at night hes too scared to be alone CNN met the family as they were packing up their things and getting ready to move to another village

I feel so bad I want to cry but, what can we do she said I want to stay here but we cant do anything

Theyve been here before Seven years ago, Rabeea and Abdulrahman said their father was shot dead by Israeli settlers near Nablus The fear of being attacked forced their family to pick up and move to Qusra Now, too scared to stay, they are being driven from their home again

Since Israel took control and occupied the West Bank in 1967 from Jordan following the sixday war, the territory, which residents hope will form part of a future Palestinian state, has been settled by Israeli civilians, often under military protection

Most of the world considers these settlements illegal under international law, but despite this successive Israeli governments have pledged support for them Israel views the West Bank as disputed territory, and contends its settlement policy is legal

This year, following the election of the most rightwing, extremist government in Israeli history under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, violence between settlers and Palestinians in the West Bank flared

As of midSeptember this year, the United Nations had reported 798 settlerrelated incidents in the occupied territory, leading to 216 Palestinians injured In the same period, Israeli forces killed 179 Palestinians in the West Bank

The IDF says most are terror suspects or people engaging violently with its troops during raids, but does not offer evidence in every case for this assertion

Settlers have long been accused of carrying out acts of violence against Palestinians As well as killings, these attacks have included incidents of physical assault, property damage and harassment

Odeh insisted their aim is to drive Palestinians from their home and ultimately from the occupied West Bank

Record housing approvals

This year, in the wake of international criticism, Netanyahu instructed Jewish settlers not to grab land in the West Bank without the Israeli governments permission But under his leadership, Israel has approved a record number of housing units in West Bank settlements

Members of his farright government, including National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who are themselves settlers, have been accused of inciting violence against Palestinians since taking power

In the wake of Hamas attack on October 7, Palestinians are being subjected to tight restrictions on movement within the West Bank and between the West Bank and Israel, with Israeli military forces imposing a full closure of checkpoints and roadblocks, according to several residents who spoke to CNN

Palestinians living in the West Bank told CNN the closure has significantly impacted their daily lives, restricting their ability to travel for work, school, medical treatment and other essential activities

In a call with US President Joe Biden on Saturday, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas demanded an end to settler attacks against people in Palestinian cities, villages and refugee camps in the West Bank, while stressing the need to stop the killing of civilians on both sides

At the home of Ibrahim and Ahmad, who lived a short drive away from the apartment building that was attacked in Qusra, and in full view of an encroaching Israeli settlement, their family wives, daughters, and sisters were in mourning on Sunday

Thank God, we are strong And God willing, we will continue to have strength and patience, Khitam Wadi, Ibrahims wife and Ahmads mother, told CNN

My husband loved his land He defended his land And we will continue to do the same so long as we are alive, she added

Evidently shaken, Khitam found it hard to describe her grief But the younger women in the family, while in pain, were adamant on standing their ground

Im sad, of course This all affects me, but not to the extent that it weakens me Weve been experiencing the same thing our entire lives, nothing has changed, Aseel, Ahmads sister and Ibrahims daughter, said

This is our home My dad taught me to love my land I will teach my kids the same And I will stay for as long as I live

Israels strategy for defeating Hamas destroying its military and political capabilities to the point where the terrorist group can never again launch major attacks against Israeli civilians is unlikely to work

Indeed, Israel is likely already producing more terrorists than its killing

To defeat terrorist groups like Hamas, it is important to separate the terrorists from the local population from which they emerge Otherwise, the current generation of terrorists can be killed, only to be replaced by a new, larger generation of terrorists in the future This is described by experts as counterinsurgency mathematics

Although the principle of separating the terror group from the broader population is simple, it is incredibly difficult to achieve in practice

This is why Israel and the United States have waged major military operations that killed large numbers of existing terrorists in the near term but ultimately led to the rise of many more terrorists, often in a matter of months

Exactly this pattern happened in the past when

Israel invaded Southern Lebanon with some 78,000 combat troops and almost 3,000 tanks and armored vehicles in June 1982

The goal was to smash PLO terrorists, and Israel achieved significant nearterm success However, this military operation caused the creation of Hezbollah in July 1982, led to vast local support for Hezbollah and waves of suicide attacks and ultimately led to the withdrawal of Israels army from much of southern Lebanon in 1985 and the growth of Hezbollah ever since

Israel maintained a heavy military occupation of Gaza and the West Bank from the early 1990s to 2005

These operations succeeded in killing many terrorists from Hamas and other Palestinian groups, but also triggered vast local support for the terrorist groups and massive campaigns of suicide attacks against Israelis that stopped only when the heavy Israeli military forces left Far from defeated, Hamas won the 2006 Palestinian elections

Israel launched a ground offensive into Lebanon in JulyAugust 2006

Although the goal was to completely destroy Hezbollahs leaders and fighters so that it could never again kidnap Israeli soldiers and launch missiles at Israeli cities, the Israeli offensive failed, and Hezbollah is vastly stronger today as a result

The United States invaded and occupied Iraq in 2003 with 150,000 combat troops

American forces completely defeated Saddam Husseins army within 6 weeks However, these heavy military operations led to the largest suicide terrorist campaign in modern times, a major civil war in Iraq and ultimately, the rise of ISIS

Is history repeating in Gaza 2023

In Gaza, this tragic pattern is probably already happening Right now, we are witnessing not the separation of Hamas and the local population, but the growing integration of the two, with likely growing recruitment for Hamas

The Israeli order for 11 million Palestinians the population of northern Gaza to move south is not going to create meaningful separation between the terrorists and the population

Many thousands cannot move because they are too young, too old, or too sick or injured and dependent on specialized care and hospitals Hence, evacuating the entire civilian population of northern Gaza is not possible Even if the civilian population did move, many Hamas fighters would simply go with them

Moreover, Hamas has ordered civilians not to evacuate Since Hamas and the civilian population remain tightly integrated, it is no surprise that Israeli operations to kill Hamas terrorists has led to the death of over 8,000 civilians, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah, citing sources from Hamascontrolled Gaza Virtually all have family members who are already likely being recruited by Hamas in large numbers

We should expect that Hamas is thus growing stronger, not weaker, with every passing day

So, what does work

To defeat terrorist groups, it is crucial to engage in long campaigns of selective pressure, over years, not simply a month or two, or three of heavy ground operations, and to combine military operations with political solutions from early on

Indeed, the very effort to finish off the terrorists in just a month or two militarily with little idea of the political outcome as Israel appears to be doing now is what ends up producing more terrorists than it kills

The only way to create lasting damage to terrorists is to combine, typically in a long campaign of years, sustained selective attacks against identified terrorists with political operations that drive wedges between the terrorists and the local populations from which they come

Israel is drawing comparisons with the defeat of ISIS, but it is important to remember that Muslim ground forces made an enormous difference by applying military pressure against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, over years, in ways that did not galvanize the local population to replace them, by allowing the local populations to effectively govern the area cleansed of terrorists

The campaign that defeated ISIS joined military and political operations together practically from the beginning

Going forward, Israel needs a new strategic conception for defeating Hamas The only viable way to separate Hamas from the local population is politically

Israels strategic vision has been to go in heavily militarily first and then figure out the political process later But this is likely to integrate Hamas and the local population together more and more and to produce more terrorists than it kills

Furthermore, Israel doesnt appear to have a political plan for the period after eliminating Hamas Since 2006, Hamas has been the only government in Gaza Israel claims it does not want to govern Gaza, but Gaza will need to be governed, and Israel has yet to explain what a postHamas Gaza will look like

What will prevent Hamas 20 from filling the power vacuum Given the absence of serious political alternatives to Hamas, why should Palestinians abandon Hamas

There is an alternative now, not later, start the political process toward a pathway to a Palestinian state, and create a viable political alternative for Palestinians to Hamas

This could, over time, separate Hamas from the local population more and more, and so lead to significant success It must be the Palestinians who decide who leads Gaza

This new strategic conception is the best way to defeat Hamas, secure Israels population and advance Americas interests in the region

It will be long, bloody, and complicated Thats the way two leading experts on urban warfare described the prospect of a ground attack by Israel on Hamas base in the streets and tunnels of Gaza

Colonel Ret Liam Collins and US Maj Ret John Spencer coauthored the book Understanding Urban Warfare

Collins is the executive director of the Madison Policy Forum, a senior fellow with New America and a US Army Special Forces officer He served for 27 years with multiple deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq

Spencer is chair of urban warfare studies with the Modern War Institute at the US Military Academy at West Point He served 25 years as an infantry soldier, including two combat tours in Iraq

They provided a sobering assessment of Israels capabilities, saying they dont think the Israeli military is prepared for the largescale urban combat they will likely encounter in Gaza This type of operation can take many months because an advanced military like the Israel Defense Forces IDF loses many of its advantages when fighting in a city

The experts said Israel does retain some advantages, such as specially developed armored bulldozers that can be used in urban combat and the ability to fight at night, but that must be weighed against their lack of experience and training in urban combat At the same time, Hamas has more than 200 hostages, human shields, suicide bombers, tunnels, booby traps, many civilians that remain trapped and has had years to dig in

If the Israeli invasion goes ahead, they estimate that the IDF will destroy 80 to 90 percent of Gazas urban areas and the operation will change the landscape of this area for decades

The biggest gap in the IDF is not their training areas or their tanks Its in a body of knowledge on how to do this big of an urban operation as fast and effectively as possible To be clear, all militaries, to include the United States, are not trained, manned or equipped for this type of urban battle

LIAM COLLINS I dont think their military is prepared to conduct largescale urban operations When you go to Israel and try to find their large urban training center, like many other militaries, they have something, but its not what you need to train for something like Gaza

Israel has been extremely effective at antiterrorism operations in Jerusalem and elsewhere in the country, but that doesnt translate to largescale military operations in an urban environment

SPENCER There are a lot of unknowns that will be encountered, both on Hamas capabilities everything from surfacetoair missiles to what dont we know about that Hamas has in preparation for a likely retaliation by Israel

BERGEN Lets talk specifically about the obstacles the Israelis face in Gaza Hostages, human shields, suicide bombers, tunnels, crossborder tunnels, improvised explosive devices and booby traps, and many civilians There is also no element of surprise here

For political reasons, given international pressures, the Israelis also may want to make this operation in Gaza as short as possible On the other hand, for military purposes, this could go on for months, right

SPENCER I say it would take months to do the mission in Gaza

BERGEN What advantages does an advanced military like the IDF lose in a wellpopulated, dense urban space

SPENCER They lose the ability to use advanced technologies to strike the enemy before you get close to them, which is what all militaries want to do Thats why urban warfare is the most difficult, because all those superior advantages that a big military has are reduced and, in some respects, eliminated

They lose the ability to do combined arms maneuver The whole concept of combined arms maneuver from World War II to today is about having mobile forces that can maneuver around the enemy and envelop them Youre not going to do that in an urban area No military wants to funnel its forces into a single street or multiple single streets

COLLINS To provide some tacticallevel examples, there are so many opportunities for the enemy to hide and move without being observed by the intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance platforms, or drones up in the sky They cant see the enemy because theyre moving through tunnels The enemy can move between buildings by blowing walls from one building to another And then, in terms of the firepower, even if you see them, you cant always shoot because there might be another building in the way, and then all the while, you have to be concerned about civilians in that area

there are so many opportunities for the enemy to hide and move without being observed by the intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance platforms, or drones up in the sky

SPENCER The other thing they lose is the effects of their weapons In the concrete jungle of urban warfare, most of your weapons may not even penetrate the building the enemy is in Yes, there are many that do, but most of the standardissue weapons dont

BERGEN Because

COLLINS Ill give an example Back in 2002, we dropped two 500pound bombs on a small compound in rural area of Afghanistan, and somehow this Taliban fighter lived through that and threw a grenade at us These structures provide inherent defenses for the defender You look at the destruction of a building and think no one could have survived that, but people routinely do

Hamas wants to buy as much time as possible The longer the urban fighting lasts, the more that political pressure will build for Israel to stop the attack due to the collateral damage and civilian casualties that are an inherent part of urban war Their goal isnt to destroy the IDF They cant Its to buy time

BERGEN The Israelis presumably retain some advantages

SPENCER D9 Bulldozers Twostory remotecontrolled bulldozers that can go forward and take the enemys advantage away The advantage Hamas has is that its hidden in concrete buildings Still, if you lead with an armored bulldozer that can take the first strike of anything for instance, RPGs Rocket Propelled Grenades that gives you the advantage to take away the concrete building protection that the enemy relies on So thats one of the lowtech solutions that the IDF built, a capability the US military doesnt really have

COLLINS The Israelis also retain nightfighting capability doing the attacking at night is to their advantage because that does favor them more than the enemy

BERGEN How do you suss out what the tunnels look like if you dont have overhead imagery

SPENCER The overhead imagery wont help you at the depth that some of these tunnels are at You have to have specific underground mapping technologies

BERGEN What about using robots, and what about using tear gas in tunnels

SPENCER Tear gas is an effective way to clear a building of enemy personnel, without destroying it It is unlikely Israel will use it because of the political aspect of it what does it look like when Israel is using gas

BERGEN You quote the Australian strategist David Kilcullen in your book Cities are sponges for troops Why

SPENCER Because of that force power that you need to clear even a street Youre not going to bomb your way to that An urban defender of a much smaller size can soak up your entire military, but that isnt to say that its not a mission that can be accomplished It just requires a lot of force and power, including a lot of soldiers

COLLINS And the other challenge with the urban environment, too is you could clear an area, but as soon as you leave that building, you can no longer assume its cleared because the enemy may circle back on you using tunnels or through the walls of other buildings They may get behind you and then reoccupy a building or an area as soon as you leave it

BERGEN Snipers are a tough problem Presumably, Hamas has snipers who are going to be entrenched, and they know the terrain very well

SPENCER There are a lot of lessons learned from the last 20 years of urban battles, to include acoustic sensors that can tell you where a sniper is

Also, if youve ever seen an IDF soldier, they have a very large bag that goes to the top of their head Its a special type of camouflage The IDF wears on their heads these bags that cover their helmets to fool snipers

BERGEN What about robots on the Israeli side

COLLINS They will, without a doubt, employ them, but they probably dont have as many as they would like, and theyre slow

BERGEN Hamas provides garbage removal It provides some social services It was elected a government in 2006 Theres been no election since But it functions on multiple levels It has a terrorist component Does that complicate things

COLLINS You have this hybrid organization thats a terrorist organization and a paramilitary organization that provides government services

So, Israel is not despite stating that the goal is to destroy Hamas they know thats unrealistic Thats just a political statement they have to say Their goal is to degrade them and prevent a future attack So, really, what theyre going after is the leadership, the terrorist wing, the fighting wing of Hamas

So, they will call the end to the operation when they feel that they have culminated in terms of the diminishing point of returns on degrading additional capability versus the political cost of continuing that operation to degrade additional capability

BERGEN What does the day after the fighting stops look like in Gaza

COLLINS Its people moving back to their houses Youre removing rubble Youre trying to get services back up and running Nongovernment organizations are coming in and trying to restore some semblance of normal life to the Palestinians

BERGEN The Israelis already pulled out of Gaza back in 2005 because it was too big of a headache, and the Israelis that Ive spoken say, Were not going to hold Gaza, but, if thats the case, then who is

SPENCER Militaries have an abysmal record at building states or nations or building cities in general Who will govern Gaza Who is going to provide services and security and reconstruction Thats a massive question

BERGEN Lets go to Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq that was taken by ISIS in 2014 In your book, you write about one hundred billion dollars worth of damage to the city during the fight to clear ISIS out of Mosul from late 2016 into 2017

SPENCER ISIS had two years of defensive planning and building a defense in depth with massive obstacle belts in Mosul, and that is why it took nine months for a hundred thousand security Iraqi forces albeit nothing like the IDF backed by the US with the worlds best air power to discriminately, building by building, destroy most of Mosul

Thats a telling sign of what it would look like to accomplish the current mission we think the IDF will get It will destroy 80 to 90 of the infrastructure and buildings in Gazas urban areas This will change the landscape of this area for a generation

COLLINS People should know that even under the most stringent laws of war, cities are destroyed in order to accomplish this type of mission

BERGEN Israel seems like a tankbased army Walk me through what tanks in an urban environment can do and the advantages and disadvantages they have

COLLINS Tanks have a huge advantage in the open desert But many of their advantages get neutralized or lessened when you enter the urban environment Their ability to range targets from a distance is greatly reduced and they cant elevate their main gun to engage targets in tall buildings So, you need a tank as part of your combined arms team in urban combat, but its much more vulnerable there than it is elsewhere

Tanks have a huge advantage in the open desert But many of their advantages get neutralized or lessened when you enter the urban environment

SPENCER Of all the challenges inherent to this type of urban combat, the tank is extremely vulnerable

But there is no other tool that is as vital as the tank when you fight in a city, because it can go down a street and take the punch of the defender It has a firepower unique to ground forces that it can punch through concrete, and it has the mobility to move around

The disadvantage, of course, is that it cant see everything It is vulnerable It is slow You can see it coming So, it has to be protected with infantry

BERGEN So, youve got to have substantial amounts of infantry protecting the tank

SPENCER Right Thats the lesson of the Ukraine war Russia is an artillery tankbased army, so when it entered Ukraine in early 2022 they had reduced numbers of infantry and they lost an ungodly number of tanks

COLLINS You need the infantry to protect the tank, but you need the tank to protect the infantry

BERGEN Doesnt this have some implications for the mass involved when you launch a military operation in Gaza Defending is easier than attacking

SPENCER We usually say this is the combat power In an open terrain, you need three combat powers some people just say troops to one defender In urban terrain, historically, you need fifteen or ten to one combat power because you cant mass in urban areas

One street can suck up an entire battalion just to try to move down that street

BERGEN And a battalion would be 800 troops

SPENCER Up to 900

BERGEN Lets just do some math here, what does it look like in terms of the size of the force that would need to be sent into Gaza

SPENCER Theres a lot of variables there, but its about power, not numbers This isnt the Battle of Berlin in 1945 where the Soviets put a battalion down every street This is why urban battles also happen repeatedly, because nobody has a millionman army anymore They have smaller armies, where a small opposing force can gain power in the urban environment, and you have to throw a lot of combat power usually thats artillery to get them out

BERGEN Let me ask you, Liam, about the hostages because you come from the US special operations community

COLLINS Im pretty confident that they dont have the intelligence of where the hostages are located They are most likely hiding them underground And you absolutely need that kind of intelligence to conduct an operation, and then even if you have the intelligence, do you have the means to get there safely and get them out with a reasonable chance of success without losing the hostage and losing a significant portion of your force

So, I think nations are probably staging their forces so that if they do get the intelligence, they can then decide if theyre going to try to rescue their citizens But I think were most likely to see results through diplomatic means as was the case when Hamas released the American mother and her daughter last week

Now, the Israeli hostages I think those are the ones Hamas is going to hold on to the longest

SPENCER To have this many hostages from this many countries intermixed with the enemy and the Israelis about to execute this operation is an unprecedented situation in my mind

To have this many hostages from this many countries intermixed with the enemy and the Israelis about to execute this operation is an unprecedented situationBERGEN Why did you write a book on urban warfare

COLLINS Battles are increasingly being fought in urban areas, and militaries worldwide, including our military in the US, are underprepared or unprepared to do it I constantly challenge people to name a significant battle in Ukraine thats not in one of the cities

SPENCER Militaries are inherently resistant to urban warfare It is a place where they dont want to go So, they dont prepare for it, and thats why the enemy continues to resort to it

COLLINS But you cant help but be pulled into urban warfare because humans fight wars, and humans live in cities

The global economy is facing tremendous uncertainty from the war between Hamas and Israel in the Middle East, on top of the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine Those conflicts dont just threaten the regions where theyre unfolding they may also fray the weakening interconnectedness that remains among the worlds largest economies

The global economy has become more integrated over the past century International supply chains have grown and technology has exponentially advanced, boosting the free flow of trade, capital and information globally

That interconnectedness is known as globalization It ramped up in the latter half of the 20th century following Germanys reunification after WWII and grew even more as China became an international trade juggernaut

However, since the 2008 global financial crisis many say those ties have begun to weaken Seeking to stabilize their economies, many nations have begun to establish protectionist policies that attempt to shield their domestic industries from foreign competition, according to a recent analysis from Wells Fargo

The dismantling of those economic ties is called deglobalization

Some economists say that globalization has simply stalled, while others argue that it is reversing outright, with the Trump administrations tariff war with China, the Covid19 pandemic and Russias invasion of Ukraine as catalysts

Wells Fargo economists have recently taken a bearish stance According to them, the era of globalization has ended On top of the rise in harmful trade restrictions, they point to a sharp decline in foreign direct investment flows around the world

They say Israels declaration of war against Hamas could be yet another catalyst for deglobalization, though the extent of that is still up in the air

Before the Bell spoke with Brendan McKenna, an international economist at Wells Fargo, on how the IsraelGaza conflict could hasten deglobalization

This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity

Before the Bell What role could the IsraelGaza conflict play in deglobalization

Brendan McKenna We did have geopolitical relations start to improve in the Middle East, but because of whats going on in Israel and Gaza, it seems like we backtracked on a lot of that positive momentum

And when you have this geopolitical fracturing, that just leads to reduced trade cooperation between countries, less information sharing, less technology sharing, and less financialmarket linkages

At the end of the day it is a deglobalization force

What will determine how much of an impact the conflict has on deglobalization

If the situation in the Middle East does escalate, thats probably going to lead to a bigger fracturing in the Middle East and then possibly between some other major economic actors

When you think about the United States, the country has very strong support of Israel, and if you see other countries such as China either take the other side or not explicitly support Israel, or choose to abstain, I think theres a possibility that some of the trade linkages between the United States and those countries may sour

If deglobalization does get exacerbated, what would that mean for inflation and monetary policy, globally

With deglobalization, you get a global economic environment thats less competitive, and when theres less competition, that is ultimately inflationary, causing prices to rise

If we do continue to get this economic fracturing led by geopolitics, thats ultimately going to be something thats inflationary, which can lead to higher interest rates, not just from the Fed, but also from other major central banks around the world

And not only are you going to get pretty scary forces that would reduce global GDP growth and act as a restraint on global economic activity, but you can also get tighter monetary policy as a result which could kind of compound those effects as well

How could deglobalization potentially be a good thing

If there is another type of major economic shock, like from the pandemic, the US would not be reliant on China to provide raw materials Production nearshoring can save a lot of time if there is a shock and can also save on a lot of costs

Over the Covid era, China shut down production, disrupting the global supply chain, so deglobalization would bring some production back within US borders It can also improve relations with Mexico and other countries

Obviously, the USMexico relationship under the Trump administration was somewhat tense If the US shows that it is committed to the trade relationship and building infrastructure and putting investment on the ground in Mexico, that can actually be something that could improve and enhance geopolitical relations between the US and Mexico

So theres not only a possible economic benefit, but theres also maybe the political capital that can also be built up as a result of it

How Israels vital tech sector is navigating the war

Israels vast tech sector has seen its fair share of crises, from financial downturns and the Covid19 pandemic to periodic flareups in the IsraeliPalestinian conflict, my colleague Hanna Ziady reports

Each time, the industry has bounced back, demonstrating why the country of just 9 million people is known as the worlds startup nation

But the war sparked by the Hamas assault last weekend that killed more than 1,300 people in Israel has upended daily life in a way that presents a unique challenge to the countrys most important industry

Schools have been ordered to close, oncebustling streets in Tel Aviv, the center of business, have virtually emptied and many businesses remain shut Some are closed for security reasons, but many simply cannot operate because their employees have been called up to military service

This is different than anything weve faced before, said Avi Hasson, the CEO of StartUp Nation Central SNC, a nonprofit that promotes Israels tech industry globally

Henry Kissinger once observed that Iranian leaders must decide if Iran is a cause or a nation

Iran seems to have decided that its both, exporting its militant Shia ideology to countries across the Middle East from Lebanon in the north, arming the Houthis 1,500 miles to the south in Yemen, supporting Iranianbacked militias in Iraq, propping up the Syrian dictator Bashar alAssad, and supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza

Hamas receives funding for weapons from Iran, but Hezbollah is more like an arm of the Iranian government and has a much greater military capacity than Hamas It has 150,000 rockets and is more militarily capable than the Lebanese army

But neither Iran nor Hezbollah seems to have had a plan for what to do following Hamass massacres last month in Israel Its possible they had an inkling that Hamas was planning something without knowing the scale and ferocity of what the world saw on October 7

Indeed, US intelligence sources say that senior Iranian officials appeared surprised by Hamass attacks

On Friday, Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah in Lebanon, spoke publicly for the first time about the war in Gaza Nasrallah was at pains to say that Hamas October 7 attacks in Israel were 100 percent a Palestinian operation, publicly discounting that Hezbollah and Iran had anything to with the operation, as some reports have suggested

Nasrallah also said that All options are on the table when it came to Hezbollahs possible military response against Israel the kind of threat that may not mean very much at all

Nasrallah became a new icon across the Arab world during the 2006 IsraelHezbollah war after Hezbollah abducted two Israeli soldiers, which triggered a 34day war that ended in something of a stalemate The conflict killed more than 1,100 Lebanese and 158 Israelis

Hezbollah is a potent military force, but it is also a political movement Following last years election in Lebanon, 58 out of 128 seats in the Lebanese parliament are in the proHezbollah bloc, so Hezbollah must be somewhat responsive to Lebanese popular opinion Given Lebanons ruined economy, the Lebanese people are unlikely to be eager for a repeat of the 2006 war, which caused billions of dollars of damage to their country

The Lebanese people are unlikely to be eager for a repeat of the 2006 war, which caused billions of dollars of damage to their countryAlso, any decision by Hezbollah to widen the war would likely have to be cleared by Tehran, and right now, Tehran and its proxy forces in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen seem to want to keep up pressure on Israel and US forces in the region with harassing attacks, but not to instigate a wider warIran itself appears to be doing nothing visible to foment further conflict, while letting its proxies do the work for it The Houthis, who control much of Yemen and are supported and supplied by Iran, have fired missiles, which were intercepted, at Israeli targets in recent days For the moment, both Hezbollah and Israel are exchanging titfortat fire along Israels northern border that falls short of anything close to a fullblown war

Meanwhile, in Iraq and Syria, US and partner military forces have come under fire from rockets and drones at least 28 times since October 17 Iranian proxies almost certainly launched those attacks Twenty one US service members have been treated for minor injuries, according to the Pentagon

Irans ayatollahs may, at least rhetorically, seek the destruction of the state of Israel because the third holiest site in Islam, the Al Aqsa Mosque compound is in Jerusalem which is also the holiest site in Judaism known as the Temple Mount They also know that Israel is their most powerful military foe in the region

But Iran is unlikely to instigate a fullscale regional war with Israel, which might well also draw in the United States, which has recently moved two aircraft carrier groups to the Middle East

Also, the leaders of Irans theocratic regime have faced a significant domestic protest movement over the past year largely led by women fed up with regulations requiring wearing the hijab in public, while they also have an economy that is hamstrung by significant sanctions imposed by the US and its allies The Iranian riyal has halved in value against the dollar since the protest movement began a little over a year ago, while the Iranian inflation rate is around 40

The Iranians, in short, have enough problems of their own not to start a shooting war with Israel backed by its American ally They prefer to act through their proxies in the region, keeping up some heat on Israel and the United States, but certainly not by dialing that heat up to 11

Divisions within the Israeli government are deepening after war cabinet minister Gadi Eisenkot suggested the key war aim of defeating Hamas is unrealistic and called for elections within months

Those who say that there was a major blow and demolition of the capabilities in the north of the strip are telling the truth, Eisenkot told told Israeli broadcaster Channel 12 News on Thursday evening Those who talk about an absolute defeat and lack of will and ability do not tell the truth This is why there is no need to tell tall tales

Eisenkot was speaking shortly after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu again said Israels military campaign would continue until it achieved complete victory over Hamas His comments also come after Israel withdrew some troops from northern Gaza and signaled a new phase of the conflict would begin soon

But Eisenkot said A strategic achievement was not reached We did not demolish the Hamas organization

The remarks are the latest symptom of rifts within Israels coalition government, as well as growing discontent with Netanyahus war plans Established shortly after Hamas brutal October 7 attack, the Israeli war cabinet includes some ministers already at odds with one another

Calls for fresh elections

In his interview, Eisenkot said Israel needed fresh elections because the public no longer has trust in Netanyahus leadership

He also dismissed concerns over holding elections in the country while its at war Lack of trust among the public in its government is no less severe than lack of unity during a war, he said

We need to go to the polls and have an election in the next few months, in order to renew the trust as currently there is no trust, he said The state of Israel is a democracy and needs to ask itself, after such a serious event, how do we go forward with a leadership that is responsible for such an absolute failure

While the cabinet was created to show unity, it does not disguise the fact that there are already major differences in policy and approach, said Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute IDI in Jerusalem, adding that these divisions are now surfacing

Reuven Hazan, political scientist at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, said that as the war passed the 100day mark, divisions would inevitably emerge And they have, Hazan told CNN, adding that the lines between the two camps are getting worse and worse every day

Over three months into Netanyahus war on Gaza, there is no end to the conflict in sight Israel began its campaign after Hamas launched surprise crossborder attacks, killing 1,200 people and seizing more than 240 hostages The Israeli authorities believe that more than 100 are still alive in captivity, after 105 were released during a temporary truce in December Dozens of hostages have been killed and their bodies remain in Gaza

In the meantime, more than 24,000 people have been killed in Gaza, according to the Hamasrun Ministry of Health in the enclave, and swathes of the territory have been flattened

Hazan says the Israeli government has decided it has two goals in this war, which may not both be attainable One is to destroy Hamas, and the other is to return the hostages home, he said, And as weve seen, after over a hundred days, you cannot achieve both

Eisenkot said the government had failed to achieve what he says should be its highest priority securing the release of the hostages

Theres no question for me what task is of highest priority, he said Theres no dilemma for me, the mission is to save civilians hostages before eliminating the enemy, Eisenkot said, adding that there would be time later to eliminate Hamas

A poll by Israel Democracy Institute conducted in November found that while Israelis overwhelmingly support both defeating Hamas and retrieving hostages, they see the return of the hostages are more important

Tensions with US over Palestinian statehood

Israels relations with its strongest ally, the US, have also been on a downward spiral On Thursday the Israeli prime minister voiced a strong rejection of a postwar scenario that entails the creation of a Palestinian state, which the US and other countries have called for

The idea of creating a Palestinian state would clash with the security of Israel, Netanyahu said Netanyahu has made clear his opposition to a Palestinian state several times prior to his remarks on Thursday

In any arrangement in the foreseeable future, whether with or without an arrangement, the State of Israel must control the security of all the land, which is west of the Jordan River, he told a press conference in Tel Aviv when asked about reports that he told US officials he opposes the idea of Palestinian sovereignty that would encompass both the West Bank and Gaza

Netanyahu added that Israeli politicians asking for him to step down are essentially asking for the creation of a Palestinian state

Hazan sees the relationship between Israel and US as likely to worsen, particularly, he said, because Netanyahu wants to cling to power

Current and former Israeli politicians have asked Netanyahu to step down

When asked if he thought Netanyahu had been prolonging the conflict to ensure his own political survival, Eisenkot said he did not believe that to be the case

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has also called for fresh elections In an oped published in Haaretz on Thursday, he warned that Netanyahus current strategy risks alienating the US and leaving Israel mired in the Gaza quagmire

Netanyahus political survival

Once the war comes to an end, the Israeli publics focus may shift to Netanyahus prewar shortcomings, some analysts say More attention could fall on responsibility for the October 7 attack, as well as a new mandate for leadership, according to Plesner

Given Netanyahus situation in public opinion, I am not sure he is very keen on seeing this phase unfold, he added

The prime minister, who before the war was facing mass protests against his plans for a judicial overhaul, has so far refused to take any responsibility for the events of October 7 He has also allegedly refused to hold highlevel discussions on plans for postwar Gaza, Israeli media reported, leaving a handful of farright members of the governing coalition to fill the void with ideas viewed by many as extremist

Netanyahu understands that in order for him to stay in power, the war has to continue, Hazan of the Hebrew University said, Because the day the war ends, thats when the people of Israel will turn against him

An opinion poll published earlier this month by the Israel Democracy Institute IDI found that only 15 of Israelis want Netanyahu to remain prime minister after the war Twentythree percent said they wanted former Defense Minister Benny Gantz as prime minister after the war

Gantz is widely considered a likely successor to Netanyahu when an election is called

So, as horrible as this sounds, it is in the political and survival interests of Netanyahu to continue the war, and that will put him at odds with the Biden administration, Hazan said

Even if elections are held in Israel, Netanyahu will likely campaign against the prospect of a Palestinian state, telling those who support him that only he can say no to the United States, and can say no to a Palestinian state, Hazan said, adding that the prime minister likely believes this would turn public sentiments back in his favor

Plesner, however, does not believe Netanyahu is trying to extend the war to remain in power War decisions dont come from Netanyahu alone, he said, noting that while Israelis want to see the hostages come home, there isnt significant support for a permanent ceasefire that may further empower Hamas

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday appeared to reject the idea of creating a Palestinian state, a statement that could contribute to growing tensions between Washington and Jerusalem

In any future arrangement Israel needs security control all territory west of Jordan This clashes with the idea of Palestinian sovereignty What can you do he told a news conference in Tel Aviv when asked about reports that he told American officials he opposes the idea of Palestinian sovereignty

This conflict is not about the absence of a Palestinian state but about the existence of a state, the Jewish state, Netanyahu also said

The apparent rejection of a Palestinian state is at direct odds with the stated position of one of Netanyahus staunchest allies, US President Joe Biden, who has long advocated for a twostate solution to the IsraeliPalestinian conflict Even as Biden offers support for Israel, behind the scenes he and top officials have grown frustrated that Netanyahu appears to be rejecting advice and pressure on the campaign in Gaza

American officials said Thursday they would not allow Netanyahus apparent rejection of an eventual Palestinian state to stop them from pressing the matter with their Israeli counterparts

A senior administration official noted after Netanyahus comments that the prime minister had reversed himself on hardline positions before and that his statement Thursday was not necessarily the final word

If we took such statements as the final word, there would be no humanitarian assistance going into Gaza and no hostages released, a senior US administration official said As with those and many other issues, we will continue to work toward the right outcome, particularly on issues where we strongly disagree

One person familiar with the matter said it wasnt clear whether Netanyahu had, in fact, relayed his views directly to American officials, as he stated during his news conference The person said inside the administration, his comments arent being viewed as a major departure from what hes said previously

A public rift opened between Biden and Netanyahu last month over the mounting civilian casualties in Gaza and differences in opinion about what a future for Palestinians should look like after combat operations end The US has been signaling that it wants Israel to move to a lower intensity phase of the war that focuses more on Hamas leaders and militants rather than the mass strikes that have led to tens of thousands of Palestinian civilian deaths

I want them to be focused on how to save civilian lives Not stop going after Hamas, but be more careful, Biden said last month

Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Netanyahu in a meeting last week that every partner that I met on this trip said that theyre ready to support a lasting solution that ends the longrunning cycle of violence and ensures Israels security He said they are willing to help with reconstruction and a move to Palestinian governance in Gaza

But they underscored that this can only come through a regional approach that includes a pathway to a Palestinian state, Blinken said

If Israel wants its Arab neighbors to make the tough decisions necessary to help ensures lasting security, Israeli leaders will have to make hard decisions themselves, he said

Both Biden and Netanyahu have faced increasing domestic political pressure as the military campaign in Gaza has dragged on The US president is confronted constantly by proPalestinian protesters who demand he call for a ceasefire and up the pressure on the Israelis to end their military campaign that began in the wake of the October 7 terror attack by Hamas

Meanwhile Netanyahu faces pressure from Israelis over the fact that scores of hostages are still being held from Hamas attack and the security failures that allowed it to take place Failure to deliver on the return of those hostages would intensify political pressure on a decisive leader whose popularity among Israelis has only plunged since October 7

Amid calls for Netanyahu to resign, the prime minister claimed in the news conference that the Israeli politicians asking for him to step down are essentially asking for the creation of a Palestinian state

Those who talk about the day after Netanyahu are actually talking about the establishment of a Palestinian state, he said, adding that an Israeli prime minister needs to be capable of saying no to our friends, he added

When asked about Netanyahus remarks, John Kirby, the US National Security Council spokesman, told reporters aboard Air Force One on Thursday that nothing has changed in Bidens desire for a Palestinian state

Were not going to stop working towards that goal And this is this is not a new comment by Prime Minister Netanyahu,

Hamas has become the latest party to the Gaza hostage and ceasefire negotiations to voice optimism about the prospects of reaching a deal, amid a flurry of diplomatic activity in the region

In an official statement on Tuesday, Hamas said reaching an agreement was possible A Hamas source also added that the talks were positive and optimistic

Top US, Israeli, Qatari and Egyptian officials have all touted progress in the negotiations in recent days While officials caution that a deal is neither sealed nor guaranteed, the upbeat language and recent diplomatic activity point to significant momentum toward reaching a deal

The CIA director, Bill Burns, is expected to travel to Qatar this week to participate in further talks on a ceasefire in Gaza, a US official and a second source familiar with the plans told CNN, with Burns expected in Doha as early as Wednesday, according to the second source

An Israeli source familiar with the matter told CNN that a deal was still potentially weeks away

Hamas also cautioned that hurdles remain, suggesting that Israel was imposing new conditions in the negotiations

The Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas affirms that in light of the serious and positive discussions taking place in Doha today, under the auspices of our Qatari and Egyptian brothers, reaching an agreement for a ceasefire and prisoner exchange is possible if the occupation stops imposing new conditions, the organization said in a statement

Both Israeli and Hamas teams are in the Qatari capital for indirect negotiations The Israeli delegation includes representatives from the Mossad and Shin Bet security services, a source familiar with the matter told CNN It is the most intensive period since talks fell apart at the end of August

The terms of the deal are broadly the same as the proposal put forth by US President Joe Biden earlier this year,according to a diplomatic source familiar with the matter

The threephaseBiden proposalin late May paireda release of hostages held in Gaza with a full and complete ceasefire The first phase would last six weeks and include the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all populated areas of Gaza and the release of a number of hostages, including women, the elderly, the wounded in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, the US president had said

What has changed is that Israeli forces are likely to stay in Gaza temporarily, when phase one of a deal starts, the diplomatic source said, namely in the strip of land on the GazaEgypt border, called the Philadelphi corridor, and in an area bisecting the strip, known as the Netzarim corridor

Israels demand that its troops remain along the Philadelphi corridor and Hamas insistence that they withdraw was a key reason for the collapse of talks in August

A US official told CNN that the Doha meetings were at the lower working level US officials believe that a deal is closer than it has been but caution that there are gaps and sticking points that remain between Israel and Hamas, the official said

The optimistic language follows a slew of regional diplomatic activity, including a visit by US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan to Israel, Egypt and Qatar last week

My goal will be to put us in a position to be able to close this deal this month, Sullivan said last week, speaking after his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Brett McGurk, a top Middle East adviser to President Biden, remained in Doha with other US officials working toward a ceasefire in Gaza as US officials believe that a deal is closer than it has been

McGurk had been traveling in the region with Sullivan and the fact that he stayed is a sign the administration feels positive momentum, but a deal is not expected imminently

US and Israeli officials have said conditions have ripened for an agreement to be reached in the wake of the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah, which has further isolated Hamas in its battle against Israel

Officials also point to the killing of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar and other Israeli military achievements as giving the Israeli government the victories it has sought to achieve before reaching a ceasefire deal

Since the October 7, 2023, attack on Israel, the death toll from Israeli military action in Gaza has risen to almost 45,000, with more than 106,000 people injured, according to the health ministry in the territory

US Presidentelect Donald Trump has also impacted talks, nudging Netanyahu toward a deal and threatening that there would be all hell to pay if the hostages were not released by the time he took office His incoming team has also coordinated closely with the Biden administration and made trips to the region to help secure a deal

US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said Tuesday there is cautious optimism tempered by realism about the possibility of finally achieving a truce in Gaza

Based on the remaining issues, we should be able to get to an agreement, we should be able to bridge the disagreements between the two parties, Miller said, without going into detail about the remaining issues

But that is not to say that that we will, because again, there have been times before where we were close and we thought the differences were bridgeable, and ultimately we didnt get a deal, he said at a press briefing Tuesday As youve heard me say before, all the United States can do is push and try to come up with compromises, but we cannot dictate to either side what choice they have to make They have to make those decisions for themselves

The longtime Israeli hostage negotiator Gershon Baskin cautioned that there is no deal until there is a deal

Hamas has been ready since September for a comprehensive deal to end the war, return all the hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, and even agreed to give up control in Gaza, said Baskin, who is not directly involved in the talks but remains a keen analyst What is brewing now, perhaps, is a major EgyptianQatari effort to reach a deal in stages

Public anger against Hamas is erupting throughout Gaza, he said At the same time, Hamas will not agree to release all the hostages if the IDF remains in Gaza, and even if there is a temporary ceasefire, it will not last if Israel intends to prevent the free movement of a million Gazans who want to return to their homes that no longer exist

The Israeli prime minister has also vowed that he will not end the war until Hamas is completely defeated in Gaza, raising the prospect of the war resuming once a number of hostages are released in the first phase of the agreement

Amid the optimism, more destruction

Renewed optimism over the talks comes even as Israeli forces continue to pound northern Gaza in an offensive Israel says is targeting Hamas renewed presence in the area

Israeli attacks killed at least a dozen people in Gaza overnight, health officials in the enclave said on Wednesday

Ten people were killed and a number of others wounded in Israeli strikes on a home near Kamal Adwan hospital in northern Gaza, according to the Gaza health ministry The area has been hit repeatedly in the past week

The Israel Defense Forces IDF said a strike there on Tuesday had targeted Hamas militants who were planning to attack Israeli forces Islam Ahmad, an eyewitness who was inside the hospital at the time told CNN the strike hit a residential building housing displaced families

The destruction around Kamal Adwan has restricted the flow of medical supplies to what is one of only three hospitals still operational in northern Gaza

The hospital has been bombarded relentlessly in recent days, according to its director Dr Hussam Abu Safiya Attacks on its generators have left it without electricity, its water tank has been destroyed and staff in its intensive care unit the last functioning one in the area, according to Safiya have been shot at

Anyone who moves in the hospital risks being injured or killed As of now, there is no electricity, water, or oxygen at all, he said Tuesday, adding, It is clear that the whole world either does not see or does not want to see what is happening

Of the three minimally operational hospitals left in northern Gaza, Kamal Adwan is the closest to Israeli military activity in Beit Lahiya and the Jabalya Refugee Camp and has been receiving most of the injured from the surrounding fighting

On Monday, the World Health Organizations director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said WHO staff had finally reached the hospital two days earlier after four previous missions were denied access, leaving the hospital without specialized personnel for surgical and maternal care

The WHO chief said the ongoing hostilities around the hospital had further damaged the oxygen supply, generators, and broken windows and doors of the patients rooms

The conditions in the hospital are simply appalling,

The Biden administration is racing against the clock as it attempts to secure a ceasefire in the IsraelHamas war before Ramadan next month, with senior US officials believing that the release of Israeli hostages from Gaza is the only plausible way to bring the first pause to the deadly conflict since a sevenday truce in late November and possibly, an eventual end to the war

Looming over the hostage deal discussions is the threat by Israel to launch an offensive into Rafah in southern Gaza, where around 15 million displaced Gazans have fled US officials have pointedly warned Israel against pushing farther south without guaranteeing the safety of those civilians a seemingly impossible task

If theres an operation against Rafah, we can forget about a deal happening, said a diplomat familiar with the negotiations between Israel and Hamas being mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the United States

With the Muslim holy month of Ramadan beginning on March 10, the next two weeks of negotiations are pivotal, a source familiar with the ongoing efforts told CNN An aggressive military push by Israel during Ramadan would only further inflame tensions across the region

What is less clear to some officials involved in the discussions is to what extent Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would prefer a pause in the fighting over an offensive in Rafah that would continue his goal of trying to dismantle Hamas

It doesnt look like Netanyahu is willing to do any deal at the moment, the diplomat said

The stakes of the moment could hardly be higher given that a successful deal could usher in a new and potentially final phase of a war that is now fully in its fifth month The pause and hostage talks, sources say, have been difficult despite some progress being made in recent weeks and far more complicated than the first round of negotiations

Several of President Joe Bidens top national security officials have been traveling in and out of the Middle East in quick succession in recent weeks, pushing Israel and Hamas to come to an agreement that would launch an initial sixweek pause in fighting and the eventual release of the more than 100 remaining hostages

White House Middle East Coordinator Brett McGurk was back in Cairo on Wednesday before going to Israel on Thursday to continue these efforts his trip comes on the heels of CIA Director Bill Burns visit to the region last week which included stops in Doha, Israel and Cairo

Burns is expected to travel to Paris on Friday for further talks with Israeli, Qatari and Egyptian officials, according to two sources familiar with the plans

Netanyahu called Hamas proposals delusional

Hamas leaders have also been in Cairo this week meeting with Egyptian officials to try to move the deal forward after Netanyahu dismissed the most recent series of Hamas proposals as delusional

The frameworks have included a series of multiphase pauses that would amount to at least a fourandahalfmonth ceasefire while hostages and Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons are released Among the biggest sticking points, people familiar with the talks say, were Hamas demands for the release of some 1,500 prisoners in the first phase, Israeli troops leave Gaza and discussions that would lead to a formal end to the war

In the followup meetings in Cairo last week with intelligence chiefs from Israel, the US, Egypt and the Qatari prime minister, the Israeli delegation was only willing to discuss the humanitarian aid aspects of a deal, not the other components, the diplomat familiar with the discussions said Israel did not send a technical team with their delegation, evidence that they didnt truly intend to negotiate, the diplomat said

Israel then added another condition proof that medicine that had been sent to Gaza for the hostages had actually reached them

This is very important because it will show us that there is someone there in Gaza that can really deliver and release our hostages, Gal Hirsch, the Israeli governments hostage coordinator, told CNN on Saturday at the Munich Security Conference

In response, on Tuesday, Dr Majed AlAnsari, the spokesperson for the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said Qatar has confirmation from Hamas that it has received a shipment of medicine for Israeli hostages in the Gaza Strip

Qatar received these confirmations as the mediator in the agreement, AlAnsari said in a written statement

Israel appears dug in

As Israel appears dug in its position, negotiators expect Hamas to again respond in the coming days But given the gaps that remain, a final agreement still does not appear imminent

US and United Nations officials, along with international aid agencies, have been warning of catastrophe if Israel pushes into Rafah where Palestinians have desperately sought shelter and distance from the worst of the fighting Israeli warplanes have already been bombing Rafah, with more than 100 people killed in one set of strikes last week

In a draft of a US resolution circulated at the UN on Monday, American officials wrote that such a major ground offensive should not proceed under current circumstances

But Israeli officials continue to warn of the pending operation

The world must know, and Hamas leaders must know if by Ramadan our hostages are not home, the fighting will continue to the Rafah area, Israeli war cabinet minister Benny Gantz warned over the weekend

The first hostage deal in late November saw the return of dozens of hostages taken captive by Hamas on October 7 and a weeklong truce Since the end of that truce, already three months ago, civilian casualty levels in Gaza has continued to soar, as has the global condemnation of Israels military operation and the political pressure on the Biden administration to call for a permanent end to the war

Senior US officials believe that there is no chance of Israel getting to the point where it would agree to a permanent ceasefire in the war without the release of hostages, sources say Only during a pause in fighting, even if considered temporary, discussions could continue that would eventually end the war, they argue

Israeli officials, including Netanyahu, have continued to argue that complete victory is needed over Hamas For the most part, the US continues to stand by Israel, albeit with a bit more distance as administration officials have grown increasingly critical of Israels military operations in the strip Biden himself recently described Israels conduct as over the top and the bombing indiscriminate

The United States yet again vetoed a United Nations Security Council draft resolution on Tuesday calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza

Instead, the US started circulating its own resolution calling for a temporary ceasefire, the first time the US used the word ceasefire at the United Nations But it was a few days after Biden himself started using it, a notable shift given how loaded the term has become

Supporting Tuesdays UN resolution, proposed by Algeria, in the middle of the ongoing hostage talks would have jeopardized the ceasefire talks, White House said

I think the American people, and I think most of the people around the world, would love to see those hostages home with their families, White House spokesman John Kirby said Tuesday And if we just voted went along with this resolution the chances of doing that would be greatly reduced

Israel has called the latest set of demands from Hamas ridiculous and absurd but said it will send a negotiating team to Qatar in the coming days to continue negotiations on a ceasefire in the war in Gaza and release of hostages held by the terror group

Hamas submitted a new set of demands on Thursday, including calls for a large number of Palestinian prisoners to be released and an eventual agreement on a permanent ceasefire

The response from Hamas was longawaited after discussions over a proposed sixweek pause in the fighting appeared to stall The Biden administration has repeatedly said in recent weeks that the onus was on Hamas to respond and that Israel had generally agreed to a framework deal

Hamas communicated their latest proposal via mediators Qatar and Egypt on Thursday, two sources familiar with the negotiations told CNN On Friday, the office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Hamas is continuing to hold to unrealistic demands but announced that an Israeli team would soon be traveling to Doha to further talks

An agreement, if it happens, is expected to have multiple phases, and in the first stage, Hamas has proposed releasing the Israeli hostages who are women including IDF soldiers the elderly, sick and wounded That number is believed to be around 40 out of the around 100 hostages who remain alive

The latest proposal by Hamas demands that some 700 to 1,000 Palestinians prisoners be released, a diplomat familiar with the discussions told CNN, confirming earlier reporting by Reuters

In a second phase, Hamas said that each side should release all remaining hostages and prisoners, which would include male IDF soldiers and more Palestinian prisoners The Hamas proposal included 100 prisoners serving life sentences in Israeli prisons, the diplomat said

But the toughest sticking points may be the Hamas demands that after the initial exchange of hostages and prisoners, Israel agree to a permanent ceasefire and a withdrawal of the Israeli military from Gaza Israels government has repeatedly said those terms are unacceptable and that they still intend to continue the fight against Hamas until complete victory

Israels leaders have also vowed to carry out a ground offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where almost 15 million Palestinians have sought refuge

The diplomat familiar with the discussions said It is not going to be easy to convince Israelis of this Hamas proposal

Tough negotiations are expected

An Israeli official echoed the sentiment to CNN, predicting that very tough negotiations are expected, but said negotiators are going to Doha because Hamas finally delivered a response

The team is expected to leave Israel at the beginning of next week, a second Israeli official said, and a decision will be made by the end of Saturday on the scope of what the Israeli negotiating team is allowed to agree to Even if both Hamas and Israel are participating in the talks, the two sides would not be in the same room

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday that the fact that Israel has sent a team to pursue the negotiations reflects the sense both of possibility and of urgency to get an agreement, to get a ceasefire, to get the hostages back, to get even more humanitarian assistance in

What I can tell you is were working intensively with Israel, with Qatar, with Egypt, to bridge the remaining gaps and to try to reach an agreement, Blinken said

CIA Director Bill Burns has been the Biden administrations point person on ceasefire discussions and recently returned from a trip to Egypt, Qatar and Jordan, where he also met with Israeli Mossad director David Barnea

The Biden administration is not planning on sending a team to Qatar for the next round of discussions, but on Friday, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said that Hamas response is within the bounds of the deal that weve been working on now for several months I dont want to go into more detail than that, he said, suggesting that the delegation heading to Doha for talks is a positive sign but that any ultimate agreement could change following negotiations

The fact that were physically not going to have a delegation there should not be taken as any kind of signal that this isnt a serious, positive move forward We think it could be, Kirby told CNNs MJ Lee at a White House press briefing

The Biden administration has increasingly called for an immediate ceasefire of at least six weeks They had set the beginning of Ramadan, earlier this week, as a goal for it to begin and expressed optimism that was possible But the start of the Muslim holy month came and went without an agreement

In an Oval Office meeting on Friday, Irelands prime minister called for a ceasefire as soon as possible, which Biden nodded to and said he agreed

A senior Hamas official noted the White Houses characterization of their response, saying it confirms the seriousness of the Hamas movement in reaching an agreement for a ceasefire

We will not accept anything less than an end to the aggression on Gaza, the return of the displaced, the withdrawal of the occupation, and the entry of humanitarian aid,

We arrive at Erez Checkpoint Israeli soldiers thumb through our passports, examine every item in our bags, then wave us through After a long walk through a barricaded nomans land, Palestinian officers register our names and passport numbers, then press us for a list of people were planning to meet Our Palestinian fixer intervenes, reminds the guys with the guns to be nice to us foreigners, and presto Were in Gaza On the list of the three or four people were scheduled to see in the course of the day is at least one senior official in Hamas

This is a routine I participated in, on and off, for 16 years of my life while reporting on the IsraeliPalestinian conflict for the American media throughout the 1990s and 2000s, up until my last trip to Gaza in January 2009 at the end of another IsraelHamas war that shocked the world and caused needless death and destruction Later, in 2014, I covered a far deadlier 50day IsraelHamas war for TIME magazine, this time from southern Israel, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, mainly because by then I had two toddlers at home and no longer believed entering Gaza was worth the risk

In nearly every trip I made and there were too many to count I met with Hamas officials, like seemingly every good journalist did Like many others, I was curious to hear their viewpoint and, back when peacemaking was a thing and Israel was turning territory over to the Palestinian Authority, I was keen to understand why they wouldnt get on board with the landforpeace deal known as the Oslo Accords

The Oslo process for dividing the land with Israel to create a zone of Palestinian autonomy and possibly statehood had been embraced, at least tepidly, by the late Yasser Arafat, head of the Palestine Liberation Organization PLO But Hamas, the PLOs most significant Palestinian rival, was fundamentally opposed to peace with Israel, insisting the only path forward was armed resistance aimed at eradicating Israel Throughout the 1990s, when the peace process was moving forward, Hamas sought to derail it by blowing up Israeli buses and cafes By the early 2000s, when peacemaking ground to a halt, they had killed hundreds of Israeli civilians in this manner, leading to further separation of Israeli and Palestinian societies

The Hamas leaders and spokesmen who agreed to our interviews were rarely what you would expect of representatives of a terrorist organization They were men who were fluent in English, logicalsounding about their grievances and highly educated to boot, usually in engineering or medicine They portrayed themselves as part of a political wing of Hamas, one that was unaware of what was being planned by the more secretive military wing Often, these spokesman insisted, they had no idea that an attack was imminent

By and large, we reporters ate it up Our editors wanted us to have access to this shadowy group and to explain its lure for average Palestinians and in particular, the strategic challenge it presented to Arafat By claiming that the organizations left hand didnt know what the right hand was doing, Hamas made it easy for themselves to evade tough questions like, why target civilians rather than military targets and convenient for so many of us to feel like we were putting our fingers on the Palestinian pulse rather than sitting down for tea with terrorists

So we sipped their bitter brews, and they talked a good game Look, we take no joy in seeing Israeli civilians get blown up, one spokesman told me back in the day when Hamas worst weapon was a suicide bomber in an urban area before going on to insist that these attacks were the only rational answer to what they saw as the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands When I asked why Hamas wouldnt take a crack at negotiations instead, they responded that there was no point in talking to Israel and Israel wasnt exactly jumping to talk to Hamas either The spokesman insisted I not use his name with that almostempathetic quote about not taking joy in killing Israelis In retrospect, I wonder if he said it because he knew it sounded good to the Western ear

Hamas played other games with language, presenting themselves as reasonable by saying that its leaders would in theory agree to a longterm hudna, or truce, with Israel Their words sound nice who wouldnt chose a lasting truce over the horrific killing and destruction we are now witnessing but the reality was that Hamas would never ink a permanent deal with Israel because, their leaders told me, Islam forbade it

And then there were the outright distortions Ahead of October 7, Hamas duped Israel into thinking that the organization was uninterested in inflaming the situation and wanted Gazans lives to improve With that in mind, Israel actually relaxed the Gaza border crossings in late September a week before the attack to let more Palestinian laborers into Israel Sadly, the opening to thousands of additional workers from Gaza turned Israel into an information sieve from which Hamas reportedly gathered intelligence for its attack in October

Hamas also played fast and loose with facts they gave us reporters During the first major IsraelHamas war in 2008 to 2009, known as Operation Cast Lead, Hamas said that fewer than 50 of the 1,400 dead in Gaza had been combatants But more than a year later, Hamas interior minister acknowledged in an interview with the Londonbased AlHayat newspaper that between 600 and 700 of its militants were killed in that war In that and in almost every war since, Hamas or other militant groups in Gaza launched rockets that fell unintentionally on their own citizens, but rarely if ever, owned up to the error, instead blaming Israel for the deaths

Yet how often did that stop us from reporting what they told us That dynamic was on display last month when many mainstream media outlets immediately repeated Hamas claim that an Israeli air strike had devastated a hospital and killed a big round figure of 500 Palestinians More details later emerged, indicating that it was most likely Islamic Jihad, a Hamas rival organization, that had fired an errant missile that landed on the site, and that the casualty count was much lower

Hospitals once again took center stage in the war when Israel surrounded the AlShifa Hospital after claiming that Hamas had operated out of it Hamas has long denied using hospitals despite proof that they do, and did the same this time even though there is evidence that weapons were found on site and tunnels have been built to allow the organization to use AlShifa as a base

Reporters can feel they have little choice but to rely on Hamas numbers and denials because there are few reporters left in Gaza and few options to verify anything independently But many journalists could be more transparent about how they dont have independent verification and provide context on how unreliable Hamas has proved to be in the past

One thing already clear after October 7 is that members of Hamas didnt sound like they experienced no joy in the slaughter of more than 1,200 Israelis and the kidnap of more than 200 Hamas gunmen laughed as they committed the attacks, according to eyewitnesses, and they recorded themselves as they gleefully rampaged through Israeli homes

Did Hamas change Or was too much of the media too willing to see them as something other than what they always were

Its probably a bit of both Although founded in 1987 as an expressly Palestinian organization, there is evidence that Hamas has been influenced by the style and brutality of global jihadist groups in general, and ISIS in particular Still, Hamas focus has remained on the Zionist entity, not the US, other Western targets or other religions per se And to the extent there was once a political wing that might have had different aspirations, October 7 left no doubt that the military wing is now the center of Hamas power and strategy

Its not as if most of us in the media portrayed Hamas as innocent or moderate But for years, too many of us treated the group more like an opposition party with occasional violent outbursts than a terrorist organization In fact, while interning at Reuters at the start of my career in the mid90s, I learned that we were never to call Hamas or Islamic Jihad terrorists, only militants Several outlets maintain that policy even amidst the October 7 massacre, which clearly meets the definition of terror as a deadly attack on civilians for ideological ends

Journalists working in conflict zones too often pull punches in the interest of appearing neutral, or perhaps to ensure that they stay in the good graces of the gunmen in charge Many of the questions that now reverberate in my head have no easy answers, but I can say that the ultimate goal for too many of us in the media was to ensure continued access to the big story, not to consider whether the people we were dealing with were good actors or reliable sources Though its important for readers and viewers to hear Palestinian voices as well as those of Israelis, treating Hamas like a legitimate government was perhaps the worst of bothsidesism

In 2014, a German journalist was heavily criticized for embedding himself with ISIS for a documentary Trying to explain such a despicable group of murderers went beyond the pale, critics said Werent there some actors whose behavior was so heinous that they didnt deserve a platform or even so much as a quote, which might only afford them a measure of legitimacy

Is this the approach we should have taken with Hamas, or ought to moving forward In an ideal world, yes, but in this dystopian one were watching unfold, that may be too much to expect In the meantime, if journalists continue to interview members of Hamas, we should report their words more critically and not take their comments at face value We should provide context that notes how unverifiable their information is and how poor their track record for accuracy has been And we should not shy away from asking ourselves whether our interviews afford them too much legitimacy and give them more of a platform than they deserve

It was the night before Christmas in 1914 when British soldiers fighting along the Western Front heard holiday carols coming from the German trenches

The following day, British and German soldiers met in no mans land and exchanged gifts, took photographs and some played impromptu games of football, according to the UKs Imperial War Museum They also buried casualties and repaired trenches and dugouts The truce lasted for only a few days at most, a little past the start of the new year And then it was back to war a conflict in which some 85 million soldiers from all sides would ultimately die

The timing of the IsraelHamas truce that took effect Friday had nothing to do with a holiday And the agreement to pause fighting for four days and exchange hostages and prisoners was negotiated over several weeks with the help of Egypt, Qatar and the US, rather than an impromptu occurrence Hostages released by Hamas and prisoners freed by Israel joyously hugged their fathers, mothers and siblings, seven weeks after the terror attack on October 7 prompted the war

By striking the deal, the two sides stirred hope for an eventual end to the bloodshed the ceasefire can be extended if Hamas frees more of the people it is holding But there is also the possibility that this truce wont last much longer than the one in 1914

The deal arguably strengthens Hamas, allowing it to claim credit, catch its breath and regroup, wrote Frida Ghitis Whatever Palestinians feel toward the organization that unleashed this round of fighting and we will not hear many in Gaza now openly criticize Hamas theres little question that as long as this group remains in power, the future looks bleak for Gazans

For Israel this deal is bitingly bittersweet Negotiating with a terrorist organization that has just slaughtered and brutalized more than 1,000 of the countrys citizens and remains committed to Israels destruction repeatedly confirming that goal is not only hard to swallow, its a moral and strategic dilemma of the highest order

Two clocks

Aaron David Miller, a former Middle East negotiator who served in both Democratic and Republican administrations, observed, There is little doubt that Israel and the US are operating according to two very different timetables And these two clocks appear increasingly out of sync Israel committed to the destruction of Hamas military capacity and the end of its ability to govern in Gaza appears to be in no hurry to declare mission accomplished

Its apparent that the US clock is ticking much faster, a direct result of growing pressure from its European allies, key Arab partners and a deeply divided Democratic Party Even within the Department of State and among congressional staff, there has been opposition to the administrations passivity in the face of Palestinian loss of life thats unprecedented in recent decades Indeed, President Joe Biden himself almost certainly has come to understand that, as greatly as hes concerned about Israel, the devastation and death in Gaza demands attention for Palestinians, too

Bidens democracy vs autocracy foreign policy is a mistake that weakens the US while failing to promote global stability, argued Christopher McCallion, a fellow at the Defense Priorities think tank

America currently finds itself embroiled in three major geopolitical crises US forces are still on hand in the Middle East to deter Iran and Hezbollah from intervening against Israel in its war with Hamas, putting American troops at risk and threatening to pull the US into another major war in the region American troops have already been targeted by dozens of drone and missile attacks from Iranianbacked forces in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and have conducted retaliatory strikes in response In Eastern Europe, the US is essentially engaged in a proxy war with Russia over the latters invasion of Ukraine In East Asia, the US risks a catastrophic showdown with China over the political status of Taiwan

Sheryl Sandberg wrote of the worldwide impact of the IsraelHamas war People across the globe are protesting on all sides and shouting in the streets But for one moment, I urge us to shift our focus from politics to humanity there is one opinion that everyone can agree on Rape should never be used as an act of war

On October 7, Hamas terrorists committed unspeakable atrocities that we must speak about and speak about loudly Numerous witnesses have testified that sexual violence was widespread on that day, according to reports by Israeli investigators

We have come so far in believing survivors of rape and assault in so many situations, yet this time, many are ignoring the stories that these bodies tell us about how these women spent the last moments of their lives

The silence on these war crimes is deafening

Amy Klein Taking a trip to the firing range was something Id never do before October 7

An explosive roar shakes my home and my laptop goes flying, landing amid shattered glass and debris Looking at its flickering screen, I sigh and brace myself to pronounce the death of another computer and this essay I collect it gently from the floor and coax it back to life I keep writingIn Gaza, we have all been glued to the news for the last five days, watching in disbelief as strikes and counterstrikes have been exchanged and the death counts on both sides of the border mount While every round of violence starts differently, they all end the same way here with Palestinians paying a heavy price We live in perpetual anticipation of a tragic ending

Now I write, because writing is a lifeline, and a temporary escape from a reality that has become unfathomably darker in the last few days

Our electricity falters, our water is scarce, and the air outside my home fills with thick smoke and acrid gunpowder My throat and eyes burn Its too dangerous to venture out for bread, yet my thoughts drift to the guilty pleasure of an iced salted caramel macchiato that might bring inner peace, or at least some temporary distraction What more can one expect from a Gaza millennial living in the impoverished coastal enclave that some call the worlds largest openair prison, under a suffocating blockade for more than 15 years

I write, and the world watches as violence, blood and darkness descend upon us We are in unprecedented and terrifying times But for me and many others in Gaza, it also feels like yet another flare up in the decadeslong, stagnant struggle for peace, safety and dignity What I see in Western media erasing Israels occupation, its blockade and our suffering bears no resemblance to what I see out my window

Outside, a sense of uneasy anticipation and anxiety permeates the atmosphere as people in Gaza ponder our uncertain future We try to predict how much further this all will unravel We compare the contents of our emergency kits, diligently prepared to ensure our readiness for evacuations from the massive violence Israel is unleashing upon us, on top of its directive to cut off food and water

Weve been through so many escalations that we always buy extra canned food and nuts for emergencies and then, due to water being scarce and even cut off, we fill every pot, pan, jar and anything else that will hold liquid in the hope we wont run out

Neighbors discuss essential items they need and trade whatever they can spare One family found themselves with extra diapers, another discovered an abundance of bread In a silent exchange that spoke volumes, they assisted each other, orchestrating a trade that seemed as significant as any business deal, all through the unspoken language of empathy They strategize about the most effective evacuation plans and areas to flee to, despite being acutely aware that we have nowhere, really, to run or escape to The Gaza Strip has no shelters or bunkers for us to seek refuge from Israels bombs

I wonder if I should keep quiet, as Ive been conditioned to do to bury my fears and anxiety beneath the layers of internal and external oppression that have cascaded throughout my lifetime and for decades before it The world ignores our plight and denies our humanity, blaming us for our own oppression I feel like Im trapped in an alternate dimension, struggling to process my surroundings without losing my sanity or my soul

The bias and selective outrage of Western governments isnt new They have never seen or cared about us as we have suffered under Israels occupation, violence and discrimination, year after year, decade after decade

They strategize about the most effective evacuation plans and areas to flee to, despite being acutely aware that we have nowhere, really, to run or escape to

As I navigate the minefield of selfcensorship and external oppression, I ponder the worthiness of Palestinians denouncing violence and pleading for a just peace In a world that ignores our cries, I question whether my words can break through, knowing well that if they dont, it will likely be because Im Palestinian

During every escalation of violence, US media reveal their bias towards Israel, largely omitting Palestinian voices from the equation The loss of life reported on the news is horrific, yet Western journalists and politicians show much less concern when Israel has inflicted mass violence and casualties on Palestinians repeatedly over the past decades

I yearn for the world to see us, too to hear us, and acknowledge our humanity and our right to live in freedom and safety like everyone else Is there still space for raw humanity and aching hearts amid conversations about power dynamics and political victories If there were, we would have been free long ago

The relentless, brutal Israeli military assaults and the oppressive conditions of the blockade of our borders have failed to desensitize me Its impossible to forget or ignore that these decades of Israeli military occupation color every facet of our existence and fragment our land and our people

For many of us, this, however limited, is our greatest power to dream and to feel pain in a world that seeks to dull our edges and dim our brightest lights For now, I raise my voice, I continue to read, I continue to write, and I continue to hope

The announcement that Israel and Hamas have reached an agreement to free some 50 women and children Hamas captured during its brutal October 7 rampage in southern Israel, in exchange for a 4day truce in Israels ground and air operation, comes as the first positive development in six weeks for some relatives of the more than 200 people abducted by the radical Islamist group that rules GazaAnd it is certainly welcome news for Gaza civilians, who will be thankful for other elements of the deal an increase in the amount of humanitarian aid entering the strip and the expected release of 150 Palestinians prisoners from Israeli jails three for every one of the hostages freed, along with the possible extension of the truce of an extra day for every ten additional hostages

Israels Supreme Court will review any petitions against the deal After that, some hostages, likely to be mostly children, could start coming home by Thursday

The deal, however, is hardly the stuff of unalloyed joy for Palestinians or for Israel

The war is not over And the deal arguably strengthens Hamas, allowing it to claim credit, catch its breath and regroup Whatever Palestinians feel toward the organization that unleashed this round of fighting and we will not hear many in Gaza now openly criticize Hamas theres little question that as long as this group remains in power, the future looks bleak for Gazans

For Israel this deal is bitingly bittersweet Negotiating with a terrorist organization that has just slaughtered and brutalized more than 1,000 of the countrys citizens and remains committed to Israels destruction repeatedly confirming that goal is not only hard to swallow, its a moral and strategic dilemma of the highest order Israel has done this before, and paid a high price for it

When Israeli Cpl Gilad Shalit was taken hostage in 2006, the government ended up trading more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners from its jails in exchange for his freedom in 2011 When the pale, reedthin Shalit finally left Gaza after half a decade in captivity, one of the men let out of prison in the deal was Yahya Sinwar

Sinwar is now the political head of Hamas in Gaza and believed to be the mastermind of the October 7 operation that killed about 1,200 people in Israel more Jews than on any day since the Holocaust

Still, the decision to trade was the correct one Israel has a long tradition of going to great lengths to save individual citizens Even if it ends up looking like a mistake in the arithmetic of war, with traded prisoners ultimately killing more people than the number of Israelis freed in the trade, making the painful deal is part of the nations core identity

The trauma of October 7 threatened to upend that tradition Almost every Israeli knows someone who was killed or kidnapped, or someone who lost a relative or friend that day

Israelis have been learning more and more about the sheer horror of that day It wasnt just a massacre it was a sadistic frenzy of murder Hamas fighters own body cameras recorded its members slaughtering entire families Israeli investigators reported seeing the bodies of small children burned aliv, and corpses found mutilated

There are many reports of rapes, and Israel is compiling evidence of sexual assaults alongside Hamass own videotaped evidence of dismemberment and decapitation Israelis are hearing from the victims and their families The entire country is enveloped in anger and grief

Its not the kind of information that compels a nation to seek negotiations with the perpetrators

Worse, Hamas leaders have repeated their pledge to continue their campaign, vowing to carry out similar missions again and again And as Israel tries to remove Hamas from power, the suffering of the people of Gaza trapped between Hamas and Israel has become heartbreaking, adding to the wrenching moral choices in this conflict, the balancing of life versus security

For some Israeli hardliners, it was time to change Israels hostage calculus, to keep fighting, and to deny Hamas a break during which it is sure to regroup, redeploy and strengthen itself But their voices were drowned by the strength of the hostages families In a matter of days after the attack, despite or because of their anguish, the families managed to organize themselves into a powerful political force

Keep an eye on them After the war, they will remain the tip of the spear as the Israeli people likely demand the resignation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, under whose watch Israel suffered the worst day in its history

Netanyahus fate will not be eased by making this deal, even if the overwhelming majority of Israelis support the decision They simultaneously support the governments aim of fighting Hamas so it can no longer threaten Israel The two objectives are clearly in conflict with one another But thats how it is with moral dilemmas

The war has been brutal, because Hamas embeds itself among civilians, because Hamas did nothing to build shelters for the people, building them only for its own fighters, and because a limited number of Palestinians have been allowed to flee the fighting into neighboring countries

Egypt, which has fought extremists in the Sinai Peninsula, which borders Israel, worries about a sudden inflow of large numbers of Palestinian refugees entering and turning Sinai into a stage for launching attacks against Israel, which could destabilize it It worries also about creating a new longterm refugee population, whose return to Israelicontrolled territory would be uncertain

Perhaps there was a way for Israel to fight Hamas with fewer civilian casualties I would not claim to know But there was no way for Israel to allow Hamas armed and funded by Iran to stay in power at Israels doorstep This is not about a Palestinian state Hamas is not interested in two states, as it tells us over and over It wants to destroy Israel, and its charter suggests that any agreement that allows Israel to survive, is null and void

Even so, Israel had to negotiate

For Israel, the events of October 7 brought echoes of the Holocaust And it wasnt just because of the slaughter It was also because Hamas was founded on a 1988 Covenant of genocide Hamas leaders still proclaim their antisemitic, genocidal designs Oh, Allah, bring annihilation upon the Jews, preached a Hamas official a few weeks before the attack

Imagine having to negotiate with the people who, days after the attack, when asked if their goal is the complete annihilation of Israel,answered Yes, of course

Hamas is still holding almost 80 of the hostages This entire process of negotiating a truce is emblematic of the terrible options that have dominated this conflict since the day Israelis woke up to find thousands of Hamas terrorists breaking into their homes with orders to kill as many people and take as many hostages as possible

This news of the hostage release, and the pause in the fighting, and the increase in humanitarian supplies, is cause for relief for many families, and a breather for millions

But its hardly cause for celebration Its a sign of a deep moral dilemma that will continue playing out in profound human suffering

After six weeks of the deadliest violence in an already bloodsoaked history of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, Ive been asked repeatedly why President Joe Biden remains so staunchly proIsrael Why hasnt the president done more to restrain the Netanyahu government and address the humanitarian catastrophe in GazaIsrael and the US may share the same goal the eradication of Hamas military organization in the wake of the sadistic, inhuman and indiscriminate terror surge against Israel on October 7 But US and Israeli views are clearly diverging on issues relating to humanitarian assistance, the exponential rise of Palestinian deaths and what comes on the proverbial day after Israels Gaza campaign ends And tensions are surely rising between the US president and an Israeli prime minister with a shaky track record

Still, anyone expecting a major rupture between the two ought to lie down and wait quietly until the feeling passes If needed, they should keep Bidens Washington Post oped from the weekend handy In it, he indicated no change in the staunchly proIsrael position he took from the start of the war Indeed, the presidents persona, politics and policy choices have virtually preempted such an outcome

There is little doubt that Israel and the US are operating according to two very different timetables And these two clocks appear increasingly out of sync Israel committed to the destruction of Hamas military capacity and the end of its ability to govern in Gaza appears to be in no hurry to declare mission accomplished

The Israel Defense Forces IDF have not even begun to confront the bulk of Hamas fighters in many places in northern Gaza or significantly dismantle the miles of tunnel structure below ground Then theres southern Gaza, where Hamas has undoubtedly repositioned its assets the terror group appears to be nowhere near its breaking point Israels defense minister has talked about the campaign taking months

Its apparent that the US clock is ticking much faster, a direct result of growing pressure from its European allies, key Arab partners and a deeply divided Democratic Party, all of which are starting to coalesce around a call for a ceasefire Even within the Department of State and among congressional staff, there has been opposition to the administrations passivity in the face of Palestinian loss of life thats unprecedented in recent decades Indeed, Biden himself almost certainly has come to understand that, as greatly as hes concerned about Israel, the devastation and death in Gaza demands attention for Palestinians, too

Senior US officials from the president on down have talked about the need to protect civilian lives, including hospitals pressed Israel to allow more humanitarian assistance and drawn clear lines about the day after with respect to Gaza no forced displacement of civilians, no reduction of territory and no Israeli reoccupation After vetoing other UN Security Council drafts calling for an immediate humanitarian truce, the US finally abstained on a Security Council resolution calling for humanitarian pauses

Yet despite the pressure, theres no indication that the president might support a ceasefire and has intimated, let alone pressed, Israel to set a timeline for ending its military operation in Gaza His words in the Washington Post seemed to rule that out for now

On the contrary, the administration seems to be willing to continue its support of Israel at almost every turn The IDFs operation against AlShifa hospital Gazas largest is a case in point The administration has backed up Israels claim that the complex was being used by Hamas for military purposes without providing much evidence of those claims

When pressed on Thursday as to whether AlShifa contained a Hamas command and control center, Secretary of State Antony Blinken declined to question Israels explanations Instead, he expressed his horror that weapons had been found behind an MRI machine and referred to US intelligence assessments about Hamas command centers in and under hospitals more generally

Understanding why Biden as frustrated as he no doubt is with the Netanyahu government is reluctant to confront Israel with an or else if it doesnt change its wartime tactics and strategy stems from a love for Israel that is deeply imprinted on his emotional and political DNA unlike his former boss, President Barack Obama

Even before this war started, Bidens initial instinct hasnt been to confront Netanyahu but to see where accommodation is possible and give Israel the benefit of the doubt, especially when it comes to security He was unwilling, for instance, to impose serious consequences on Netanyahu for promoting a policy designed to annex the West Bank in everything but name

In the wake of the Hamass October 7 violence the bloodiest day for Jews since the Holocaust Bidens gut reaction left no doubt that he was prepared to give Israel the time, space and support to do what it needed to respond to Hamas pure, unadulterated evil

And for the career politician, being good on Israel isnt some craven genuflecting to lobbies and media pressure Support for Israel is the right politics because its good for America and the national interest His decades in the Senate, where support for Israel runs high, reinforced this conflation

Biden is hardly naïve on the politics He knows that Democrats are increasingly divided, with large numbers still strongly supporting Israel but with a growing number, especially progressives, turning against Israel and calling for a ceasefire At the same time, Biden in also caught between Republicans looking to hammer him if he pressures Israel In these circumstances, Biden is not going to leave himself open to criticism by Republicans and mainstream Democrats

Then there are the policy realities US leverage with Israel might be greater if Washington had more compelling answers about how to wage war in densely populated areas where Hamas embeds its assets without harming civilians how to surge humanitarian assistance into a war zone and what precisely should be done the day after But it really doesnt As a consequence, Biden, who strongly shares Israels objective of preventing any more October 7s, seems willing to give Israel a wide margin to prosecute its war against Hamas

The administration has pushed the idea of humanitarian pauses as a way to relieve the pressure its under from Democrats, Arab states and the international community But an outright ceasefire would clearly make Hamas a winner by driving home the reality that, despite immense Israeli pressure, the organization withstood the onslaught to fight another day It would simultaneously cause a major breach with Israel while being unlikely to bring all the hostages home or solve the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza

The US and Israeli clocks may become even more out of sync as the day after in Gaza arrives The US is already calling for a twostate solution and a Palestinian Authoritycontrolled Gaza, in stark contrast to Netanyahu Biden also announce in his Post oped that hes ready to deny visas to extremist Israeli settlers engaging in violence Its not impossible that at some point Biden will pick up the phone and say to Netanyahu, Enough But if the death and destruction in Gaza already havent been sufficient, its hard to imagine what more would make the president change course

Washington might be reluctant to admit it, but in the getalong business of diplomacy and foreign policy, the US rarely brings heavy pressure to bear on any of its allies and friends, let alone on a special friend like Israel And for this president in this crisis, especially after the horrors of October 7, Israel remains a special friend indeed Critics claim that President Joe Biden has failed in his efforts to project American power effectively for the American people and their allies around the world But I am confident he will go down in history, as he should, for being one of the rare presidents who has accomplished something quite extraordinary He has carefully defined and quite successfully defended democracy and democratic values before a host of existential challengesFormer Presidents Donald Trump, Barack Obama and George W Bush wound up pingponging from crisis to crisis with no clear sense of what shape the horizon might take, frequently updating their worldviews to match the moment Bush was against nationbuilding until he was for it in Afghanistan and Iraq Obama was against foreign intervention until he was for it in Libya Trump was for sweettalking global adversaries until he was against it

Biden, in contrast, has been operating on the basis of a real weltanschauung or worldview Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger told me and other students in his class at Harvard that few leaders, especially presidents of the United States, operated on the world stage with a cleareyed sense of where they want the world to be at the end of their four or eight years and then worked to get there

And indeed, few have defined and embraced democracy as a doctrine, viewed crises and partners through such a prism and worked so effectively to further these essential values more than Biden, who spent decades on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and eight years as vice president before becoming the leader of the Free World

Bidens latest challenge, of course, is in Israel and Gaza In the face of a barbaric terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel and the unrelenting response of the government under Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Biden has stood squarely by Israel, defined by The Economists Democracy Index as the only democracy in the Middle East and North Africa

In contrast to George W Bush, Biden has modeled how diplomacy as well as force can support efforts to shore up democracy The US reportedly played a crucial role in getting many Israeli hostages released from Hamas But the US also quickly dispatched two aircraft carrier strike groups and 900 additional troops to the Middle East to back up his warning to Iran and Hezbollah not to broaden the conflict

Those moves not only safeguard Israel but help secure American interests in the region and show that a democratic power can constrain fundamentalist ones

Biden is similar to other presidents in getting little credit for what doesnt happen Beyond containing the IsraelHamas conflict so far, he also hasnt been properly recognized for avoiding a direct USRussia confrontation and likely conflagration by tempering the delivery of advanced weapons to Ukraine and restraining its efforts to join NATO, even as the US has slowly but steadily ratcheted up the levels of military support for Ukraine

Ukraine, of course, is trying desperately to retain its democratic orientation in the face of Moscows violent and autocratic challenge Though now facing obstacles in Congress, theres no question that the Biden administrations support has been essential to Ukraines impressive and, to many, unexpected success in its continued fight against Russian President Vladimir Putins aggression

Then theres Taiwan Chinese President Xi Jinping has redoubled efforts to build pressure to force the island nations absorption into mainland China, sending warships and warplanes ever closer to Taiwan even into and through its airspace But a stillindependent government in Taipei is planning a democratic presidential election on January 13, a robust threeway race in which voters consider an outcome that could well define the islands future

This is happening with determined American political, diplomatic and military support, including Biden being clearer than previous presidents that the US will defend Taiwan Despite GOP footdragging in Congress, Biden has included funding for Taiwan as well as Ukraine and Israel in a new aid package an allbutunprecedented effort at American assistance for democracies under threat

But while hes minced no words in continuing to call Xi a dictator, Biden has managed the relationship with Beijing rather than rupturing it in ways that could be dangerous Just this fall, he succeeded in reopening militarytomilitary channels of communication with China for the first time since Beijing severed them after thenHouse Speaker Nancy Pelosis visit to Taiwan in August 2022

Those who see Bidens abrupt and chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan as a failure that damages his record on democracy have themselves failed to recognize a reality that Biden had earlier come to appreciate

In Afghanistan, democracy never really took root at all Its illconceived and improbable elections were little more than window dressing on a deeply flawed and corrupt kleptocracy that America had been backing with the bodies of thousands of its troops

As Sarah Chayes, once a special assistant in the Pentagon, wrote in Foreign Affairs, Joe Biden was outspoken about his opposition to the intervention That underscores the point that Bidens success isnt just his principled view of democracies George W Bush also prominently called for democratization but shrewdness in knowing when and where to promote them most effectively

One could ask what happens when Biden finds himself facing a leader with antidemocratic tendencies like Indias Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who presides over what close observers have called an electoral autocracy in what was long a model democratic nation There, it would appear, Biden has shown steadiness in waiting for the forces that propelled other truly democratic leaders of Indias past to harness the will of the people to return them to power It has been and will require a most delicate balance that I am persuaded Biden has been adept in implementing

Bidens determination to defend democracy wherever it manages to gain a foothold and help it to survive, then prosper, is something that makes him tick and remain appealing to others, as Ive seen in so many parts of the world Political leaders and other officials from Paris to Riga that Ive come in contact with during the Biden years have suggested repeatedly how imperative it is that America retain the values Biden holds so close

Democracies are more than a form of government, Biden told the world on November 2, 2022, in a speech the White House titled Remarks by President Biden on Standing up for Democracy Theyre a way of being, a way of seeing the world a way that defines who we are, what we believe, why we do what we do, he explained We must, in this moment, dig deep within ourselves and recognize that we cant take democracy for granted any longer

Officials from Israel, Hamas and Qatar have cautioned against US President Joe Bidens optimism that a hostageforceasefire deal in Gaza could be reached by the end of this week, suggesting that differences remain as negotiators work to secure an agreement

Biden said Monday during an appearance at an ice cream shop in New York City that he hoped there would be a ceasefire in the IsraelHamas conflict by next Monday, as the death toll in Gaza approaches 30,000

But an Israeli official told CNN Tuesday that Israel was surprised that he Biden used the word Monday and that he used the word ceasefire

I dont know on what basis he said it, the Israeli official said Tuesday, asking not to be named due to the sensitivity of the subject The official said Israel was ready to make a deal under the right terms

Israel will be ready to release Palestinian prisoners even today if conditions are met, the official said

Basem Naim, a member of Hamas political bureau, told CNN Tuesday that the group was unaware of any ceasefire agreement that could be brokered by next Monday There is nothing,

Qatar, which along with the US is a key mediator in negotiations between Israel and Hamas, added further caution on Tuesday and hinted at a different timeline than that suggested by Biden

If there was an agreement you would see me more in a cheered attitude, Majed AlAnsari, a spokesperson for the Qatar Foreign Ministry, said Tuesday But until now we dont have an agreement and were still working on negotiations on all fronts

We have seen a positive trajectory by the sheer fact that the meetings are taking place, but we have yet to reach a final agreement, where we can hopefully announce before the beginning of Ramadan a humanitarian pause that will ease the tension and would allow us to bring in more aid into Gaza and would allow us to deescalate

Ramadan is set to begin as early as the evening of March 10, a week after the date Biden said he hoped to see a resolution

Ansari said disagreements remain over numbers, ratios and troop movements, without elaborating further He is likely referring to the number of hostages released for Palestinian prisoners and the withdrawal of Israeli soldiers from parts of Gaza

Asked by CNN about Bidens comments, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said, whats underpinning the presidents optimism is looking at the broad outlines of a deal that we have put in place through negotiations last week and negotiations that are continuing through this week, and the fact that he believes and we believe one is within reach

Certainly, wed welcome getting one by this weekend, Miller said

On Monday, CNN reported Hamas had backed off some key demands in the negotiations for a hostage deal and pause in the fighting in Gaza following Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus accusation that the groups position was delusional, bringing the negotiating parties closer to an initial agreement that could halt the fighting and see a group of Israeli hostages released, according to two sources familiar with the discussions

Reuters and Al Jazeera reported Tuesday that Hamas was reviewing a draft proposal for an initial ceasefire lasting roughly six weeks, during which 40 Israeli hostages would be exchanged for 400 Palestinian prisoners

The Israeli official confirmed to CNN Tuesday that the hope was for about 40 hostages to be freed in the initial stage of the deal, and that Israel is insisting female soldiers be included in the group

Teams from the US, Egypt, Israel and Qatar met in Paris on Friday and then in Qatar Monday

Those involved in the discussions have previously said an agreement would likely be implemented in multiple phases and once an initial deal is made it could lead to a truce lasting for as long as six weeks with a group of Israeli hostages released including women, children, the elderly and sick in exchange for a smaller number of Palestinian prisoners than Hamas had initially demanded

During a truce, negotiations would take place over more sensitive topics like the release of male Israeli soldiers who are hostages, Palestinian prisoners serving longer sentences, the withdrawal of IDF forces and bringing a permanent end to the war alongside the socalled day after issues

On Tuesday, US National Security spokesman John Kirby said there was hope that a temporary ceasefire could lead to a better approach to end the conflict writ large

Referencing the previous weeklong pause in fighting that took place at the end of November, Kirby said, What were hoping for is much more aggressive than that And as weve said before, we also hope that if we can get that in place, and both sides can abide by it for the course of several weeks, maybe up to six, that maybe that could lead to something more in terms of a better approach to end the conflict writ large

Kirby said he believes we are getting closer in a negotiation and hopeful it could happen in coming days but did not make any guarantees about that happening before Ramadan

Its not about trying to beat the clock to Ramadan Its about trying to get these two sides to come to closure on a deal that again, would get all those hostages out and get them to get the fighting stopped, he said

Almost 30,000 people have died in Gaza since Israel waged war on Hamas on October 7, according to the health ministry in the enclave

At least 17 million Palestinians in Gaza have been forcibly displaced, according to the UN More than 13 million people have sought refuge in crammed shelters in the southern city of Rafah, where a looming Israeli ground assault has stirred panic among civilians many of whom fled from fighting in the north

President Joe Biden warned Israel in an interview Monday that it risks losing additional international support as its offensive in Gaza drags on, though he expressed hope that a ceasefire deal could be reached by early next week

His comments to comedian Seth Meyers aired one day before voters head to the polls in Michigan, a critical November battleground state where ArabAmerican activists have been pushing for Democrats to pick uncommitted as a way to protest current US policy Biden, a longtime supporter of Israel, has navigated a delicate political path since the war with Hamas began in early October, but the immense death toll in Gaza, coupled with everincreasing political pressure at home, has added to his urgency in concluding the conflict

Israel has had the overwhelming support of the vast majority of nations, Biden said in an interview with Meyers If it keeps this up with this incredibly conservative government they have theyre going to lose support from around the world

My hope is that, by next Monday, well have a ceasefire, Biden said at an ice cream shop in New York City, emphasizing that the parties seemed close to reaching an agreement

Hamas has backed off some key demands in the negotiations for a hostage deal and pause in the fighting in Gaza following Israeli accusations that its position was delusional, bringing the negotiating parties closer to an initial agreement that could halt the fighting and see a group of Israeli hostages released, two sources familiar with the discussions told CNN earlier this week

Israel, however, was surprised that Biden expressed optimism for a deal on a ceasefire by Monday, an Israeli official told CNN, but confirmed that Israel hoped a deal would initially involve the release of about 40 hostages, including female Israeli soldiers

Ramadan is coming up, and theres been an agreement by the Israelis that they would not engage in activities during Ramadan as well, in order to give us time to get all the hostages out, Biden said Monday

Qatars foreign ministrys spokesperson, however, said Israel and Hamas have yet to reach an agreement to pause fighting in exchange for the release of hostages from Gaza, though he said he remains hopeful that an agreement can be reached before Ramadan, which is set to start as early as March 10 Regarding Bidens assessment that an agreement would be reached by Monday, Ansari refused to answer and said the question should be directed to the White House

Biden also addressed the looming Israeli offensive into Rafah, a city that has become home to around 15 million Palestinians that is viewed by Israel as the last stronghold of Hamas in Gaza

In the meantime, there are too many innocent people that are being killed Israel has slowed down the attacks and Rafah, Biden said They have to, and theyve made a commitment to me theyre going to see to it that theres an ability to evacuate significant portions of Rafah before they go and take out the remainder of Hamas

National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told CNN later Tuesday that the US wont support Israels planned offensive into Rafah until officials have seen a plan that ensures the safety of refugees seeking shelter in the city The belief comes despite comments from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu indicating Israel will move into Rafah regardless of whether a humanitarian pause is negotiated in Gaza

Kirby cited comments from Netanyahu earlier this month that hes ordered Israel Defense Forces to produce a plan for operations in Rafah to include in that a plan for securing the safety of the more than a million refugees that are there

But he acknowledged the US has not been presented with such a plan to date

Pressed by CNNs MJ Lee on if the US wouldnt support Israeli forces going into Rafah without seeing a plan guaranteeing the safe evacuation of civilians, Kirby said, Thats correct

Biden has been under increasing pressure from his progressive base over US support for Israel, and Michigans primary on Tuesday will be the latest litmus test among Democrats over the war Organizers there say they hope at least 10,000 people will vote uncommitted in the Democratic primary, a nod to the 10,700vote margin that delivered the state to Donald Trump in 2016

In 2020, nearly 146,000 Muslim Americans voted in the general election in Michigan, according to an analysis by Emgage, a group working to grow Muslim Americans political power Biden won the state by 150,000 votes

A truce between Israel and Hamas that was scheduled to begin at 7 am local time 12 am ET Friday is believed to be holding, with civilian hostages held captive by militants expected to be released in the coming hours as part of a breakthrough diplomatic deal following an uneasy daylong delay

The pause in fighting, part of the carefully negotiated agreement announced Wednesday, appeared to be taking effect despite what sounded like sporadic Israeli artillery fire and sirens warning of rockets from Gaza in the minutes after it was due to begin

CNN journalists in the southern Israel city of Sderot said the sounds of heavy weapons fire stopped around 718 am local time 1218 am ET

They heard what sounded like small arms fire inside Gaza about 20 minutes later, but artillery fire, airstrikes and rockets appear to have stopped

At least 90 aid trucks have so far entered Gaza through the Rafah border crossing on Friday, an Egyptian official at the border told CNN, carrying desperately needed supplies to ease a humanitarian crisis thats worsened each day of Israels blockade of the enclave They were among the 200 aid trucks that had entered the Egyptian side of the crossing on Friday morning, the official said

Two hundred trucks loaded with food, medicine and water, as well as others transporting fuel would cross into the Gaza Strip each day starting Friday, Diaa Rashwan, the chairman of Egypts State Information Service said that morning

Sixtyseven Palestinians who got stuck in Egypt during the war traveled back into Gaza via the Rafah border crossing on Friday, hours after the truce went into effect More Palestinians will be allowed to cross into the Strip starting Saturday if they wish to do so, the Palestinian embassy in Cairo said

The first hostage release from Gaza is scheduled to take place later Friday, when 13 women and children held captive in Gaza are expected to be freed, mediators in Qatar said the previous day Thirtynine Palestinian prisoners would also be released by Israel Friday as part of the deal, according to an Israeli official

The Israel Defense Forces IDF said it has completed preparations for receiving hostages released from Gaza back into Israel, including readying several locations with medical provisions and support for their initial reception

The implementation of the fourday truce would mark the first sustained break in hostilities after nearly seven weeks of conflict and the first expected largescale release of hostages

The agreement followed mounting pressure on the Israeli government from the families of the hostages, who have demanded answers and action from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

It also comes amid growing international pressure for more humanitarian support for the people of Gaza, where the number of people killed since October 7 now stands at 14,854, according to information from Hamas authorities in the Strip

Israel declared war on Hamas following the militant groups bloody October 7 terror attack on its territory, in which more than 1,200 people were killed the largest such attack on Israel since the countrys founding in 1948

Militants are holding more than 200 people captive inside Gaza from mass abductions that day, according to figures from the Israeli military

The IDF said Friday that they destroyed a number of tunnels underneath the AlShifa Hospital area in Gaza City they believe are used by Hamas and completed operational preparations according to the agreed truce, ahead of its anticipated start

Israels defense minister said he expects the military operation against Hamas will continue forcefully after the truce

Expected hostage release

Under terms previously announced by Qatar, a total of 50 of those hostages, women and children, are expected to be freed over a fourday humanitarian pause in fighting

The first batch of hostages is expected to be released from Gaza at around 4 pm local time Friday and handed to the International Committee of the Red Cross, Qatar Foreign Ministry spokesperson Majid AlAnsari said Thursday ahead of the pause

American citizens are not expected to be among the first group of hostages released, a US official told CNN The official added that they remain hopeful that there will be Americans among the initial 50

An Israeli government official told CNN Thursday the hostages, most of whom are expected to be children with their mothers, will enter Israel at three different locations, which are not being publicized due to the sensitive nature of the release

Israels Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs has released detailed instructions on how to care for released hostages who are children, advising IDF troops on how to interact with them in the moments following their release

Children will ask questions such as, Wheres Mum Wheres Daddy Soldiers should not answer these questions, even if they know the answers Any questions should be answered along the lines of, Sweetheart, Im sorry, I dont know My job is to bring you to Israel to a safe place, where people you know will be waiting for you and will answer all your questions, the advice says

A representative with the ministry said Friday that professionals will have to pretty quickly share relevant information with the hostages about what has happened to their families and communities once they return to Israel

Of the 39 Palestinian prisoners scheduled for release, they are expected to include 24 women and 15 children, Qadura Fares, head of the Palestinian Commission for Detainees and ExPrisoners Affairs, told CNN Hamas published a list of names of the first batch of prisoners set for release, the majority of which are from the occupied West Bank, on Friday

The deal also includes the further release of 150 prisoners during the fourday period, according to Israel There is also the potential for an extension and more releases in the days following the currently agreed pause Most of the prisoners concerned are male teenagers, along with some women, according to an Israeli government list of those who could be released

The total number of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails is approximately 8,300, according to Qadura Fares, the head of the Palestinian Prisoners Club, a nongovernmental organization

Of those, more than 3,000 are being held in what Israel calls administrative detention, which Amnesty International says can be extended indefinitely

Humanitarian aid

The truce has been seen as an opportunity to ramp up humanitarian support to Gaza, though Qatari foreign ministry spokesperson AlAnsari on Thursday warned it would be a fraction of the need

The enclave has been struggling with severe shortages of basic supplies, food and fuel amid power outages and bombardment, with humanitarian groups and governments saying the levels of aid allowed in in past weeks were insufficient

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has been preparing their operations for a

couple of days to be ready to profit as much as possible of this unique opportunity,Israel has been highly reluctant to allow fuel into Gaza since October 7, citing concerns Hamas will use it to power its operations, even as aid groups say its critical for cooking food and maintaining operations at hospitals Last week it agreed to allow minimal deliveries

Israels Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, said in a statement Friday that four fuel tankers and four tankers of cooking gas crossed into Gaza through the Rafah Crossing

The fuel and cooking gas are designated for operating essential humanitarian infrastructure in Gaza and was approved by the Israeli government as part of the truce, the statement said

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has dismissed Hamas proposals for a ceasefire and hostage deal in Gaza as delusional, in a setback to diplomatic efforts to pause the war

Speaking to reporters, Netanyahu insisted that there was no alternative to complete victory over Hamas in Gaza

Netanyahus hawkish response came hours after he met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and is a blow to the intensifying efforts aimed at securing a breakthrough in the conflict But the Israeli leader notably did not suggest that Israel would abandon the ongoing discussions mediated by regional powers including Qatar and Egypt, and Blinken said later that there was still a path to a deal

The Hamas proposal envisaged a threestage process over fourandahalf months, during which Israeli troops would gradually withdraw from the enclave, hostages would be released and Palestinian prisoners in Israel would be freed, according to a copy of the groups counteroffer obtained by CNN

But Netanyahu repudiated the proposal We havent committed to any of the delusional demands of Hamas, he said There is not a commitment there has to be a negotiation, its a process, and at the moment, from what I see from Hamas, its not happening

Israels aim was complete victory in Gaza, Netanyahu said The victory is achievable its not a matter of years or decades, its a matter of months

In a latenight press conference in Tel Aviv, Blinken suggested negotiations could still move forward, saying he believed Netanyahus delusional remark referred to specific elements of the Hamas proposals that were unacceptable

Clearly, there are things that Hamas sent back that are absolute nonstarters and I assume thats what the prime minister was referring to, but I dont want to speak for him, Blinken said

He added that there was space to continue to pursue an agreement, and these things are always negotiations

Its not flipping a light switch Its not yes or no Theres invariably back and forth, Blinken said

Hamas said it would send a delegation to the Egyptian capital, Cairo, to follow up on its proposals, according to the groups spokesman Osama Hamdan

A proposal in three phases

Hamas had proposed a threephase deal, each lasting 45 days, that would also see the gradual release of hostages held in the enclave in exchange for Palestinian prisoners in Israel including those serving life sentences as well as the start of a massive humanitarian and rebuilding effort

Contrary to earlier demands, Hamas did not call for an immediate end to the war Negotiations for a permanent ceasefire would take place during the truce and the remaining hostages would only be released once a final deal to end the war was agreed, the document said

The proposal was a response to a framework agreement presented by negotiators in Paris at the end of last month

Hamas response had put the focus back on Israel, which is under intense pressure from its allies to scale down the war and ease the humanitarian suffering in Gaza There have been indications that the United States views the Hamas offer positively, butNetanyahu has pledged not to stop the campaign until Israel destroys Hamas once and for all

He reiterated that stance after his Wednesday address, telling Israeli media that Israel would be safe only after it destroys Hamas Not part of Hamas, not half of Hamas, the entire Hamas

The Israeli offensive, launched after the Hamas attack four months ago, has taken an immense humanitarian toll on the strip, with tens of thousands dead and the population of Gaza pushed to the brink of famine

A weeklong truce in November saw the release of 105 hostages in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners Israel believes 132 hostages taken during the October 7 attacks remain in Gaza, 29 of whom are thought to have been killed

There wont be any hostages to release

The Israeli former hostage Adina Moshe criticized Netanyahu, saying there wont be any hostages to release if his government continued its plan to completely eliminate Hamas

Moshe, 72, who was kidnapped by Hamas from Kibbutz Nir Oz and held hostage in Gaza for seven weeks, spoke at a press conference for the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, directing her comments specifically to Netanyahu

Mr Netanyahu, Im turning to you Its all in your hands You are the one Youre the one who can And Im really afraid that if you continue the way you do, the destruction of Hamas, there wont be any hostages to release,

The Hostages and Missing Families Forum Headquarters also delivered a message directly to Netanyahu and the Israeli War Cabinet in a press release on Wednesday If the hostages are not returned home the citizens of Israel should know they live in a state that is not committed to their security, that the mutual responsibility in it has died, the families forum said They who do not protect their citizens will find that their citizens lose faith in them and their leadership

The price is unbearable, but the price of abandoning the hostages will be a historic stain for generations to come,

Hamas counterproposal had earlier been met with optimism by those involved in the negotiations, though President Joe Biden had described it as a little over the top in remarks to the press on Tuesday

Before Netanyahus remarks on Wednesday, several Israelbased civil society groups and human rights organizations had called for an immediate ceasefire, and demanded the release of hostages held in the enclave, saying a pause in fighting would assist access to vital aid to address the humanitarian catastrophe in the strip

In more than 120 days of war in Gaza, following Hamas egregious attack on October 7, which killed some 1,200 Israelis and internationals, we have witnessed Israeli bombardments and siege policy causing unfathomable death and destruction in the Gaza Strip, said the statement, which was published jointly by 17 Israeli based groups including BTselem, Combatants for Peace and Breaking the Silence

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the response from Hamas on a deal to free the remaining hostages and reach a sustained pause in fighting in Gaza creates space for agreement to be reached, despite containing what he called some clear nonstarters

We will work at that relentlessly until we get there, Blinken said at a news conference in Tel Aviv Wednesday following a day of meetings with top Israeli officials

The top US diplomat suggested that negotiations toward an agreement would continue, despite Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissing the counterproposal from Hamas as delusional just hours earlier

There is not a commitment there has to be a negotiation Its a process, and at the moment, from what I see from Hamas, its not happening, Netanyahu said at a news conference just hours after meeting with Blinken

I told Antony Blinken we are nearly there with complete victory, he said, adding that Israel will not do less than that

Blinken, asked about Netanyahus remarks, said he believed that the prime minister was referencing the absolute nonstarters

The full Hamas response proposes three phases, each lasting 45 days, including the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza, a massive humanitarian effort and freedom of movement for people throughout Gaza, according to a copy obtained by CNN

These things are always negotiations, Blinken said Its not flipping a light switch Its not yes or no Theres invariably back and forth

As I said, we see the space for that And given the imperative, given the importance that we all attach to bringing the hostages home, were intent on pursuing it, he said

Still, Netanyahus sharp rejection of an end to the fighting is likely to present a challenge to the efforts to reach an agreement It also suggests that Blinkens attempts to pressure the Israeli government toward a humanitarian pause have yielded little success

Officials see such a cessation in fighting as central to the objectives they are pushing for both the short and longerterm in Gaza, particularly as international and domestic US pressure to end the conflict in Gaza continues to mount and amid the massive humanitarian toll of the conflict

The Israeli offensive, launched after the Hamas attack exactly four months ago, has taken an immense humanitarian toll on the strip, with tens of thousands dead and the population of Gaza on the brink of famine The offensive sparked a barrage of regional attacks by Iranianbacked proxy groups, including by Houthis against vessels in the Red Sea as well as a deluge of strikes by militias against US troops in Iraq and Syria one of which took the lives of three US service members The Biden administration is facing outrage from some groups at home over its handling of the situation in Gaza which could cause political damage to President Joe Biden in an election year

Civilian toll remains too high

Blinken said that even after four months of pressing the Israeli government on all of his previous visits and pretty much every day on concrete ways to strengthen civilian protection, to get more assistance to those who need it, the civilian toll remains too high

Nearly 2 million people have been displaced from their homes Hundreds of thousands are experiencing acute hunger Most have lost someone that they love And day after day, more people are killed, Blinken said

As I said to the prime minister and to other Israeli officials today, the daily toll that its military operations continue to take on innocent civilians remains too high, he said

Although Blinken acknowledged that Israel had taken some important actions, he outlined in his meetings Wednesday additional key steps that he said the government must take to mitigate civilian suffering

Israel should open Erez so that assistance can flow to Northern Gaza, where, as I said, hundreds of thousands of people are struggling to survive under dire conditions, he said

It should expedite the flow of humanitarian assistance from Jordan, Blinken continued It should strengthen deconfliction and improve coordination with the humanitarian providers

And Israel must ensure that the delivery of lifesaving assistance to Gaza is not blocked for any reason, by anyone, the top US diplomat said, appearing to reference ongoing protests that have blocked the entrance of aid

Behind closed doors, Blinken expressed concerns about the potential toll of a military operation in Rafah, where more than a million people have fled He was briefed about the plans for that operation in a meeting with Israel Defense Forces chief of staff Herzi Halevi and Mossad Chief David Barnea, according to two Israeli officials

With the potential of Israels military operation lasting months longer, Blinken also publicly appealed to Israel to not lose sight of our common humanity

The overwhelming majority of people in Gaza had nothing to do with the attacks of October 7, said Blinken, and the families in Gaza whose survival depends on deliveries of aid from Israel are just like our families

Blinken said that Israelis were dehumanized in the most horrific way on October 7 and that the hostages have been dehumanized every day since, but that cannot be a license to dehumanize others

The top US diplomat intends to meet on Thursday, as he has many times in the past, with the families of the hostages held by Hamas in Gaza

The hostages are foremost on our minds and in our hearts, Blinken said earlier in the day in a meeting with Israeli President Isaac Herzog

Plans for the day after in Gaza

Blinken arrived in Israel Tuesday night after stops in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Qatar, where the meetings focused on ensuring that we can use any pause to continue to build out plans for the day after in Gaza the security, humanitarian, reconstruction, governance

On Wednesday, the top US diplomat also traveled to the West Bank to meet with Palestinian Authority PA President Mahmoud Abbas Blinken pressed Abbas on the need to take steps to reform and revitalize the PA, chief among them improving governance, increasing accountability to the Palestinian people reforms that the Palestinian Authority has committed to make in a recently announced reform package and that we urge it to implement swiftly

US officials have suggested that a revitalized PA could lead a unified Gaza and West Bank In November, Blinken outlined a series of principles for Gaza after the conflict ends no reoccupation by Israeli forces and no reduction in territory among them

However, Netanyahu has publicly dismissed many of these key tenets, as recently as Wednesday after meeting with Blinken

I told Blinken today that after we destroy Hamas, we will secure that Gaza is a safe area forever History has proven that only one force can prove can achieve this Israel, the IDF and our security forces, he said at a news conference Israel will be acting in Gaza whenever necessary in order for the terror not to come back

Netanyahu has rejected the notion of a Palestinian state or a role for the Palestinian Authority in postwar governance of Gaza There are also signs that he intends to establish a buffer zone within Gaza, in opposition to US demands that Gazas territory not be reduced

On both this and his last trip to the region, Blinken has stressed that the Israeli government must make difficult decisions and move toward a twostate solution if it wants to achieve normalization with Saudi Arabia and if it wants the support of its Arab neighbors for security and reconstruction in Gaza

The top US diplomat, who met with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Monday, said that Saudi Arabia still has a strong interest in normalizing relations with Israel, but the Crown Prince made clear that the war in Gaza must end and there must be a clear, credible, timebound path to the establishment of a Palestinian state

At his news conference in Doha Tuesday, Blinken again noted that in terms of dealing with some of the most profound security challenges that Israel has faced for years, it will be in a much stronger position as part of an integrated region to deal with them

But again, these are decision that will have to be made None of them are easy And well continue the effort to prepare all the diplomatic steps necessary to be able to move down that path if thats the path that everyone chooses,

The stale, damp air inside the tunnel smells of sewage The walls are slimy, and they feel like they are closing in When the light goes off, everything is plunged into complete darkness

Inside this maze of tunnels under Khan Younis, there is a narrow room with an arched ceiling, divided in half by a barred metal gate The musty chamber, which looks like a makeshift cell, is where the Israeli military says Hamas held at least 12 of the hostages kidnapped and brought to Gaza on October 7

The Israeli military said it made that assessment based on testimony from freed hostages and forensic evidence, including DNA Some were among those released during the pause in hostilities in late November, the military said CNN could not independently confirm Israels account, but details of it tally with descriptions in Israeli media from hostages who say they were held there

In the darkness underground, the wreckage above feels remote, and silent horror fills the void Any hostages held here would have had limited sense of time or place Minutes feel like hours, and after a few turns down different shafts, its impossible not to feel disoriented The compound is hot and very humid Its tiled walls and floors are wet with condensation The air feels heavy, as if oxygen is running out

Israel says that Hamas built a vast network of compounds like this one, connected by tunnels and shafts deep underground The southern city of Khan Younis, which Israel considers one of the main strongholds of the group, is the current epicenter of fighting

CNN was among a small group of reporters granted a military escort by the Israel Defense Forces IDF to see two interconnected tunnel compounds, including the room where the Israelis say hostages were held, in the central part of the city The IDF has shown similar complexes to other media in eastern Khan Younis The group was accompanied by one of the IDFs top commanders, Brig Gen Dan Goldfuss

They spent years and years building it, this is not a twoyear project, this is years of planning So, if anyone asks how long was October 7 being planned, I say for many years, he said, adding that he feels some responsibility for Israels vulnerability to attack by Hamas I failed to defend my people, as a general

As a condition to enter Gaza under IDF escort, news outlets must submit photos and raw video footage to the Israeli military for review prior to publication The IDF did not review this written report

International media have been blocked access to the strip since the war began CNN agreed to the terms to provide a rare glimpse into wartime Gaza, as Israel tries to find the remaining hostages and pushes further south into areas where hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have fled

More than 250 hostages were seized during Hamas October 7 terror attack on southern Israel, in which 1,200 people were killed, according to Israeli officials More than 27,000 Palestinians have been killed and 66,000 injured, according to the Hamasrun Ministry of Health in Gaza, in Israels aerial bombardment and ground assault on the strip, which has flattened entire neighborhoods including this one

A CNN journalist entered the tunnel network through the wall of a basement now entirely exposed by a giant crater, the area surrounded by blownout, multistory residential buildings

The IDF said three hostages Sahar Calderon, 16, Or Yaakov, 16, and Sapir Cohen, 29 were released from this location during the ceasefire agreed as part of an IsraelHamas hostage deal in late November The three were abducted from Nir Oz, a kibbutz community near Israels border with Gaza

CNN could not independently verify whether they were held in the compound, or for how long But Hamas propaganda videos have shown hostages in similar confined spaces with tiled walls

More than 100 Israeli and foreign hostages were freed during the truce, with Palestinians held in Israeli prisons released in exchange Israel believes 132 hostages are still being held in Gaza in compounds like the one CNN was escorted to under Khan Younis

In late January, Israeli forces intensified their offensive on Khan Younis, where medical facilities and other buildings sheltering displaced civilians have been battered, causing mass casualties, according to the United Nations The IDF has said its operations in Khan Younis are aimed at dismantling Hamas military framework and strongholds, and has used the tunnels as justification for leveling large swathes of the territory

Palestinian health officials and paramedics have also reported Israeli tanks and attack drones firing at people trying to flee the vicinity of two hospitals in Khan Younis, where the Hamasrun health ministry said Israeli forces have cut off critical medical, food and fuel supplies The IDF maintains that Hamas militants are using hospitals in the area for military purposes

Underground maze

Inside the subterranean complex, the shafts are cramped Connecting passages between rooms are just about tall enough to stand and so narrow that two people passing cant avoid physical contact

Some of the tunnels are flooded ankledeep in mud

Elsewhere, the floor slopes up and down, the depth varying between some 15 and 25 meters 50 and 80 feet below the surface, according to the IDF, which said the section of the tunnels visited by CNN ran for about one kilometer about 1,100 yards

Goldfuss said the IDF believes Hamas leaders, including its top official in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, hid inside this compound deep under Khan Younis as Israel launched its military response to the October 7 attack At some point during the IDFs ground operation, this section of the network was redesigned to hold hostages, Goldfuss said, pointing to the cagelike gate that appears to be a more recent addition

CNN could not verify those claims, or any others that Goldfuss made about who may have been holed up in the labyrinth or what its original purpose was

What was clear from CNNs tour is that the compound was used for an extended period of time Discarded trash, empty food and drink packaging, soiled blankets and random pieces of clothing lie scattered around In a kitchen fitted with basic equipment, dirty dishes are discarded in a sink

And yet some thought was put into the interior design The rooms are adorned with tiles more fitting of a home than the underground compound of a militant group In the kitchen, the tiles are painted with bowls of eggs and gherkins, baskets of flowers and jars marked, in English, flour, cookies, and cereals

You can see in the kitchen they even took time to make themselves feel at home here The initial objective of this tunnel wasnt to have the kidnapped here, this was a strategic tunnel, there is a toilet, there is a bathroom, there is a maintenance tunnel, the leaders spent time here, Goldfuss claimed

Emerging from the underground complex reveals the enormous destruction wrought by the Israeli military

Goldfuss said a building once stood where CNN accessed the tunnel through a huge crater and other shafts spread like a spiderweb through the neighborhood The devastation is immense nothing was left of the original structure its remnants having been bulldozed away to expose the tunnel entrance

Similar devastation could be seen throughout the surrounding residential area Most buildings had gaping holes instead of windows, giving them a dollhouselike appearance On several balconies, laundry hung out to dry was still flapping in the winter breeze Books and personal items lay scattered around the rubble

None of the buildings appeared to be liveable, and there was no one in sight

Medical facilities in Khan Younis in southern Gaza have been battered amid an Israeli assault in the area Monday, Palestinian health officials said, as the number of people killed in Israels siege on Gaza continues to rise

Dozens of people have been killed and wounded in the latest offensive in western Khan Younis, according to the Hamascontrolled health ministry in Gaza Medical facilities including the Nasser Medical Complex, Al Amal Hospital and the Palestine Red Crescent Society headquarters are located in the area

The situation here is completely catastrophic We didnt sleep last night The hospital is entirely besieged, Ahmad Al Moghrabi, a doctor at the Nasser Medical Complex said in a video shared to his Instagram page Monday

There is no way for us to escape the hospital and no way for evacuation The troops are all around, and the only roads for evacuation are filled with dead bodies, he said

The Nasser Medical Complex is receiving more serious injuries than it can accommodate, the health ministry said, adding that intensive care units are at capacity

Médecins Sans Frontières MSF staff at the Nasser hospital said there is a sense of panic among staff, patients and displaced people sheltering inside the building, as they could feel the ground shaking during the strikes, MSF said on social media

The hospital wards are full and exit routes are blocked, preventing the evacuation of medical staff and patients from the hospital, MSF added

Health officials also said that Israeli forces Monday stormed the Al Khair Hospital, west of Khan Younis, and detained a number of its medical staff, amid an ongoing siege of the area

The Israeli military said it was targeting Hamas outposts, infrastructure, and command and control centers in Khan Younis and the action demanded precise operations due to the densely populated civilian areas

The military operation, which was launched on Sunday, is being led by Israels 98th Paratroopers Division and is expected to last for several days, the Israel Defense Forces IDF said, without providing further details on the timeline

Dismantling Hamas military framework in western Khan Younis is the heart of the logic behind the operation, the statement added

The IDF said it had seen militants at sensitive sites such as hospitals and shelters in the tightly packed civilian areas

The Palestine Red Crescent Society said its headquarters and the AlAmal Hospital, located in the same neighborhood, are under siege by Israeli forces, and soldiers are targeting anyone who tries to move in the area

A field ambulance point has been established outside the AlAmal neighborhood, where the medical facilities are located, to ensure a continuity of operations

But the organization said the situation remains extremely dangerous and around 80 percent of the entrances and exits to AlAmal are obstructed Ambulance teams are facing significant difficulties in reaching the wounded and injured due to the continuous bombardment in the governorate

WHO DirectorGeneral Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has said he is deeply concerned by reports of the fighting, warning that that violence near AlAmal hospital and the raid on AlKhair not only put patients and people seeking safety within these facilities at risk, but they also prevent newly injured people outside the hospitals from being reached and receiving care

Israels siege in Gaza has devastated swathes of the territory, diminished food, fuel and water supplies, and crushed the enclaves medical system Over 19 million Palestinians have been forcibly displaced, many multiple times, according to the UNs agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA

There are 16 out of 36 hospitals partially functioning across the strip, including nine in southern Gaza and seven in the north, the UNs humanitarian affairs office reported on Sunday

In southern Gaza, three hospitals Al Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir ElBalah, and Nasser and Gaza European hospitals in Khan Younis are at risk of closure due to the issuance of evacuation orders in adjacent areas and the ongoing conduct of hostilities nearby, OCHA said

The Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza has been functioning to a limited degree since midJanuary, added OCHA

The Health Ministry said Monday that the number of Palestinians killed in Israeli attacks in Gaza since October 7 rose to 25,295, with at least 63,000 injuries recorded At least 190 people were killed and 340 injured in the last 24 hours, the Ministry statement said

CNN cannot independently verify casualty figures in Gaza due to limited access to the area

Hamass militant wing, the Al Qassam Brigades, said in a statement Monday that they were fighting in the western Khan Younis area, killing a number of Israeli soldiers with antipersonnel missiles

Ahmed Naseem, a resident of AlAmal neighborhood in Khan Younis, told CNN Monday that intense shelling of the area started in the early hours of Monday

There was heavy shelling in the area since the early hours of Monday I could feel it intensely from the building I live in, Nassem said We dont even dare open the windows to see where these attacks are happening, he said

He said that he is terrified of filming the scenes taking place nearby because he fears he will be shot at, if a drone catches him in the act

We cant even go to the rooftop because we cannot determine if drones will fire at us, he said A few days ago water tanks were damaged, after drones fired right at them My cousin, who was filling water at the time of the strike, was close to getting hit, but survived,

Early on Christmas Day in the central Gazan city of Deir alBalah, Motaz Azaiza shared a terrifying update on X

A quadcopter was flying low above the door of his house, he said, and he feared he was about to be targeted in an Israeli airstrike As a highly visible Palestinian online who had received threats before, Azaiza believed he had reason to be afraid

Hundreds of people flooded the replies with concern for the 24yearold Palestinian photojournalist, who has been documenting Israels military assault on Gaza on social media since Hamas attack on Israel on October 7

Im so scared for Motaz, the replies read

I hope Motaz is okay

Pray for Motaz

Noor, a medical student in California who asked to go by her first name for safety reasons, was one of the people worrying For months, shes been following Azaizas dispatches from Gaza, broadcast to his millions of followers images of his once vibrant neighborhood transformed into a gray wasteland, raw glimpses of carnage in the ashes, and reflections on his own feelings of rage and exhaustion

Noor refers to Azaiza with the familiarity of his first name She gets notifications on her phone each time he posts, and worries when too much time passes

For so many of us, it almost feels like hes a brother Hes a friend, and were seeing him suffer in real time, she told CNN

Noor isnt Palestinian and has never been to Gaza Whats happening there still hits close to home Her family is Iraqi, and she grew up against the backdrop of the Iraq War When Azaiza said he feared being killed for his work, Noor found herself feeling scared and anxious for a virtual stranger halfway around the world

Their journalism isnt just journalism Its a diary, Noor said of the Gazans posting on social media Theyre showing us their lives Theyre telling us, Hey, I couldnt shower for a week Hey, I barely had some of this to eat today

After hours with no information following that fear of an airstrike, Azaiza finally posted again A targeted attack on his house hadnt materialized, but there was bad news elsewhere a refugee camp was hit in an Israeli attack

Still, his posts signaled he was alive, and Noor could breathe a sad sigh of relief

Palestinians on social media are a window into the war

Like millions of others around the world, Noor is witnessing the war in Gaza through the eyes of Palestinians who are sharing their daily realities on social media Through their posts on Instagram, X and other platforms, these citizen journalists are putting a face to the conflict

In return, their followers are developing strong emotional connections with them

Leyla Hamed, a sports journalist in London, said the first thing she does when she wakes up is open Instagram to visit the profiles of Palestinians she follows and watch their stories one by one As a journalist herself, she sees them as colleagues and feels a responsibility to bear witness

I feel so much empathy for them that I sometimes feel scared to open their profiles, just thinking something bad has happened to them, she said

Kanwal Ahmed, a filmmaker and storyteller in Toronto, has a similar routine

Theyve become family to the entire world, she said If creator Bisan Owda hasnt posted for 12 hours, there are hundreds of tweets Wheres Bisan Does anybody know where Bisan is Is she okay If Azaiza has posted a picture where you can tell that hes looking extremely depressed or hes lost weight, theres people discussing that

These images and accounts from Palestinians offer an instantaneous view that some young people feel like they havent gotten from traditional media outlets, Ahmed said Young Palestinians like Azaiza, content creator Bisan Owda and freelance journalist Hind Khoudary havent just been on the ground since the beginning They are reporting from their homes and their communities, often persisting through extended communications blackouts like the current one that began January 12

Through raw, selfiestyle videos chronicling the everpresent threat of explosions or the everyday indignities of displacement, theyre giving outsiders an intimate look at the human costs of war from the perspective of people who live there Many of the images they share are so graphic that Instagram obscures them with sensitive content warnings

Everyones getting a chance to tell their own stories, Ahmed said People can tell for themselves And its very hard to look away when youre seeing somebody sitting in a pile of rubble, or if youre seeing a fiveyearold girl crying next to her fathers dead body

Seeing the war directly through these channels changes how people understand it, said Zaina Arafat, a Palestinian American author in Brooklyn who has written about witnessing the assault on Gaza through Instagram

The constancy of these images and the way that we watch them through our phones very much in private allows for a more direct and forceful impact, she said Its this very immediate connection between journalist and viewer, which I do think heightens the response

They are changing the way the world sees war

Israel began its relentless bombardment and ground assault in Gaza after Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, killing more than 1,200 and taking more than 200 hostages, according to Israeli authorities

Israel says its offensive is aimed at wiping out Hamas, a militant group that the US, European Union and others consider a terrorist organization But the conflict has also created a humanitarian crisis one that people around the world are able to see up close

Direct accounts from Palestinians are one of the most reliable ways for people to understand the devastation in Gaza, where about one in every 100 people has been killed and more than one in 40 have been wounded since the war began, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah, which draws its statistics from hospitals in Hamascontrolled Gaza Israels military denies accusations that it deliberately targets civilians

This is as close as you can get to factual and minutebyminute reporting on the atrocities on the ground, said Marwa Fatafta, an analyst and researcher who leads Middle East and North Africa policy and advocacy work for the digital rights organization Access Now

Independent journalism out of Gaza is scant With notable exceptions, among them international news agencies such as Reuters and Agence FrancePresse, most news organizations have been unable to cover the war in Gaza with their own correspondents Israel, along with Egypt, has largely blocked international journalists from the territory on the premise that it cannot guarantee their safety The few foreign journalists who have been allowed to enter have primarily embedded with the Israel Defense Forces and may have had to submit their footage to the military for security review

In December, two months into the war and after weeks of trying, CNNs Clarissa Ward and her team finally gained access into southern Gaza without the IDF Their trip was facilitated by the Emirati government, which runs a hospital inside Gaza Still, such independent reports remain rare

Eyewitness accounts on social media are critical in understanding global conflicts, including past flareups between Israelis and Palestinians In 2021, Palestinian poet and writer Mohammed elKurd rose to social media prominence for his activism around a series of forced eviction cases in his Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem

Whats different this time, according to Fatafta, is how many more people are paying attention

What we see now is a continuation of what happened in 2021, but of course, on a massive scale, because also whats happening in Gaza is unprecedented, she said

Before October 2023, Azaiza had about 25,000 Instagram followers, according to the social media analytics firm Social Blade That number has since grown to more than 18 million Bisan Owda has 38 million followers, and Hind Khoudary recently surpassed one million

The reports show how much violence has affected their lives

Plestia Alaqad said she wanted to tell stories about the beauty of Gaza before the events of October 7 turned her into a de facto war reporter

After one of her videos capturing a blast going off near her building went viral, she said she felt a duty to continue Like many Gazans on social media, she posted in fluent English, allowing her photos and videos on Instagram to reach a global audience that now numbers 47 million people

As a Palestinian living in Gaza, you dont have a choice but to be a war journalist, Alaqad, 22, said in an interview with CNN Overnight, your life changes Overnight, a war happens and you dont have an option You found yourself reporting to the world whats happening, whether you like it or not

Alaqad has been on both sides of this dynamic, first as a citizen journalist and now as a viewer Through October and much of November of 2023, she was reporting daily on what was happening on the ground in Gaza, with her followers hanging on to every update

As overwhelming as it felt at times to have so many people relying on her for updates, Alaqad said she wanted viewers to feel connected She didnt want people to learn from TV about some new tragedy in Gaza and just move on with their day

She wanted viewers to see Palestinians as someones child, friend or neighbor, with lives and dreams of their own

Its not about me as Plestia, she said Its about me as a Palestinian Id like people to know about Palestine, to see Gaza through my eyes

In November, she made the difficult decision to leave Gaza with her family after her uncle in Australia secured emergency visas for them Now watching from afar in Melbourne, shes the one refreshing her social media feeds and anxiously texting relatives, friends and colleagues to make sure theyre safe

The everyday details are just as moving as the violence

Viewers who scroll back far enough through these Gazans social media posts are hit with sobering reminders of a life before the war Motaz Azaiza was still documenting flareups in the ongoing conflict before the events of October, but he also spent time near the sea photographing children playing and shared a selfie celebrating his graduation from university Plestia Alaqad filmed a tour of Gazas Old City, did a photoshoot in a motorcycle helmet and posed for pictures with dogs

They would go to restaurants They would go to the beach They would watch their favorite films They would take care of the gardens They have a life just like me and you, said Leyla Hamed, the sports journalist

Others can still see themselves in parts of these peoples lives, even as they are under siege Last month, Owda shared that she had to chop off her signature brown curls because she no longer had clean water or products to care for her hair properly

It might seem trivial to mourn the loss of hair in such a situation, but it was an intimate detail people could identify with, said Syed Faizan Raza, a design researcher in Islamabad

It goes back to those moments of relatability and how you are familiar with these people Everyone knows these people by name and theyre following them quite diligently, he said

The connections are virtual, but the danger is very real

The work of these photographers, storytellers and citizen journalists is dangerous

At least 82 journalists and media workers have been killed while covering the war as of January 16, 75 of them Palestinian, according to data from the Committee to Protect Journalists Reporters in the region also face assaults, arrests and threats, in addition to communications blackouts

The landscape is so dire that some have decided to cease their efforts On January 10, blogger Ismail al Dahdouh announced to his 12 million Instagram followers that he would no longer be documenting the war in order to seek safety with his family

Other Palestinian creators continue to record with relentless dedication Sometimes, they express despair over whether anyone is listening, or whether their reporting makes a difference

One day in early December, their exhaustion was especially apparent

I no longer have any hope of survival like I had at the beginning of this genocide, and I am certain that I will die in the next few weeks or maybe days, Owda wrote in a December 2 Instagram post Israel has denied allegations of genocide in Gaza, claiming its actions in the region are in selfdefense and that it is targeting Hamas rather than civilians

The phase of risking my life to show the world whats happening is now over A new phase has begun the phase to survive, Motaz Azaiza wrote in Arabic in an Instagram post that same day

Despite the pain, people watch to learn and bear witness

Even as people flock to learn from and support these Palestinians on social media, Noor says the exchange is overshadowed by feelings of powerlessness

For Azaiza, the photojournalist, its almost like hes a representative of his people, Noor said By extension, your care isnt just for him Your care is for everyone because he is showcasing what his people are suffering

Still, Noor and other followers hope that their advocacy for Palestinian stories can keep public attention on the crisis in Gaza and put pressure on elected officials to bring about an end to the fighting

In the US, people are encouraging each other to contact their representatives in Congress and demand they support a lasting ceasefire Protests, demonstrations and public gatherings in support of Palestinians have grown in size since the start of the war, according to data from scholars and researchers with the Crowd Counting Consortium A December 2023 Quinnipiac University poll found that US voter support for sending military aid to Israel had dropped Israel is facing mounting international pressure to agree to a ceasefire, or at least moderate its offensive in Gaza And in what it describes as a new phase of the conflict, the Israeli military said it has started to withdraw some troops

Its difficult to attribute these events to any one factor, and Fatafta cautions against drawing too straight a line between social media and changing opinions on the war There is a rich history of solidarity with Palestine in the Arab world and beyond, and Fatafta said the massive social media followings of Palestinians like Azaiza partly reflect that

And its only growing, because also the events on the ground are beyond atrocious, and they do merit a global reaction, Fatafta said

If there wasnt, I would be scared to live in this world

Constantly checking Instagram to make sure Azaiza and other Palestinians documenting the war are still alive feels dystopian, Noor said Shes had to take a break at times because the horrors she was seeing through her phone were affecting her ability to function But she knows those in Gaza dont have that luxury, so she never looks away for long

The least that I can do, or anybody can do, is to bear witness,

The UNs top court ordered Israel to prevent genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, but stopped short of calling for Israel to suspend its military campaign in the wartorn enclave, as South Africa had requested

In a hearing in The Hague, the Netherlands, on Friday, the International Court of Justice ICJ said Israel must take all measures to limit the death and destruction caused by its military campaign, prevent and punish incitement to genocide, and ensure access to humanitarian aid

South Africa had accused Israel of violating international laws on genocide, written in the wake of the Holocaust, and wanted the court to order Israel to cease fire in Gaza

While the ICJ did not order Israel to end its war, the ruling represents a blow to Israel, which had hoped the case would be dismissed outright

Fridays decision related only to South Africas request for emergency measures, which act like a restraining order while the court considers the full merits of the genocide case, which could take years

The catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is at serious risk of deteriorating further before the court renders its final judgment, Judge Joan Donoghue, the ICJs president, said Friday

By an overwhelming majority, the courts 17judge panel voted in favor of six emergency measures, ordering Israel to take all measures within its power to prevent acts which could fall foul of the 1948 Genocide Convention, and to ensure its military does not commit genocidal acts in Gaza

It also ordered Israel to prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to commit genocide, and to guarantee the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance in the enclave

Israel was also ordered to preserve evidence related to allegations of genocide and report back to the court on its compliance with these measures in a month

The ICJs decisions are binding and cannot be appealed, but it has no way of enforcing them In 2022 it ordered Russia to immediately suspend its invasion of Ukraine, but Moscows war rages on nearly two years later

Israel had already indicated it would not accept the ICJs orders Nobody will stop us not The Hague, not the axis of evil and not anybody else, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus office wrote on X

The courts panel ordinarily comprises 15 judges, but was expanded in this case by additional judges from South Africa and Israel

Israels judge Aharon Barak, an 87yearold Holocaust survivor and former president of the countrys Supreme Court, voted in favor of two of the emergency measures, ordering Israel to curb incitements to genocide and to ensure aid can enter the enclave

Both sides hail ruling

Apart from its call for a halt in fighting, the bulk of South Africas nine requests to the court were granted

The Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister, Riyad alMaliki, said the ICJ had ruled in favor of humanity and international law and thanked South Africa for bringing the case to the court

South Africas President Cyril Ramaphosa called the ruling a victory for international law, for human rights, and above all for justice

While South Africa said it was disappointed that the court did not order a ceasefire, its Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor said she believes Israel will have to observe one if it is to comply with the other measures ordered

In exercising the order, there would have to be a ceasefire, she said after the hearing Without it the order doesnt actually workDespite the courts ordering emergency measures, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hailed the ruling as a rejection of discrimination against his country

Like every country, Israel has an inherent right to defend itself, he said in a short video message The vile attempt to deny Israel this fundamental right is blatant discrimination against the Jewish state, and it was justly rejected

However, not all members of Netanyahus cabinet welcomed the ruling Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant criticized the courts decision to hear the case altogether, claiming the ICJ granted South Africas antisemitic request to discuss the claim of genocide in Gaza, and now refuses to reject the petition outright

Israeli war cabinet minister Benny Gantz said, Those truly needing to stand trial are those that murdered and kidnapped children, women and the elderly, referring to those killed and taken hostage by Hamas on October 7

Palestinian militant group Hamas also welcomed the courts decision in a statement on Friday, saying it anticipates further court decisions convicting Israel of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity

A very significant rebuke

Legal experts have said that, while the court did not grant the most explosive of South Africas requests, in finding that Israel is plausibly violating laws on genocide, its decision is damning

Even though it is not a definitive verdict, it is a very significant rebuke for the armed forces of a democratic state that sometimes says it has the most moral army in the world, Janina Dill, codirector at Oxford Universitys Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict, told CNN

The world court looked at Israels actions in Gaza and said it is not implausible that its violating the Genocide Convention I dont see how that can possibly be a victory In some sense its a rebuke, and it is also a rebuke to the governments of the world that support Israel in its actions in Gaza, she said

In the initial hearing two weeks ago, South Africa alleged that Israels leadership was intent on destroying the Palestinians as a group in Gaza, and that its aerial and ground assaults aimed to bring about the destruction of Palestinians in the enclave

South Africa and Israel are both parties to the Genocide Convention, meaning they are obliged not to commit genocide and to prevent and punish it

Israel reacted furiously to the accusation and rejected what it called South Africas grossly distorted story, telling the court its war in Gaza was fought in selfdefense, that it was targeting Hamas rather than Palestinian civilians, and that its leadership had not displayed genocidal intent

It said the accusation of genocide was an attempt to pervert the meaning of the term and empty it of its unique force

Israel claimed if genocidal acts had been committed, they were perpetrated against Israel on October 7, when Hamas fighters stormed into the country from Gaza, killing more than 1,200 people and taking 240 hostage, according to Israeli officials Israels retaliatory offensive in Gaza has since killed more than 26,000 people, according to the Hamasrun health ministry in the enclave

A historic ruling by the United Nations top court in a genocide case against Israel on Friday was welcomed by the three main parties it involved Israel, South Africa and the Palestinians But at the same time, no one got what they asked for

The International Court of Justice in The Hague, the Netherlands, ordered Israel to take all measures to prevent genocide in Gaza after South Africa accused Israel of violating international laws on genocide in its war in the territory

It rejected Israels request for the case to be thrown out, but it also stopped short of ordering Israel to halt the war as South Africa has asked

I would have wanted a ceasefire, said South African foreign minister Naledi Pandor after the ruling in The Hague She said that she was still satisfied with the outcome

Israel went to war with Hamas in Gaza after the Palestinian militant group launched a brutal attack on the country on October 7, killing 1,200 people and taking more than 250 people hostage

The war has resulted in the death of more than 26,000 people in Gaza, according to the Hamasrun health ministry, and left much of the enclave in ruins Israel has pledged not to stop its campaign until all the remaining hostages are released and Hamas is destroyed

The case at the ICJ marks the first time Israel has been brought before the court on accusations of violating the 1948 UN Genocide Convention, which was drafted in part due to the mass killings of Jewish people in the Holocaust during the Second World War

Still, many Israelis hailed the ruling on Friday as a win for the Jewish state Eylon Levi, an Israeli government spokesperson, said the court dismissed South Africas ridiculous demand to tell Israel to stop defending its people and fighting for the hostages Avi Mayer, the former editor in chief of the Jerusalem Post called it a devastating blow to those accusing the Jewish state of genocide

The most dramatic thing is that no ceasefire was ordered, Shelly Aviv Yeini, head of the international law department at the Hostages and Missing Persons Families Forum, told CNN, adding that a potential ceasefire order was Israels biggest fear, especially as it would have come as over a hundred hostages remain in Gaza

The discourse in Israel has so far focused on only ending the war once the hostages are freed, she said, adding that Israel would have struggled to live with a ceasefire order that doesnt guarantee the return of the captives

So, I think this is quite an expected outcome, and something that Israel will be able to comply with, she said, adding that the courts order for Israel to deliver humanitarian aid and report back to the ICJ on its actions is doable

A dark day in Israels history

Despite the outcome being perceived by some as being in Israels favor, experts warned of the reputational damage faced by the Jewish state

I would not call it a win, but I would say it could have been worse, Robbie Sabel, professor of international law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, told CNN The fact that in public eyes therell be an association that Israels acts could have led to genocide, clearly this is harmful public relations

Fridays measure was an interim measure by the ICJ as the court considers a full ruling on whether Israel is guilty of violating the Genocide Convention That ruling could take years

Sabel said that while he is absolutely convinced that the ICJ will eventually find Israel not guilty of genocide, he worries that by that time the public may have forgotten that

If they had asked us to stop defending ourselves, we would have had a problem, and at least we dont have that problem, he said

Yeini said it was nonetheless a a very dark day in Israels history

For some Palestinians, however, the courts ruling didnt go far enough

Mohammed elKurd, a Palestinian activist from Jerusalem, said the ICJ failed on South Africas most important request to suspend the military operations Not shocking, but stings nonetheless, he said on X, formerly Twitter

Until the Israeli regimes genocidal assault on Gaza stops, we should keep protesting and disrupting in every way possible This is todays lesson,

Israel is appearing before the International Court of Justice in a high stakes case that could change the course of the brutal war in Gaza

It is an unprecedented case Experts say it is the first time that the Jewish state is being tried under the United Nations Genocide Convention, which was drawn up after the Second World War in light of the atrocities committed against the Jewish people during the Holocaust

The South African government, a successor to the apartheid regime that was made a pariah on the international stage three decades ago, brought the case against Israel, accusing it of being in breach of its obligations under the convention in its war on Hamas in Gaza

Israel has firmly rejected the claim, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu calling it a false accusation

Israeli President Isaac Herzog said on Tuesday that his country will present a case using selfdefense to show that it is doing its utmost under extremely complicated circumstances to avert civilian casualties in Gaza

Eliav Lieblich, a professor of international law at Tel Aviv University, told CNN the case is significant politically and legally An allegation of genocide is the gravest international legal allegation that can be made against a state, he said

Heres what we know about this case

What is South Africa saying

South Africa has taken Israel to the ICJ, also known as the World Court, on claims that it is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and failing to prevent genocide

On the first of two days of hearings, South Africa on Thursday told the court that Israels leadership had declared their genocidal intent in public comments surrounding the war, and that the actions of its military showed a pattern of genocidal conduct

South Africas representatives argued that the publicly available evidence of the scale of the destruction resulting from the bombardment of Gaza, and the deliberate restriction of food, water, medicines and electricity available to the population of Gaza, demonstrates that the government of Israel is intent on destroying the Palestinians in Gaza as a group

The acts in question include killing Palestinians in Gaza, causing them serious bodily and mental harm, and inflicting on them conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction, South Africa added in its 84page filing to the court

More than 23,000 people have been killed in Gaza since October 7, according to the Hamasrun Ministry of Health in Gaza

The United Nations defines genocide as an act committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group

The UN says that it was developed partly in response to the Nazi policies of systematic murder of Jewish people during the Holocaust

In eight pages, the filing at the ICJ details what South Africa describes as expressions of genocidal intent by Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and members of his cabinet

South Africa has also asked the court to issue provisional measures ordering Israel to stop its war in Gaza, which it said was necessary in this case to protect against further, severe and irreparable harm to the rights of the Palestinian people A provisional measure is a temporary order to halt actions, or an injunction, pending a final ruling

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, a grouping of 57 Muslim countries, as well as Jordan, Turkey and Malaysia have so far backed the case

What is the International Court of Justice

The ICJ is based in The Hague in the Netherlands and was set up in June 1945 by the Charter of the United Nations

The court tries governments while the International Criminal Court, also in The Hague, prosecutes individuals Israel doesnt recognize the ICC so the court has no jurisdiction over it Israel however is a signatory to the Genocide Convention, which gives the ICJ jurisdiction over it

Member states of the UN and those who have accepted the ICJs jurisdiction can present cases The court accepts cases in which the states involved have each accepted its jurisdiction The ICJ is composed of 15 judges who serve nineyear terms Current judges are from the US, Russia, China, Slovakia, Morocco, Lebanon, India, France, Somalia, Jamaica, Japan, Germany, Australia, Uganda and Brazil Five seats come up for election every three years, with no consecutive term limit

Four new judges will take their seats in February, one of whom is South Africas Dire Tladi

Adhoc judges can be appointed by parties in contentious cases between two states in this instance Israel and South Africa bringing the number of judges in the case to 17 South Africa has appointed Dikgang Moseneke, the countrys former deputy chief justice, and Israel has named Aharon Barak, expresident of the countrys Supreme Court

Experts say a final ruling could take years

How has Israel responded

Israel has called the case a blood libel by South Africa, a thinly veiled accusation of antisemitism, and Netanyahu has in turn said that it is Hamas that has committed genocide, adding the Israeli military is acting in the most moral way and does everything to avoid harming civilians

And I ask where were you, South Africa, and the rest of those who slander us, where were you when millions were murdered and displaced from their homes in Syria, Yemen and other arenas You werent there, the prime minister said

Israel will nonetheless appear before the court

Thats because it is a signatory to the UNs 1948 Genocide Convention, which was drafted in the aftermath of the Holocaust The treaty gives the ICJ the authority to adjudicate in cases, which can be brought by parties not directly affected by the alleged genocide in question

Since the court clearly has jurisdiction, it would be strange if Israel would simply not appear, said Lieblich Also, genocide is a grave allegation, and states usually want to make their case

The Israeli publics view of the case reflects the political disagreements in the country, Lieblich said Some view the proceedings as just another case of international bias against Israel Many others are angry because they think that the case was only made possible because of irresponsible statements by farright politicians, that in their views dont represent actual policy

But he said that few in the Israeli mainstream are willing to accept the genocide allegations They mostly view the war as one of selfdefense against Hamas, which due to the latters tactics result in wide but unintended harm to civilians

Polls show that Israelis overwhelmingly support the war

Citing an Israeli diplomatic cable, Axios reported that Israel has mobilized its diplomats to lobby host nations to back its position and create international pressure against the case Its strategic goal, it said, is for the court to reject the request for an injunction, refrain from accusing Israel of committing genocide, and acknowledge that it is operating according to international law

A ruling by the court could have significant potential implications that are not only in the legal world but have practical bilateral, multilateral, economic, security ramifications, Axios cited the cable as saying

Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy said Pretoria is criminally complicit with Hamas campaign of genocide against our people

He also accused it of double standards, and backing former Sudanese President Omar alBashir, who faces a warrant issued by the ICC

How tragic that the rainbow nation that prides itself on fighting racism will be fighting pro bono for antiJewish racists, he said in a January 2 speech posted on X We assure South Africas leaders History will judge you And it will judge you without mercy

Lieblich said South Africa appears to be positioning itself in opposition to the US dominance in the international order

While it pursues the case against Israel, South Africa has criticized the ICCs arrest warrant against Vladimir Putin, and has also refrained in the past from arresting Omar alBashir, he said So, there is a clear international statement here South Africa has been very vocal about what it views as Western double standards and this case is a part of that campaign

Why is this case significant

While the ICJ has ruled against Israel in the past, it did so through nonbinding advisory opinions that are requested by UN bodies such as the General Assembly

This is the first time Israel is being sued in the ICJ in what is known as a contentious case, where states directly raise cases against each other

In 2004, the ICJ issued an advisory opinion declaring Israels separation barrier in the occupied West Bank to be in violation of international law, and called for it to be torn down Israel ignored that decision

If the ICJ eventually rules that Israel is directly responsible for genocide, it will be the first time it has found a state has commited genocide, experts said

This would be a significant precedent first and foremost because the ICJ never ruled, so far, that a state actually committed genocide, Lieblich said The farthest it went was to rule that Serbia failed to prevent genocide by militias in Srebrenica In this sense, such a ruling would be legally uncharted territory

While no state has been found to be directly responsible for genocide by the court, both Myanmar and Russia have faced provisional measures in genocide cases in recent years

All ICJ judgements are final, without appeal and binding

But the ICJ cant guarantee compliance In March 2022, for example, the court ordered Russia to immediately halt its military campaign in Ukraine Kyiv, which brought the case, disputed the grounds for Russias invasion, and asked for emergency measures against Russia to halt the violence before the case was heard in full

What happens if the court orders Israel to halt the war

Israel is set to appear in public hearings before the court on Friday to contest South Africas genocide accusations

A ruling on genocide could take years to prove, but the injunction on the Gaza war that Pretoria has asked the ICJ for could come much sooner

Daniel Machover, a Londonbased lawyer and international justice expert, told CNN that a provisional measure should be a quick decision that would be taken before there is a final ruling on genocide

South Africa, he said, only needs to demonstrate that it has standing to bring the case, has acted on its duty to prevent genocide, that there is a plausible legal argument that violations of the Genocide Convention are or may be taking place, and that there is a real and imminent risk that irreparable prejudice will be caused to Gaza residents before the court gives its final decision, such that the court needs to order Israel to stop the war

Francis Boyle, an American human rights lawyer who won two requests at the ICJ under the Genocide Convention against Yugoslavia on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, told Democracy Now that based on his review of the documents submitted by South Africa, he believes Pretoria will indeed win an order against Israel to cease and desist from committing all acts of genocide against the Palestinians

Boyle, based on his experience in the Bosnian case, said the order could come within a week of this weeks hearings

Lieblich doubts that Israel would cease the fighting altogether should the court issue an injunction on the war Instead, it could attack the legitimacy of the court and its judges, considering that some of them are from states that dont recognize Israel It would also matter whether the decision is unanimous, he added

The consequences of noncompliance might range from reputational harm and political pressure to sanctions and other measures by third states or further resolutions in the UN, he said The key for Israel would probably be how its key allies would act in such a case

He added that while the threshold for an injunction is relatively low, in the main case, proving genocide requires two elements proof that certain unlawful acts were committed, and that these acts were committed with specific intent to destroy a certain group

In past ICJ cases the court required a high threshold to prove such allegations, he said Here the challenge for South Africa would be to prove that statements by some Israeli officials actually reflect the states intent as a whole, and also that Israels actions on the ground were both unlawful and actually tied to an intent to destroy the group as such

Could a ruling have implications outside Israel

The fallout of an ICJ ruling could spread beyond Israel, according to experts It would not only embarrass Israels closest ally, the US, but could also deem Washington complicit in the alleged violation of the Genocide Convention

Even though the South African application focuses on Israel, it has huge implications for the United States, especially President Joe Biden and his principal lieutenants, wrote John Mearsheimer, an American political scientist

Why Because there is little doubt that the Biden administration is complicitous in Israels war, he said

Biden has acknowledged that Israel is carrying out indiscriminate bombing in Gaza, but he has also vowed to protect the country The US has bypassed Congress twice to sell military equipment to Israel during the war

Leaving aside the legal implications of his behavior, Bidens name and Americas name will be forever associated with what is likely to become one of the textbook cases of attempted genocide, Mearsheimer wrote

Even if Israel ignores an order by the ICJ, there will be a legal obligation among other signatories to comply, said Machover So, anyone assisting Israel at that point will be in breach of that order

We could have worldwide litigation if states dont stop assisting Israel there will be legal ripples across the world he said

The case could also have an impact on the Israeli public, Machover said He believes that a significant number of Israelis have not looked in the mirror and lack awareness of the real impact of the war on Palestinians in Gaza

The ICJ case, he hopes, would prompt the Israeli public to engage in some sort of selfreflection

A British surgeon who led an emergency medical team in central Gaza says the situation at AlAqsa hospital has been beyond any doubt the worst thing hes seen in his career, as Jordans monarch warned Israels bombardment was creating an entire generation of orphans

Theres been multiple traumatic amputations of children horrific burns, the likes of which Ive never seen before, Dr Nick Maynard told CNNs Isa Soares on Monday after his team found themselves with no choice but to withdraw from the hospital, following increased Israeli military activity

He said that often there is no pain relief to give to these patients at all, underscoring the dire humanitarian situation and lack of medical supplies in the Palestinian enclave following more than three months of Israeli bombardment

I think its fair to say Ive never seen anything like this And I never expect that in my life I would see such an appalling situation, said Maynard, who was speaking from the Egyptian capital of Cairo on Monday after leaving Gaza

The Israel Defense Forces IDF has repeatedly said it is not targeting civilians The IDF has also said that Hamas uses civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, as shields for its attacks on Israel, and that attacking those targets are essential as it works to eliminate Hamas from the enclave

Israel has also said some hospitals are being used as command centers but has provided limited evidence to support that claim

The IDFs operations are contentious, with humanitarian organizations warning that a growing number of medical facilities across Gaza are rendered unable to provide basic services

Ive been going to Gaza for nearly 15 years now, I have many friends who work in hospitals there There are many examples of hospitals being attacked In the last two days since I left AlAqsa hospital, there have been attacks on the hospital, Maynard told CNN

The British surgeon had been in Gaza for two weeks, an experience he described as frightening, saying his team pulled out as the conflict came closer

There was an attack on the intensive care unit, he said We were due to leave it about that time anyways but the following morning, the whole area was taken out of the deconfliction zone, and we were told by the Israeli Defense Forces that we would not be able to go

CNN has reached out to the Israeli military for comment but is yet to hear back

The doctor said his organization, Medical Aid for Palestinians MAP, and Doctors Without Borders, also known as Médecins Sans Frontières MSF, were both operating at the hospital but both sets of foreign doctors had to leave

MAP and the emergency medical team of the International Rescue Committee IRC announced their withdrawal from the AlAqsa Hospital on Sunday citing increasing Israeli military activity in the area

As Maynard and his team left Gaza for their safety, he fears that there are not enough staff to run the hospital in any form at all now

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, head of the World Health Organization WHO, warned Sunday that AlAqsa hospital was the most important hospital remaining in central Gaza He demanded that medical staff and their families be protected, adding the facility must remain functional

An entire generation of orphans

Israels bombardment of Gaza began after Hamas launched its brutal October 7 assault in which some 1,200 people, mostly civilians were killed and more than 200 people taken hostage

Since then, about one out of every 100 people in Gaza has been killed, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, which generates its data from hospitals in the Hamascontrolled Gaza Strip

At least 23,084 Palestinians have been killed and 58,926 others injured in Gaza since October 7, the Hamasrun Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza said on Monday The Ministry of Health in Ramallah said that more than 5,300 of the dead are women and more than 9,000 were children

CNN is not able to independently verify numbers released by the two ministries

A separate statistic released by the international organization Save the Children said more than 10 children on average have lost one or both of their legs every day in Gaza since October

Israels military campaign has sparked an international outcry with a growing number of nations backing calls for a ceasefire

The United States has been pressuring Israeli officials in the last several weeks to do more to protect civilians and implement more strategic strikes but has so far resisted calls for a ceasefire

As deaths continue to climb, the conflict in Gaza has created an entire generation of orphans, King Abdullah II of Jordan said in a speech on Monday

More children have died in Gaza than in all other conflicts around the world this past year, Abdullah said according to the speech which was carried on state media Of those who have survived, many have lost one or both parents an entire generation of orphans

Abdullahs made his remarks during a visit to the Kigali Genocide Memorial in Rwandas capital, according to Jordans Petra news agency

How can indiscriminate aggression and shelling bring peace How can they guarantee security, when they build on hatred Abdullah asked

Without a just peace, on the basis of the twostate solution, the world will continue to pay a heavy price for failing to resolve this conflict, and we will never know true peace and stability in the Middle East, he warned

The speech in Rwanda came after Abdullah of Jordan met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Amman on Sunday, where the two agreed to continue close coordination for sustained humanitarian assistance in Gaza, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Sunday

Abdullah also warned Blinken of the catastrophic consequences of the continuing war in Gaza,

South Africa has filed an application at the International Court of Justice to begin proceedings over allegations of genocide against Israel for its war against Hamas in Gaza, the court said on Friday

South Africa accuses Israel of being in violation of its obligations under the Genocide Convention in its application and argues that acts and omissions by Israel are genocidal in character, as they are committed with the requisite specific intent to destroy Palestinians in Gaza, according to the ICJ

Over 21,507 people have been killed in Gaza since October 7, according to the enclaves Hamascontrolled Health Ministry Among the dead are at least 308 people who were sheltering in United Nations shelters, per the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees

Israel has rejected South Africas claims and application to the world court, saying through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs that South Africa is calling for the destruction of the State of Israel, and that its claim lacks both a factual and a legal basis

Israel is committed to international law and acts in accordance with it, and directs its military efforts only against the Hamas terrorist organization and the other terrorist organizations cooperating with Hamas, its statement said, adding that it has made every effort to limit harm to the noninvolved and to allow humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip

Ad Feedback

Israels aerial bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza, in response to Hamas deadly terror attacks and kidnapping rampage on October 7, have caused widespread devastation in the denselyinhabited coastal strip, prompting outcry from aid groups and the international community

US President Joe Biden said earlier this month that that Israel is engaged in indiscriminate bombing in Gaza US intelligence assessment suggests that nearly half of the airtoground munitions that Israel has used in Gaza in its war with Hamas have been unguided, otherwise known as dumb bombs Unguided munitions are typically less precise and can pose a greater threat to civilians

Many of the bombs used in Gaza have also been massive, capable of killing or wounding people more than 1,000 feet away, analysis by CNN and artificial intelligence company Synthetaic has suggested

Proponents of Israels campaign in Gaza argue that such heavy munitions act as bunker busters, helping to destroy Hamas underground tunnel infrastructure However such bombs are normally used sparingly by Western militaries, experts say International humanitarian law prohibits indiscriminate bombing

South Africas application came as Israels military said Friday that it is expanding its operations in southern Gaza, where civilians were previously told to seek refuge It also claimed to have destroyed a network of tunnels and one of the hideout apartments belonging to Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar CNN cannot independently verify the IDFs claims

South Africa is gravely concerned with the plight of civilians caught in the present Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip due to the indiscriminate use of force and forcible removal of inhabitants, a statement released by South Africas Department of International Relations and Cooperation said on Friday

Furthermore, there are ongoing reports of international crimes, such as crimes against humanity and war crimes, being committed as well as reports that acts meeting the threshold of genocide or related crimes as defined in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, have been and may still be committed in the context of the ongoing massacres in Gaza, it says

As a State Party to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, South Africa is under a treaty obligation to prevent genocide from occurring

South Africa and Israel are both parties to the Genocide Convention, according to the ICJ, which is also known as the World Court and is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations

Hamas has replied to a proposal aimed at the release of the remaining hostages in Gaza and a sustained cessation in fighting, Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced Tuesday

I would like to inform the media that we have received a reply from Hamas with regards to the general framework of the agreement with regard to hostages, Al Thani said at a press conference alongside Blinken in Doha

The reply includes some comments, but in general it is positive However, given the sensitivity of the circumstances, we will not tackle details, Al Thani said

We are optimistic, and we have delivered the response to the Israeli party, he said

The United States is reviewing the response from Hamas now, Blinken said, adding that he would discuss it with Israeli government officials on Wednesday

The framework of the proposal was agreed to by negotiators in Paris at the end of last month CNN previously reported that it would call for a first phase of civilian hostage releases to take place over a sixweek pause, with three Palestinian prisoners held by Israel released for each civilian hostage returned from Gaza That ratio would be expected to go up for Israel Defense Forces soldiers and a longer pause is possible beyond the six weeks for the later phases

Qatar, which serves as one of the key mediators in negotiations with Hamas, received the response from the group on Tuesday, and then relayed it to Blinken when he arrived in the Qatari capital that day, a source familiar told CNN Blinken had arrived in Doha after Tuesday meetings in Egypt another key interlocutor and meetings Monday in Saudi Arabia

After being told about Hamas proposal, Blinkens response was positive, the source said

A State Department official said Blinken was first informed about the Hamas counterproposal by the Qatari Emir, who told the top US diplomat that Hamas had responded an hour before the meeting The Emir outlined it briefly and called it positive, and then the Qatari Prime Minister gave further details, the official told the traveling press State Department officials briefed the White House

President Joe Biden, who was briefed on the Hamas response, described it as a little over the top in remarks to the press later on Tuesday, but did not provide further details

Were not sure where it is Theres a continuing negotiation right now, he said

Officials close to the matter expected Hamas to reply with a counterproposal rather than a straight rejection or acceptance to the proposal given to them more than a week ago

The source familiar described Hamas longawaited counteroffer as reasonable For a first phase, it does not include two of its most prominent and public demands that Israeli soldiers leave Gaza or for a deal to end the war, the official said

In a press statement Tuesday, Hamas said it dealt with the proposal in a positive spirit, ensuring a comprehensive and complete ceasefire, ending the aggression against our people, ensuring relief, shelter, and reconstruction, lifting the siege on the Gaza Strip, and completing a prisoner exchange It did not offer specific details about its response

Last week, senior Hamas leader Ismael Hanniyeh said in a statement that the review of the new proposal for a ceasefire is based on the basis that any negotiations lead to a complete end to the aggression

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus office on Tuesday confirmed that Israel has received Hamas response Hamass reply has been conveyed by the Qatari mediator to the Mossad, the Prime Ministers Office posted on X Its details are being thoroughly evaluated by the officials involved in the negotiations

The next hurdle is Israels response Any push for a lasting ceasefire is likely to remain among the foremost sticking points in the longerterm negotiations, as Netanyahu has vowed to continue the offensive in Gaza until Hamas leaders have been killed and complete victory has been achieved

We will kill the Hamas leadership, therefore we must continue to act in all areas of the Gaza Strip The war must not end before that It will take time months not years, Netanyahu said Monday

The sides have been unable to reach an agreement to release more hostages since one in November collapsed That agreement resulted in a weeklong pause in fighting in exchange for the release of more than 100 hostages Another deal to free the more than 100 who remain would be a major breakthrough at a time of huge tension in the Middle East as concerns grow about a wider regional conflict breaking out

The top US diplomat on Tuesday reiterated that the proposal that was presented to Hamas was a serious one that was aimed at not simply repeating the previous agreement, but expanding it

Theres still a lot of work to be done, but we continue to believe that an agreement is possible, and indeed essential And we will continue to work relentlessly to achieve it, Blinken said at the news conference

When human rights activist Ziv Stahl was awakened to the booms of rocket fire on October 7, while staying at her sisters home in Kibbutz Kfar Aza, she did not for a moment anticipate the scale of the terrorist attack unfolding around her Nor did she imagine the horror she would feel when she later called the police, who basically told me no one is coming

That day saw Hamas militants murder her sisterinlaw and several prominent peace activists living in the kibbutz, one of the communities that bore the brunt of the attack on Israel

Stahl, who is the executive director of the human rights organization Yesh Din, says she is not calling for revenge over what happened that day nor is she taking a pacifist position on Israels ensuing war in Gaza against Hamas I am not saying ceasefire at any cost, she said Israel has a right to defend itself and protect Israeli citizens, she explained, but not indiscriminately or at the cost of thousands of Palestinian lives

Her position, which she described as complicated, speaks to the challenge Israels peace movement faces when coming to terms with the worst massacre of Jewish people since the Holocaust

Jewish Israelis who have spent their lives committed to coexistence with Palestinians have found themselves balancing worries about the cycle of violence churned by Israels war and the security needs of Israelis amid great personal loss

Ad Feedback

As Palestinian solidarity protests take place throughout the West, some of Israels small group of leftists, peace activists and human rights advocates, like Stahl, have chosen to take a step back from the public debate on a permanent ceasefire Others say finding an end to the war and forging a twostate solution is more urgent than ever, even if it may be an unpopular opinion in the country that over the decades has drifted rightward politically

Some activists complain that authorities are attempting to equate peace activism with support for Hamas Antiwar protests have been near impossible to get permits for, except for one in Tel Aviv by the leftwing Arab and Jewish Hadash party And in early November, four highprofile Palestinian political leaders in Israel were detained for taking part in an antiwar silent protest

The radical left

At a leftwing community space in Tel Aviv, decorated with a red banner with the words a nation that occupies another nation will never be free, a group of young Israelis discuss their newlyformed antiwar group, which they have named Gen Zayin, which means Gen Z

The groups members have asked CNN to use pseudonyms for them, pointing to the dozens of people arrested since October 7 in Israel for allegedly inciting violence and terrorism Many of those arrested are Palestinian and activists say their arrests and detention are carried out without proper legal justification and simply for showing support for Palestinian people

While in the West, young voters are often more liberal than their grandparents, the opposite is true in Israel, Rafael, one of Gen Zayins cofounders who is using a pseudonym, told CNN A 2022 poll by the Israeli Democracy Institute found that 73 of Jewish people surveyed between the ages of 18 and 24 identified as rightwing compared with 46 of people polled over the age of 65

The groups antiwar position wont be welcomed by most of the Jewish population at this current moment, they say, which is why Gen Zayin members stick up posters in the dead of night and surreptitiously share pamphlets that espouse their antiwar, antigovernment manifesto in high schools

Rafael, 24, passionately supports a twostate solution and accuses the countrys rightwingers, like Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, of emboldening Hamas with their attempt at repressing a Palestinian state The situation is unsustainable, and the only way that we can live in a just, equal, and democratic society is through peace, the end of occupation, eviction of the settlers from the West Bank and the right of return of an estimated 59 million Palestinian refugees around the world, he said

Gen Zayin members are fearful of Israeli public opinion but also feel abandoned by parts of the Western leftist movement, who they see as advocating for the abolition of the Israeli state Rafael raged at an antiwar slogan he saw online Do you support decolonization as an abstract concept or a tangible event it read That tangible event was in reference to Hamas attack, which killed 1,200 people in Israel and led to the outbreak of the war, he said

They dont understand that 7 million Israelis are living here, and arent going anywhere, and a lot of Israelis dont know that the 7 million Palestinians in Israel and the territories are not going anywhere either, he said The only way forward is together

Doxed and threatened

Expressing public sympathy for Palestinians can land you in hot water Some Jewish Israelis have lost their jobs or have been publicly sanctioned for speaking out in favour of Gaza, say activists Ofer Cassif, a Hadash lawmaker in the Knesset, told CNN he was suspended in October for 45 days for saying the Israeli government wanted confrontation

He was also accused of comparing Israels plan for Gaza to the Nazi Final Solution, he said Thats not what I said But they didnt really care because that committee was interested in political persecution, in political silencing of the opposition and dissident voices who raise a voice against the war,

The leftwing, ultraOrthodox journalist Israel Frey recounts how he was doxed and chased out of his home in Jerusalem on October 15 with his wife and two children by farright football ultras It was over a video of him saying the Kaddish, the Jewish mourners prayer, where he prayed for those slaughtered by Hamas and for Palestinian women and children under fire in Gaza

Little by little, the street was filling up They arrived at my home I tried to look through the viewfinder in the door and they closed it Knocking, trying to hurt me Two months later I talk about it with some amusement, but in real time it was very scary Hundreds of people came and tried to hurt me, he told CNN from an undisclosed location, as he is currently in hiding

Riot police officers who came to usher him out of his apartment also tormented him, he said, with one spitting on him, he said CNN has reached out to Yasam, the Israel Police Special Patrol Unit, for comment

Grieving families consider the future

Over a hot cup of tea, filled with herbs he picked from the roof garden of a hostel he coowns in Tel Aviv, Maoz Inon told CNN he became a peace activist a week after his parents were killed in the October 7 attack In that moment, he realized that peace is the only thing that can bring security to everyone living in between the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, he said

He has not been sanctioned in the same way as other people in the peace movement, saying that its down to him being among the families affected by Hamas attack Im using my privilege and 15 minutes of fame of being a victim in order to prevent others from becoming victims,

Not many Jewish peace activists are ready to vocally advocate for peace because everyone is traumatized but I have the words, Inon said

Speaking from a suburban community near Jerusalem, just meters away from the Green Line with the occupied West Bank, Israeli American Elana Kaminka told CNN she used to buy vegetables from a small Palestinian village across the border But everything changed after October 7, when her 20yearold son Yannai was killed as he heroically defended Zikim training base near the border with Gaza, she said

Since then, the metaphorical and physical walls have gone up around her stretch of the Green Line The checkpoints have hardened and many Palestinians living in the West Bank, have seen permits for work in Israel revoked, say Kaminka, who has not visited the village since her son died

If Israelis really understood what was happening in the territories the actual practical meaning of the occupation I think their opinions would be different, she told CNN from the home she shares with her husband and three other children And for Palestinians, also, its very easy to demonize Israelis and every Israeli soldier as a horrible person It is super easy to live in a bubble where you dont have any interaction with the other side

The grief she feels for the loss of her son is all encompassing She has struggled to write or continue with her volunteer work, which includes supporting victims of racist violence and transporting unwell Palestinian children to Israeli hospitals

Kaminka does not have a clear position on the war and, like Stahl, says there are huge security concerns at play, especially when more than 100 hostages remain in Gaza What she is certain of is that, in the longterm, JewishPalestinian coexistence is the only way forward

While pointing to the Palestinian village she used to visit, she said We have to find a way to build a common society that feels fair and feels just to as many people as possible

Israel on Friday rejected what it called the grossly distorted accusation of genocide leveled against it by South Africa, telling the United Nations top court the case was an attempt to pervert the meaning of the term

In the second and final day of hearings at the International Court of Justice ICJ, Israel argued its war in Gaza was fought in selfdefense, that it was targeting Hamas rather than Palestinians, and that its leadership had not displayed genocidal intent

South Africa on Thursday had alleged Israels leadership was intent on destroying the Palestinians as a group in Gaza, and that its aerial and ground assaults on the enclave were intended to bring about the destruction of its Palestinian population

Israel said the case was a concerted and cynical effort to pervert the meaning of the term genocide itself It asked the court, which sits in The Hague, the Netherlands, to dismiss the case as groundless and refuse South Africas request for the court to order a halt to the war

In a statement issued after the second day of hearings at the ICJ, a German government spokesperson said that Germany expressly rejects allegations that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza

Spokesperson Steffen Hebestreit said Germany acknowledges diverging views in the international community on Israels military operation in Gaza but said that the German government decisively and expressly rejects the accusation of genocide brought against Israel before the International Court of JusticeThe ICJ was established in 1945 in the wake of World War II and the Holocaust It hears cases brought by states accusing others of violating their UN treaty obligations South Africa and Israel are signatories to the 1948 Genocide Convention, meaning they are obliged not to commit genocide and to prevent and punish it

In its opening remarks, Israel said it was singularly aware of why the genocide convention was adopted Seared in our collective memory is the systematic murder of 6 million Jews, as part of a premeditated and heinous program for their total annihilation, said Tal Becker, a lawyer representing Israel

But Israel argued the convention was adopted only to address a malevolent crime of the most exceptional circumstances, and was not designed to address the brutal impact of intensive hostilities on civilians during warfare

We live in a time when words are cheap, said Becker But if there is a place where words should still matter, where truth should still matter, it is surely a court of law He said South Africas case was an attempt to weaponize the term genocide against Israel

The UN defines genocide as an act committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, and says the term was developed in response to the Nazis systematic murder of Jewish people during the Holocaust

A final ruling on the case will take years, and this weeks hearings relate only to South Africas request for provisional measures, which act like a restraining order to stop a dispute from escalating while the court considers the full case based on its merits, which could take years

For provisional measures the court need only decide if prima facie, or at first glance, the acts complained of including Israels use of 2,000pound bombs and its restriction of food and water to Gaza could fall foul of the genocide convention It is necessary to establish only whether at least some of the acts alleged are capable of falling within the provisions of the convention, South Africa argued Thursday

South Africa has asked the court to order Israel to suspend its military campaign in Gaza But even if the court does find it has prima facie jurisdiction, the provisional measures it decides would not necessarily be those requested by South Africa

The ICJ has in the past granted similar requests In January 2020, the court granted The Gambias request for provisional measures to protect the Rohingya people remaining in Myanmar from genocide The court has granted similar measures to protect Ukrainians from ongoing Russian aggression, and to Bosnians during the Balkan Wars in the 1990s

The courts rulings are final and binding, but in practice it has no way of enforcing them A 2022 report by Human Rights Watch found continued abuses against the Rohingya remaining in Myanmar, despite the provisional measures And, despite the court in March 2022 ordering Russia to immediately suspend its invasion of Ukraine, Moscows war rages nearly two years later

Genocidal acts perpetrated against Israel

Israel said it felt compelled to share with the court a fraction of the horror meted out on Israeli civilians by Hamas during its murderous rampage, when more than 1,200 people were killed and 240 hostages were taken back to Gaza

Becker, the lawyer, said Israel wanted to share evidence of Hamas atrocities not because these acts, however sadistic and systematic, release Israel of its obligations to uphold the law as it defends its citizens and territory, but because it was necessary to understand the nature of the threat Israel is facing

Legal experts warned ahead of the trial that focusing excessively on Hamas October 7 attacks would not benefit Israels case because it would be beside the point South Africa had stressed that nothing can ever justify genocide, no matter what some individuals within the group of Palestinians in Gaza may have done

Nonetheless, Israel shared multimedia evidence of the carnage and sadism committed by Hamas militants and of the genocidal intent its leadership proudly declared Hamas founding charter mandates the killing of Jews and the destruction of Israel

The court was shown a video of an interview shortly after October 7, in which Ghazi Hamad, a senior Hamas leader, told a Lebanese TV channel We will do this again and again He said the attack was just the first time and there will be a second, a third, a fourth

If there have been acts that may be characterized as genocidal, then they have been perpetrated against Israel, said Becker

No genocidal intent

Much of South Africas argument focused on the alleged genocidal intent of Israeli leadership, which it said was echoed in the actions of its military Israels offensive in Gaza has killed more than 23,000 people since October 7, according to Palestinian officials

South Africa cited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus address to Israeli forces on October 28, ahead of the imminent launch of its ground offensive in Gaza Remember what Amalek did to you, Netanyahu said in his address, which South Africa said was a biblical reference to the divine command from God for the retaliatory destruction of the Amalekites

Malcolm Shaw, representing Israel, said the language was merely rhetorical and pointed instead to other statements by Netanyahu, which he said demonstrates the precise opposite of genocidal intent

Any careful review of the official and binding policy decisions made by the relevant authorities in Israel clearly evidence that such decisions lack any genocidal intent The contrary is true, he said

Israel stressed it was complying with international humanitarian law and attempting to minimize civilian casualties, despite Hamas embedding its military operations in buildings like schools and hospitals

South Africa on Thursday said the evacuation order issued by Israel on October 13 to residents in northern Gaza was genocidal, since it required immediate movement while no humanitarian assistance was permitted

Israel said it was astonishing that a measure intended to mitigate harm to the civilian population had been taken by South Africa as proof of the countrys genocidal intent

Absurd provisional measures

Israel concluded its hearing by asking the court to refuse South Africas request for provisional measures, since it said these would constrain Israels ability to defend itself while allowing Hamas to continue attacks

If resort to force in selfdefense against an enemy hiding behind civilians can be portrayed as genocide and trigger provisional measures, then an inevitable tension will be created between the genocide convention and states defending themselves against the everincreasing capacities of terrorist organizations,

Christopher Staker, another of Israels lawyers, said provisional measures ought to be a temporary shield to preserve rights, but were in this case being used as a sword to give an advantage to one party in a conflict over another

Its absurd to suggest that the only way to ensure observance of the genocide convention in a military operation is to prevent the operation from being conducted at all, he said

Staker also argued that, in ordering Israel to desist from committing genocidal acts, South Africa had implied that violations of the convention by Israel are occurring and so sought an implied ruling on the merits of the full case

It could be days or weeks before the ICJs 15judge panel expanded by an additional judge from each side in this case issues a decision on the emergency measures

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made clear to the Israeli government that Palestinians must be allowed to return to their homes in Gaza as soon as conditions allow and must not be displaced from the strip, the top US diplomat said Tuesday

Blinken announced that the Israeli government had agreed to a plan to allow a United Nations assessment mission to northern Gaza as the Israeli offensive there shifts to a new phase

It will determine what needs to be done to allow displaced Palestinians to return safely to homes in the north, Blinken said at a news conference in Tel Aviv

In a day of talks with top Israeli officials, Blinken said he reaffirmed US support for Israel ensuring that October 7 can never happen again, while also calling on the government to do more to mitigate civilian casualties He also discussed the efforts to secure the release of hostages who remain held by Hamas

Blinken has made five visits to Israel since the October 7 Hamas attacks as the Biden administration sought to keep pressure on the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Its our unique bond and Americas enduring commitment to the people of Israel that allows, indeed demands, that were as forthright as possible in the moments when the stakes are highest, when the choices matter the most This is one of those moments, he Tuesday

Indeed, the stakes of the secretarys latest visit couldnt be higher as concerns mount over the war spilling out into the wider region and the humanitarian toll continues to grow Tens of thousands of people have been killed in the Israeli offensive, millions have been displaced, and the entire population in the wartorn strip faces the risk of famine, the UN has warned US officials have publicly acknowledged that gaps remain between Israels intentions and results when it comes to the staggering toll on civilians

Give the Israelis our best advice

Following Tuesdays meetings, Blinken said the US would continue to give the Israelis our best advice about conducting this war in a manner that achieves the objective of making sure that October 7 cant be repeated, does better by protecting civilians and making sure that people get the assistance that they need

The US believes Israel has achieved significant progress toward ensuring that the Hamas terrorist attack cannot happen again, the top US diplomat said

In his meetings, Blinken discussed the next phase of Israels war in Gaza, which Israeli officials said would be more targeted and involve fewer troops inside Gaza

Blinkens comments after the meetings suggest that there had been more discussion of the future for Gaza than in his past four visits

In announcing the UN assessment mission, Blinken noted that it was just the beginning of the process to make a land now deemed by a UN official as uninhabitable livable again

This is not going to happen overnight There are serious security, infrastructure and humanitarian challenges, he said

Blinken said that Sigrid Kaag, the UNs new senior humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, must have Israels full support

Beyond that, the Netanyahu government one of the most farright in history must move toward a twostate solution if they want the help of their Arab partners in the region with lasting security moving forward, the top US diplomat said

Blinken, who traveled to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar prior to his stop in Israel, told Netanyahu that every partner that I met on this trip said that theyre ready to support a lasting solution that ends the longrunning cycle of violence and ensures Israels security

But they underscored that this can only come through a regional approach that includes a pathway to a Palestinian state, Blinken said

If Israel wants its Arab neighbors to make the tough decisions necessary to help ensures lasting security, Israeli leaders will have to make hard decisions themselves, he said

Rein in the farright

In some of his most direct comments on the matter, Blinken said Netanyahu must rein in the farright tendencies of his government in order to achieve any progress in the future

Israel must stop taking steps that undercut Palestinians ability to govern themselves effectively Extremist settler violence carried out with impunity, settlement expansion, demolitions, evictions all make it harder not easier for Israel to achieve lasting peace and security, he said

Blinken also said that the Palestinian Authority has a responsibility to reform itself, to improve its governance Blinken will meet with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank on Wednesday

The top US diplomat again rebuked the comments of farright members of the Israeli government who had called for Gazans to be relocated outside of the strip, and said that Netanyahu reaffirmed to me today that this is not the policy of Israels government

On fears of escalation to the north, Blinken claimed that neither the US nor Israel wants to see that happen He arrived just hours after news emerged that a senior Hezbollah commander had been killed in an Israeli strike in Lebanon the second such strike by Israeli forces since the start of the year

As I told the war cabinet and other senior officials, the United States stands with Israel in ensuring its northern border is secure, Blinken said Tuesday Were fully committed to working with Israel to find a diplomatic solution that avoids escalation and allows families to return to their homes to live securely in northern Israel, and also in southern Lebanon

In the first month of its war in Gaza, Israel dropped hundreds of massive bombs, many of them capable of killing or wounding people more than 1,000 feet away, analysis by CNN and artificial intelligence company Synthetaic suggests

Satellite imagery from those early days of the war reveals more than 500 impact craters over 12 meters 40 feet in diameter, consistent with those left behind by 2,000pound bombs Those are four times heavier than the vast majority of the largest bombs the United States dropped on ISIS during the war against the extremist group in Syria and Iraq

Weapons and warfare experts blame the extensive use of heavy munitions such as the 2,000pound bomb for the soaring death toll The population of Gaza is packed together much more tightly than almost anywhere else on earth, so the use of such heavy munitions has a profound effect

The use of 2,000pound bombs in an area as densely populated as Gaza means it will take decades for communities to recover, said John Chappell, advocacy and legal fellow at CIVIC, a DCbased group focused on minimizing civilian harm in conflict

Israel has come under pressure internationally over the scale of the devastation in Gaza, with even staunch ally US President Joe Biden accusing Israel of indiscriminate bombing of the coastal strip

Israeli officials have argued that its heavy munitions are necessary to eliminating Hamas, whose fighters killed more than 1,200 people and took more than 240 hostages on October 7 They also claim that Israel is doing all it can to minimize civilian casualties

In response to Hamas barbaric attacks, the IDF is operating to dismantle Hamas military and administrative capabilities, the Israel Defense Forces IDF said in a statement in response to CNNs reporting In stark contrast to Hamas intentional attacks on Israeli men, women and children, the IDF follows international law and takes feasible precautions to mitigate civilian harm

Hamas relies on a sprawling tunnel network that is believed to crisscross the Gaza Strip Proponents of Israels campaign in Gaza argue that the heavy munitions act as bunker busters, helping to destroy Hamas underground infrastructure

But 2,000pound bombs are normally used sparingly by Western militaries, experts say, because of their potential impact on densely populated areas like Gaza International humanitarian law prohibits indiscriminate bombing

Marc Garlasco a former US defense intelligence analyst and former UN war crimes investigator, said the density of Israels first month of bombardment in Gaza had not been seen since Vietnam

Garlasco, now a military adviser at PAX, a Dutch nongovernmental organization that advocates for peace, reviewed all the incidents analyzed in this report for CNN

Youd have to go back to the Vietnam war to make a comparison, said Garlasco Even in both Iraq wars it was never that dense

The heavy munitions, mostly manufactured by the US, can cause high casualty events and can have a lethal fragmentation radius an area of exposure to injury or death around the target of up to 365 meters about 1,198 feet, or the equivalent of 58 soccer fields in area

Weapons and warfare experts blame the extensive use of heavy weaponry, such as the 2,000pound bomb for the soaring death toll According to authorities in the Hamascontrolled Gaza Strip, about 20,000 people have been killed since October 7

Most of the dead are women and children, according to those figures

CNN partnered with US AI company Synthetaic which used Rapid Automatic Image Categorization RAIC to detect craters, smoke plumes and damaged buildings in tasked satellite imagery over the Gaza Strip The findings were manually reviewed by a member of Synthetaic, as well as by CNN journalists

CNN and Synthetaics findings reveal and emphasize the sheer intensity of the bombardment over a very short period of time, according to Annie Shiel, US advocacy director at CIVIC

A highintensity offensive

For over two months, Israel has conducted a highintensity war in Gaza, combining heavy aerial bombardment with relentless rounds of artillery fire, as well as a ground invasion that began on October 27

The operation has wrought devastation that stretches across swathes of the besieged enclave, satellite imagery and video show

In two months, weve had about the level of strikes in this tiny little area in Gaza as what we saw in Mosul and Raqqa combined, said Larry Lewis, research director at the Center for Naval Analyses CNA and formerly the US State Departments senior adviser on civilian harm, referring to USled coalition operations against two ISIS strongholds It is an incredible amount of strikes, periodwise

On November 6 the final day of CNN and Synthetaics dataset the death toll in Gaza surpassed 10,000 people, according to the Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah, citing authorities in Hamascontrolled Gaza

Later that week, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf the most senior American diplomat on the Middle East said the death toll could be even higher

In this period of conflict and the conditions of war, it is very difficult for any of us to assess what the rate of casualties are, said Leaf during a hearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee We think theyre very high, frankly It could be even higher than are being cited

Last week, US intelligence sources told CNN that 4045 of the 29,000 airtosurface munitions dropped on Gaza by then were socalled dumb bombs, unguided munitions that can pose a greater threat to civilians, especially in densely populated territories like Gaza

Some of these are likely to be the 2,000pound bombs detected in the satellite imaging of the craters Israel has a large arsenal of the big bombs, known as MK84s When a GPSguided kit is attached to the MK84, the bomb becomes known as a GBU31

According to two people familiar with the matter, the US has provided Israel with more than 5,400 MK84s since October 7

The devastation that weve seen for communities in Gaza is unfortunately, cosigned by the United States, said CIVICs Chappell Too much of it is carried out by bombs that were made in the United States

Extensive big bomb attacks around Gaza City

The 2,000pound bombs feature prominently in attacks on the perimeter of Gaza City, the epicenter of the Israeli military operation in October and much of November

Israels ground forces eventually laid siege to the city in early November The bombing pattern seen in the satellite images suggests that the heavy bombardment around Gaza City may have paved a path to its encirclement by Israeli troops

In northern Gazas Jabalya refugee camp, satellite images showed two large craters consistent with Israels October 31 bombing, decried by the UN as a disproportionate attack that could amount to war crimes It claimed over 100 lives, according to civilian harm watchdog Airwars, and caused catastrophic damage in the densely populated area

One Al Jazeera employee lost 19 members of his family in the bombing, which Israel claimed targeted Hamas commander Ibrahim Biari, killing him and destroying his base

The two craters left behind by the attack, which experts described as earthquakelike in its impact, were 24 meters nearly 79 feet wide and 13 meters nearly 43 feet wide respectively, according to satellite imagery

Former State Department adviser Lewis said the October 31 Jabalya strike was something we would never see the US doing

It certainly appears that Israels tolerance for civilian harm compared to expected operational benefits is significantly different than what we would accept as the US, Lewis said

A large crater consistent with a 2,000pound bomb is seen on the coastal highway that runs through the Al Shati, or Beach camp In a neighborhood just north of the camp, 14 craters indicating 2,000pound bombs appear in one square kilometer

The Beach camp is one of the first areas in Gaza where Israeli ground troops established a firm foothold Satellite images of the refugee camp from November 6 showed it to have been all but leveled by bombardment

Suddenly, we heard two airstrikes It was loud It felt like an earthquake We saw stones flying everywhere, said one man to a CNN stringer in the immediate aftermath of an apparent large bomb attack on the Beach camp on November 6 We came here to see 10 houses struck

The lethal fragmentation zone

The 2,000pound bombs large 365meter about 1,198ft lethal fragmentation radius is evident in many videos reviewed by CNN, where several buildings are seen to have been flattened in a single strike

On October 24, Israel struck a location less than 100 meters about 328 ft away from Wafa Hospital In an interview with alJazeera almost immediately after the strike, the hospitals director, Fouad Najm, said the attack had terrified the patients and medics The hospital has since gone out of service because of sustained nearby strikes and fuel outages

It is unclear whether the October 24 blast caused significant damage to the hospital

CNN geolocated video of the blast and matched it to 12meter and 15meter craters, consistent with 2,000pound bombs, in satellite imagery

Clearly the hospital is within the lethal fragmentation range of a 2,000pound bomb It would likely have caused damage, said PAXs Garlasco

In one area near Beach camp, seven schools were within the lethal fragmentation zone of at least five craters Satellite imagery captured on November 6 showed widescale destruction in the area Those satellite images also showed Israeli armored vehicles in and around the schools

When you use a weapon so close to a civilian building, it is impossible to remove the chance of damage from the weapon It is going to get hit by something, said Garlasco

On the sixth day of its offensive, the Israeli Air Force said in a tweet that it had dropped 6,000 munitions since the start of the war, averaging 1,000 bombs a dayTal and Zak have no idea how long theyll be deployed in what the Israelis call the Gaza envelope, the area in southern Israel that was attacked by Hamas terrorists two weeks ago

It could be weeks, it could be months, they said Its the same for everyone No one knows, Zak told CNN at a military camp not far from the Gaza border The two young soldiers, whose surnames CNN isnt revealing for security reasons, serve in an artillery unit of the Israel Defense Forces IDF that was moved into the area after Hamas militants killed 1,400 people and kidnapped about 200 on October 7

Their unit is part of a massive buildup of Israeli troops and military material on the Gaza border On top of its regular force, the IDF has also called up 300,000 reservists who reported to their bases within hours Across Israel, highways in the vicinity of major bases are lined with thousands and thousands of cars, abandoned by reservists rushing to take up arms

A ground incursion by Israel into Gaza now seems inevitable On Thursday, the Israeli Defense Minister, Yoav Gallant, told troops gathered near the border that they would soon see the enclave from the inside and said Gaza will never be the same He later pledged that the expected incursion will be the last manoeuvring inside Gaza due to the simple reason that Hamas will cease to exist It might take a month, two but eventually there will be no Hamas

But what that operation might look like remains unknown The IDF could launch a fullscale invasion, or conduct more precise incursions aimed at recovering the hostages and targeting Hamas operatives

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The hostage situation could complicate any potential incursion into Gaza According to two sources briefed on the discussions, the United States has pressed Israel to delay its invasion to allow for the release of more hostages The release on Friday of two Americans held by Hamas signaled the possibility of freeing more hostages, but Israel has not indicated it is considering a ceasefire

What will happen after that is an even bigger question While the Israeli leadership speaks about the need to get rid of Hamas, the plan for the future of Gaza and its more than 2 million people people remains unknown

There is a consensus that any other option than to totally eliminate Hamas would be terrible, not just for Israel, but for the entire area, and then even globally, said Harel Chorev, senior researcher at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at the Tel Aviv University

What it means is basically to destroy the infrastructure there, the city under the city what we call the Gaza City Metro, Chorev told CNN, referring to the vast labyrinth of tunnels used to transport people and goods, store rockets and ammunition and house Hamas command and control centers It means breaking their backbone through any measure, and, of course, destroying the leadership, in Gaza and elsewhere,

But Hasan Alhasan, a research fellow for Middle East Policy at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said the plan to annihilate Hamas could be dangerous and complicated and may have unforeseen consequences

Because Hamas is deeply rooted and embedded within Gaza, its society and geography, in order to defeat them, Israel would have to carry out permanent topographic and demographic change of the Gaza Strip and that has already been happening, he told CNN

Humanitarian disaster

The IDF has told all civilians in north Gaza to evacuate to the south as it continues pounding the enclave with airstrikes That order has created a humanitarian disaster of epic proportions

The UNs Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs OCHA said on Saturday that about 14 million people had been displaced in Gaza more than 60 of the entire strips population Gaza has been under blockade by Israel and Egypt for years, but after the Hamas attack, Israel also cut off its electricity, food, water and fuel supplies

Israel said it restored water supply on October 15, but without electricity to run pumping station, water authorities in Gaza say they cannot even tell if water has been restored, let alone pump it

The concern, within Egypt especially, is that Israels strategy of making the humanitarian situation very difficult in Gaza is ultimately meant to force a mass expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza into the Egyptian Sinai, Alhasan said, adding that Egypt has the backing of all of the Arab states in that it would not allow this

The Jordanians are also concerned that if we see a mass expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza, that this would create a precedent and that Israels right wing government would attempt to solve the Palestinian issue once and for all by expelling them en masse from Gaza into Egypt and from the West Bank into Jordan, he added

Israel has so far maintained it is waging a war on Hamas, not the civilians of Gaza But a spokesman for the IDF told CNN on Saturday that while they try to avoid civilian casualties, they are inevitable in urban warfare

Lt Col Peter Lerner told CNNs Lynda Kinkade with the prospect of ground operation, the IDF remained focused on defeating Hamas It is our role to make sure Hamas can never hold the power of government, of terrorism, that they did, he said

The most just war

The huge military buildup around the Gaza Strip border is clearly visible as is the high morale among the troops Just down the road from the camp where Tal and Zak are staying, volunteers from across Israel have set up a makeshift pit stop for the soldiers passing by, serving food and handing out soft drinks, religious items, cigarettes and most importantly, according to some of the soldiers good coffee

Rabbi Yitzhak, a military rabbi, has been traveling around the Gaza border, visiting troops and offering his encouragement

I am here to make the soldiers stronger, so they can focus on their job as time goes by, they can get tired, I want to make sure they know we love them and appreciate them They are nervous, but they are strong, he said, adding that his main purpose is to boost the soldiers morale so that they can finish the job

Not that he needs to do much The brutality of the terror attack by Hamas has shaken Israel to its core and the large number of its victims has made it personal to most

I dont think theres one person in this country who doesnt know someone who was killed, Tal, the artillery unit soldier, told CNN

One young reservist, who was called back just a year after finishing his compulsory military service, said the war Israel was waging on Hamas was the most just war one can imagine

There is nothing more just than this they murdered innocent civilians Thats why we are here, he said, asking for his name to remain private as he is not officially allowed to speak to media

He and the other young men he served with have been reunited near the Gaza border, training for whats to come next whatever that may be We are ready, but we hope it will end soon, he added

Tight grip

What is clear is that for people in Gaza, it will not end soon What happens to them after the operation ends is anyones guess Most Israeli politicians have remained vague on their plans for the enclave, hinting it could look more like the West Bank in the future

Hamas, an Islamist organization with a military wing, has been in control of Gaza since it won a landslide victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections the last vote to be held in Gaza and then violently expelled Fatah, the faction that makes up the backbone of the Palestinian Authority, in 2007

Unlike some other Palestinian factions, Hamas refuses to engage with Israel It is also in a political war with the Palestinian Authority, which governs the West Bank and engages in security coordination and talks with Israel

Hamas has been designated a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union and Israel, but it also runs religious and social welfare programs in Gaza, which is partially how it maintains a tight grip on the population

So if Israel succeeds in removing Hamas, it will need to replace the group with an alternative government

Avi Dichter, a former head of the Israeli Security agency, or Shin Bet, and the current minister of agriculture, said that what Israel wants to achieve in Gaza is the same level of security control it currently has in the West Bank, where it maintains complete access on its own terms

Today, whenever we have a military problem in every single place in the West Bank We are there, Dichter told CNN Remember in Gaza there is no administration, it has to be built another administration, Dichter said

Harel Chorev, the Middle East expert, told CNN that the only way to rebuild Gaza is by implementing a longterm plan, something like the Marshal Plan that helped rebuild the economy in postwar Europe with the goal of containing the spread of Communism

It will be a postSecond World War like situation in the Gaza Strip in terms of destruction, so it will need to be taken care of, he said He said he believed there would be international cooperation on the rebuilding of Gaza, because international aid worth tens of millions of dollars has been flowing into the enclave for years but much of it has been misused by Hamas, he said

You have to understand how much damage is inflicted on all of the Palestinians by Hamas I was talking to a Palestinian Authority official and their message is clear destroy them, destroy them, this time, Israel must destroy Hamas, otherwise were done, he said Of course, publicly, they condemn Israel, he added

The Palestinian Authority is controlled by Fatah, Hamas political rival

However, Alhasan said securing international help could be difficult if Israel proceeds with its plan to invade Gaza

I think it would be very difficult to secure cooperation from the Arab states on the postIsraeli incursionscenario, because they werent on board with it from the get go I think it will hinge on whether Israel goes for a total annexation of Gaza, or whether it opts for for something else, he said

He said the biggest risk is that Israels heavyhanded approach which could lead to a high number of civilian casualties will only lead to Hamas being replaced by another extremist group

This is what militant groups do They provoke an overreaction, and that overreaction helps further radicalization, and essentially allows them to continue recruiting people to continue to receive support because the further down we go the path of violence, the more it seems that the only answer is violence, he said

The IDF campaign has so far left more than 4,000 people in Gaza dead

I think this is why the mass expulsion scenario becomes suddenly not inconceivable in Israel, if the objective is to eliminate Hamas, but also to prevent Hamas from regenerating or some other potentially even more radical group from emerging, Alhasan added

But Chorev said an international effort to rebuild Gaza economically could break this cycle of violence If all that international money that was invested into the Hamas projects could go to education, to welfare, to industry you know, there are great people there in Gaza and the prospects would be better, he said

As they help their unit fire more missiles towards Gaza, with the goal of taking out Hamas targets one by one, Tal and Zak are not thinking about the future, not beyond the next day or so

In fact, Zak told CNN, they try not to think much at all

We try hard not to have off times Because if you dont do anything, your mind goes to places you dont want to be All of the friends weve lost, the family, many of us lost their close relatives and friends, some even their boyfriends and girlfriends,

The Israeli military has completely encircled Gaza City, according to a spokesperson, as the United Nations main relief agency in the isolated enclave accused Israeli warplanes of lethally bombing UNrun schools sheltering civilians

Nearly a week after Israel first began moving tanks, bulldozers, infantrymen and combat engineer units into Gaza, Israel Defense Force spokesman Rear Adm Daniel Hagari said Thursday that Gaza City has been surrounded The IDFs engineering corps is working to locate and neutralize underground infrastructure, explosives and other threats so that troops can move freely, he said

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency meanwhile highlighted the civilian toll of the ongoing conflict, after agency chief Philippe Lazzarini announced that Israeli warplanes had hit several UNrun schools that had been sheltering civilians More than 20 people were reportedly killed in the attacks, he said

Over the last few hours, I received reports that three of our schools sheltering about 20,000 people have been hit This reportedly has led to the deaths of more than 20 people in Jabalya, and also one person at the beach camp, he said An UNRWA statement later said a fourth schoolturnedshelter had been hit CNN has asked the Israel Defense Force IDF for comment

Chaos of the aftermath could be seen in a fiveminute video posted to Telegram, which showed bloodied bodies strewn across the floor and people screaming at the UNRWAsponsored Jabalya Elementary school

The agencys fuel stocks crucial for moving aid and powering medical services are also completely completed after weeks of an Israeli blockade on essential supplies entering Gaza, Lazzarini also said UN independent experts have previously warned that the import blockade, which prevents fuel, water and food from entering in sufficient quantities, likely violates international law

As the Gaza war nears its fifth month, with more than 25,000 Palestinians civilians and combatants dead and Israel nowhere close to achieving its objective of destroying Hamas, no one seems to have come up with a concrete proposal thats palatable to both parties to pause the conflict, let alone end it But there are suggestions, however halfbaked, from both sides, that show a willingness to talk

Indeed, Qatar the main gobetween says there are serious discussions with Israel and Hamas, and is receiving constant replies from both sides Theyre not negotiations yet, says the White House But with indirect talks ongoing, we seem to be inching towards what Ofer Shelah, Senior Researcher with Israels Institute for National Security Studies INSS, describes as a Zopa a zone of possible agreement

On Monday Axios reported Israel had proposed a twomonth truce in exchange for the release of all the 100plus hostages still held in Gaza Later that day CNN learned that Mossad chief David Barnea had suggested allowing Hamas leaders to go into exile as part of a broader ceasefire On Tuesday, The Wall Street Journal said Hamas was now open to releasing some of the hostages in exchange for a pause in the fighting And Reuters reported that Israel and Hamas had agreed in principle to a onemonth truce, during which abductees would be freed and Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails released

The sticking point there appears to be that Hamas wants a package deal which would include a secondphase agreement to end the war But even if Israel were to okay this, its unlikely to feel compelled to keep its word I dont think even Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar is under the impression that any hostage deal would in fact end the IsraelHamas conflict, Shelah tells CNN Either they dont want to do a deal, he says, or its just posturing for domestic consumption

So how about exile For now, at least, that seems a nonstarter Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman AlThani reportedly told US Secretary of State Antony Blinken that it would never work Hamas leaders, its understood, would rather go down fighting in Gaza They know living abroad wouldnt stop them being knocked off by the Mossad Unlike PLO founder Yasser Arafat, who went from exile in Beirut to exile in Tunis, Gaza is home to Hamas senior leadership Moreover, even Israel doesnt seem overly keen The exile of Sinwar is not Israels position and has not been offered by Israel, a senior Israeli government official told me

And while emissaries are talking, and the IDF and Hamas are fighting, pressure on the Israeli government to bring the hostages home is growing Over the weekend, protesters camped outside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus home to demand a deal to bring them home Right now someone is being raped in a tunnel, former hostage Aviva Siegel told the Knesset on Tuesday On Wednesday, they held a day of action, blocking roads On Thursday, they blocked humanitarian aid deliveries to Gaza It also emerged that Netanyahu had taken to blaming Qatar for slow progress in getting the hostages freed prompting a rebuke from the emirates foreign ministry

An allforall deal is another option thats been mooted since October 7 In other words, freeing all Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails including those whom Israel says have blood on their hands in exchange for freeing all the hostages But even if such a scenario were on the table, a survey published by the Israel Democracy Institute on Wednesday found more than half of Israelis would be against it

For now, though, such talk remains moot, with an Israeli official telling CNN theres no concrete deal on the table Pummeling Hamas, says former IDF General Israel Ziv, ought to help There is no doubt theres not a single Israeli who doesnt want the hostages home, he tells CNN But at the same time we cant gamble on the future of Israel by leaving Hamas in control of Gaza And to have both we need to apply the most military pressure in order to get the maximum position in negotiations

Ziv reckons it will take up to a month longer for the IDF to crush Hamas brigades in Khan Younis, in southern Gaza, where intense fighting has been taking place an UNRWA shelter there was struck on Wednesday, killing at least a dozen displaced Palestinians Any deal Israel is looking to seal, says Ziv, would be more likely to come into effect once the Khan Younis operation is complete

Of course, the endgame in Gaza isnt only subject to military considerations, hostage families demanding a deal, or even pressure from the United States to wind things down Theres also politics The latest polls spell disaster for the career of Israels longestserving leader One recent survey found more than half of all Israelis believe Netanyahus war policies are born of selfinterest Gadi Eisenkot, a former chief of staff who sits in the war cabinet and whose own son was recently killed in Gaza, says he doesnt believe thats the case, but he does say that destroying Hamas is unrealistic

With that in mind, this round of the IsraelHamas war probably wont be the last Israel should agree to almost any kind of deal that brings the hostages home, says the INSSs Shelah Because it wont be the end of the war anyway

Israel has proposed that Hamas senior leaders could leave Gaza as part of a broader ceasefire agreement, two officials familiar with the ongoing international discussions told CNN

The extraordinary proposal, which has not been previously reported, comes as Israel has struggled to achieve its stated goal of completely destroying Hamas Despite its nearly fourmonth war in Gaza, Israel has failed to capture or kill any of Hamass most senior leaders in Gaza and left around 70 of Hamas fighting force intact, according to Israels own estimates

Though it would give safe passage out of Gaza for top Hamas leaders who orchestrated the October 7 attack, draining Gaza of its leaders could weaken Hamas grip on the wartorn area while also allowing Israel to continue tracking down highvalue targets abroad

Senior Hamas officials are known to live in Doha, Qatar, and the Lebanese capital Beirut, among other places outside the Palestinian territories An Israeli airstrike earlier this month killed a top Hamas commander in Beirut

Israels suggestion that Hamas leaders could leave Gaza, though unlikely to be accepted by Hamas, has been discussed as part of broader ceasefire negotiations at least twice in recent weeks once last month in Warsaw by Israels intelligence chief, Mossad Director David Barnea, and then again this month in Doha with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, according to one official familiar with the discussions

It also comes amid a flurry of diplomatic activity to try to achieve an extended break in the fighting and free hostages believed to still be alive in Gaza The White Houses top official for the Middle East, Brett McGurk, is traveling to Egypt and Qatar this week for further talks

American and international officials familiar with the negotiations have said that Israel and Hamas recent engagement in talks is encouraging but that a deal doesnt appear imminent

Pressure on Netanyahu

Pressure is building on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to deliver some kind of resolution The complete victory over Hamas that he has called for is a long way off, by his own admission Meanwhile, anger among Israelis has grown over the inability of the government to bring home the more than 100 hostages being held in Gaza

Israel is not achieving their military objectives, says Aaron David Miller, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace That, combined with the enormous pressure on Netanyahu and his government to bring hostages home, Miller said, has created a situation where Israel would be willing to propose having Hamas leaders leave Gaza

I think theyre simply bumping up against against reality, said Miller And hostage families are beginning to exert tremendous influence

In addition, international sentiment toward Israel has soured over its continued bombardment of Gaza, which has killed more than 25,000 Palestinians, according to the Hamasrun Gaza Health Ministry

For the past two months, the Biden administration has been openly calling on Israel to transition to a lowerintensity phase of the conflict, which US officials argue has started happening, though intense operations continue in southern Gaza

Proposal would never work

The proposal for Hamas leaders to leave Gaza was raised in Warsaw in December by Barnea, Israels top intelligence official when he met with US CIA Director Bill Burns and Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, who has acted as an intermediary with Hamas The official familiar with the discussions in the meetings said it was then brought up again when Blinken was in the Qatari capital earlier this month

In that meeting Blinken was told by al Thani that the Israeli idea would never work, the official said In part because of distrust by Hamas that Israel would in fact end its operations against Hamas in Gaza even after its leadership left

A second official, from the Middle East, was told about Israels proposal by the US

The US State Department, CIA and the Israeli Prime Ministers Office all declined to comment

While its unclear whether in private discussions Israel has named which Hamas leaders they would hope to leave Gaza, there is no bigger target than Yahya Sinwar, Hamas top official in Gaza Sinwar is a dead man walking, Netanyahu and others have said

Sinwar spent two decades in Israeli prisons and is originally from Khan Younis in southern Gaza, where the bulk of Israels operations in Gaza are currently focused Israeli and US officials have said they believe Sinwar could be hiding out in the vast, deep network of tunnels under the city, Gazas second biggest

His closest confidantes and aides are Mohammed Deif, the leader of Hamas armed wing, along with Deifs deputy Marwan Issa Sinwars brother Mohammed is also a senior Hamas commander None are believed to have been found or killed by Israel

Last month Israel dropped leaflets on Gaza offering rewards of hundreds of thousands of dollars for information on the Hamas leaders, including a 400,000 reward for information on Sinwar

The goal is bringing down Hamas as the ruler in the Gaza Strip, said Ofer Shelah, a senior researcher at Israels Institute for National Security Studies

There is no difference if Sinwar dies, or if he leaves, Shelah said If he dies, then somebody could take over much in the same way If we bring all the hostages back and Sinwar leaves, definitely that would make most people in Israel feel that weve won the war

American officials believe it is highly unlikely Sinwar and those around him would agree to leave Gaza, preferring instead to die fighting their sworn enemy

Israel vows to hunt Hamas globally

Israel has made no secret of its intention to continue hunting Hamas leaders long after the war is over

Netanyahu said in November he had instructed the Mossad to act against the heads of Hamas wherever they are Ronen Bar, the director of Israels domestic security agency Shin Bet, has vowed to eliminate Hamas around the world, even if it takes years

Everywhere in Gaza, Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, Qatar, everywhere, Bar said in a recording aired in early December by Israels public broadcaster, Kan

Sinwar could perhaps be convinced to leave, Miller argued, if Israel were to agree to an asymmetrical trade of many times more Palestinian prisoners held by Israel than Israeli hostages

I think he would only consider it in the event the Israelis also agreed to free all of the Palestinian prisoners, Miller said

Whatever the Israelis agree to, Sinwar must know that theyre going to try to kill him, he added Weeks, months years

World events in recent years have brought large numbers of civilians seeking safety to Americas doorstep, from war in Ukraine to spiraling violence in Haiti to the Talibans return to power in Afghanistan

Could the IsraelHamas war lead to a rise in the number of Palestinian refugees coming to the US

Its a complex situation for the Biden administration to consider, with global tensions on the rise and domestic political pressures intensifying by the minute

And several US presidential hopefuls are already making the issue a major point in their primary campaign stump speeches

Heres a look at some key questions, and the answers we know so far

Are there any plans for the US to welcome refugees from Gaza

So far more than 14 million people have been displaced inside Gaza since war erupted after Hamas militants attacked Israel earlier this month, according to the UN

The Biden administration hasnt announced any new measures to resettle Palestinian refugees in the United States, or any parole programs that would create a pathway for them to come here

Right nowthe focus is on getting humanitarian assistance in and trying to work on some measure of safe passage out, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said earlier this month when asked whether some refugees from Gaza should come to the United States

Egyptian officials have yet to open the only functional border crossing that would allow people to leave Gaza

But on the Republican presidential primary campaign trail, several candidates have made a point of saying theyd block Palestinians from coming to the US over terrorism fears Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that controls the enclave and attacked Israel earlier this month, is considered a terrorist group by the US, the European Union and Israel

Some Republican lawmakers have even introduced bills dubbed The GAZA Act, with the letters of the Palestinian territorys name standing for Guaranteeing Aggressors Zero Admission

Sunil Varghese, policy director of the International Refugee Assistance Project, calls such proposed measures xenophobic, and adds that they fail to acknowledge a fundamental reality

Theres no way to get out of Gaza Theres no safe way to get out of the region Civilians in Gaza are stuck there under continuing bombardment Egypt is not opening its borders Israel is not opening its borders Even Palestinian Americans cannot get out, Varghese says

So discussions about banning Palestinian refugees from coming to the US dont make logical sense, he says

Its hard to see it as anything but fearmongering, Varghese says At the same time, I dont think we should lose sight of the fact that there might be very, very vulnerable folks, even people with US ties, that we need to welcome

What are Palestinians saying

Palestinians who spoke with CNN recently from a refugee camp inside Jordans capital said their families dont want to leave Gaza, even if the border crossings are opened

Gaza is their home They will stay there even if it means being wiped out by an airstrike, said AbdelMunim Dababsheh, 49

Hanya Sabawi, who left Gaza as an infant but whose family remains there, told CNN she doesnt know whether her family will have homes to go back to

And the biggest fear of course, is that theyre going to be evacuated and turned into refugees This is what everyone is now openly talking about, as if they didnt matter, she said They dont want to move They would rather die in Gaza than move

Are Palestinian refugees already living in the US

The United Nations estimates that there are 59 million Palestinian refugees in the world, most of whom are now the descendants of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who were expelled or fled their homes during the 1948 ArabIsraeli war That includes more than 1 million of Gazas roughly 2 million residents Many other Palestinians live in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria Far fewer live in the United States

Of the more than 1 million refugees resettled in the United States in the past 20 years, just over 2,000 have been Palestinian, according to an analysis of government statistics by the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute

Thats, of course, a tiny number, and the numbers we see tell a lot of important dynamics, says Jeanne Batalova, a senior policy analyst at the institute who manages its Migration Data Hub

One reason the number in the US is so small Most Palestinian refugees are ineligible to be resettled in the United States due to the way the US admits refugees Most refugees come to the United States via the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, but another UN agency deals with most Palestinian refugees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency That organization does not provide resettlement services, Varghese says

That doesnt mean there are not many people in the United States who consider themselves Palestinians The number of people in the US claiming Palestinian ancestry has nearly quadrupled in the past 30 years, according to MPIs analysis of government statistics A growing share of them are USborn

The fact that we see the proportion of USborn people who identify as Palestinian growing, Batalova says, is because there are not that many coming in

Could more Israelis start coming to the US if the fighting intensifies

The situation is different for Israeli citizens

Coincidentally, just weeks before the war broke out, the United States added Israel to the list of countries whose citizens dont need to obtain tourist visas to enter the US The policy allows Israeli passportholders to apply to enter for up to 90 days the US through a CBP electronic authorization system

Now there is an opportunity to come to the United States which was not available before, so well see how that unfolds, Batalova says

So far, it appears the war has been drawing Israelis to return to Israel from abroad and fight, rather than inspiring many to flee the country But if fighting intensifies, more may come to the US, Batalova says

Are we likely to see an influx of people from the region arriving at the USMexico border

When war erupted in Ukraine, cities along the USMexico border began to see a notable increase in arrivals of Ukrainians and Russians who were seeking asylum in the US

Something similar is unlikely to occur in this case, Batalova says, because Palestinians in Gaza are essentially a trapped population thats not free to travel And the recent changes to US policy that make it easier for Israelis to travel directly to the United States make a stopover in Mexico unnecessary

In addition to vows to ban refugees from Gaza from coming to the United States, several GOP presidential primary contenders have also claimed, without evidence, that those responsible for the October 7 terror attacks in Israel are already crossing the USMexico border

But a US Customs and Border protection spokesperson told CNN that the agency has seen no indication of Hamasdirected foreign fighters seeking to make entry into the United StatesWhat policy steps is the US likely to take

Uniting for Ukraine, a Biden administrations program, has allowed more than 100,000 Ukrainians to come to the United States since it began in 2022

ts unlikely the Biden administration would create a similar program for Palestinians, Batalova says, given existing domestic political pressures, such as the influx of migrants from all over the world already at the USMexico border

Smaller efforts may be more likely, she says, such offering temporary protected status to the hundreds of Palestinians who are in the US on student visas

Well have to wait and see, Batalova says There might be some smallscale symbolic measures

But the more than 1 million people in Gaza whove already been displaced in this war are unlikely to find a home in the United States

The intensifying rivalry between Florida Gov Ron DeSantis and former South Carolina Gov Nikki Haley to lay claim to the mantle of Donald Trumps top challenger, playing out for weeks in closeddoor meetings with donors, burst into the open amid the fallout from the deadly Hamas attack on Israel

DeSantis in recent days has all but accused Haley of inviting Palestinian refugees to the United States a position she has not advocated while dismissing her experience as US ambassador to the United Nations, which he called a worthless organization Haleys team accused DeSantis of lying about her record because his White House bid is sputtering

We know were running for president, and hes trying to say whatever he can, Haley told Fox News on Tuesday

Gone are the days when DeSantis had the luxury of ignoring Haley in the Republican presidential race The unusually heated backandforth over foreign policy a topic seldom at the forefront of the primary until this month has become the biggest flashpoint yet

Less than three months before the Iowa caucuses open the voting in the Republican presidential race, a furious scramble is underway to emerge as the top alternative to Trump, the commanding frontrunner, with DeSantis and Haley locked in the fiercest competition for donors, voters and party activists

The behindthescenes jockeying came to a head last week in Dallas, where a group of prospective donors summoned the campaigns of both DeSantis and Haley to make a case for financial support down the stretch DeSantis team contended he is their best hope to stop Trump from winning the GOP presidential nomination Haley allies said DeSantis was old news, while she was on the rise

DeSantis actions of late suggest he views Haley as an emerging threat if not for the nomination then at the very least to his chances of consolidating support before Iowa He is increasingly confronted by chatter surrounding Haley, including from local reporters in New Hampshire and South Carolina two states where she is polling ahead of him

Early on, DeSantis regularly sidestepped questions about Haleys competing aspirations for the GOP nomination as he was laserfocused on dethroning Trump And before Monday, DeSantis and his campaign hadnt posted once about Haley on X, the social media site formerly known as Twitter

But starting Monday, his rapid response teams X account mentioned Haley six times in 24 hours, and DeSantis has stepped up his criticism of her in recent radio and television appearances

The subject of those attacks stems from the debate over Palestinian refugees caught in Israels war with Hamas DeSantis, who cast all Palestinians as antisemitic, said the US shouldnt welcome any refugees from Gaza

Asked during a Sunday appearance on CNN about DeSantis characterization of Palestinians, Haley said, America has always been sympathetic to the fact that you can separate civilians from terrorists She said half of Palestinians dont want to live under Hamas rule

On Monday on Fox News Radio, DeSantis accused Haley of catering to elites, and his campaign on X mischaracterized her response as openness to admitting Gaza refugees to the US something she has said she opposes DeSantis himself could not identify anyone pushing for the US to take in Palestinian refugees, telling CBS News on Sunday, I think some on the far left have said this

But that hasnt stopped Never Back Down, a DeSantisallied super PAC, from featuring Haleys remarks in a new ad airing in Iowa and New Hampshire, as well as on national television and streaming services SFA Inc, a super PAC backing Haley, accused Never Back Down of misrepresenting her record out of desperation

Haley, who has leaned on her background as Trumps UN ambassador during this period of international tumult, told Fox News on Tuesday that Hamassympathizing countries should take these Gazans now

DeSantis, who draws from his experience serving in the Navy during the Iraq War, said Haley had flipped Asked about DeSantis criticism of her, Haley told Fox, Ive always said we shouldnt take any Gazan refugees in the US

Unfolding duel

A feverish chase is on between DeSantis and Haley to win over highlevel donors

Haley is capitalizing on her strong performances in the first two primary debates, trying to entice some of the biggest Republican contributors to take a leap of faith and invest in her candidacy In closeddoor meetings last week in Park City, Utah, and Dallas, she made a case for herself and against DeSantis

Its time to get in the game, Haley implored donors in Utah, according to an attendee at the Republican summit at the Stein Eriksen Lodge, where many prominent contributors gathered with Utah Sen Mitt Romney in an ongoing quest to find the strongest candidate to challenge Trump

In a win for the former South Carolina governor, Keith Rabois, a top Florida contributor who has previously expressed admiration for DeSantis, is now committed to helping Haley, CNN learned He sent invitations for a 10,000aperson fundraiser to benefit her campaign at his Miami home this week She also recently picked up the endorsement of former Rep Will Hurd after the Texas Republican suspended his presidential campaign Meanwhile, longtime conservative columnist George Will urged South Carolina Sen Tim Scott to drop out of the GOP presidential race and get behind Haley even as Wills wife advises Scotts bid

In public and private conversations, Haleys advisers have been bluntly arguing that momentum is on her side and her candidacy offers the best chance to consolidate the anyonebutTrump sentiment inside the GOP

But DeSantis remains ahead of Haley in most national surveys and, critically, in Iowa In Dallas, DeSantis team argued that he remained best positioned to take on Trump in Iowa, where the Florida governor is on a path to visit all 99 counties and has built out a political operation in the mold of 2016 caucuses winner Sen Ted Cruz The DeSantis campaign also shared internal polling that showed Haley voters would scatter among the remaining candidates if she dropped out, but that wouldnt be the case were the governor to drop out

If I wasnt in the picture, most of those voters who are going to caucus for me would go to Trump they would not go to Haley, DeSantis said later, summarizing the pitch during a campaign stop in New Hampshire

People can support who they want, but lets just not kid ourselves, DeSantis said The nominee for the GOP is either going to be Donald Trump or its going to be me Theres not a path for anybody else

And while Haleys standing has been on the rise, based on a series of polls and the latest fundraising reports, she still has considerable ground to make up It was only last week that she opened her first Iowa campaign office and began bolstering her staff on the ground DeSantis has campaign chairs in every Iowa county

Those fundraising reports, though, also showed that DeSantis is burning through cash at a fast rate and has 1 million in unpaid bills, a warning that the financial troubles from the summer when his campaign overspent and shed staff may not be fully behind him Haley, meanwhile, has spent more conservatively and has more money available for the primary race than DeSantis

Haley also hired two top Republican strategists with deep Iowa experience, including Hooff Cooksey, the campaign manager for Iowa Gov Kim Reynolds successful reelection effort, and Troy Bishop, the field director for Iowa Sen Charles Grassleys winning 2022 campaign She is hiring more staff this month, aides said, but she still has fewer people on the ground than DeSantis and his affiliated super PAC

Both DeSantis and Haley will travel to Iowa again this weekend as their campaigns circle each other in the Hawkeye State

Bob Vander Plaats, who leads an influential Christian group in Iowa and is seen as especially close to DeSantis, told CNN that the Florida governor has been doing everything right to win an Iowa caucus

Still, Vander Plaats said Haley definitely has the time and the lane, and momentum can be a powerful factor for Iowans

The infrastructure will take you far, but it will only take you so far, Vander Plaats said You have to rely on the organic nature of the caucus as well

As the DeSantis campaign has failed to live up to its lofty expectations, Haley has exceeded hers, with the fight between a current Southern governor and a former one now fully joined Both candidates are already preparing for a critical facetoface meeting on November 8, when Republican contenders gather in Miami for their third debate

Its not just donors and voters who are watching the duel unfold

New Hampshire Gov Chris Sununu, who has said he intends to make an endorsement in the Republican presidential race, and Iowas Reynolds, who has not ruled out doing so, are closely studying the trajectory of DeSantis and Haley, aides told CNN, in their respective search to find a Plan B to Trump

While DeSantis has made clear that his path has all but come down to trying to beat Trump in Iowa, Haley is playing more of a long game Her advisers say a strong showing in Iowa, followed by a New Hampshire surprise, would set her up favorably when the race reaches her native South Carolina, home to the first Southern primary

I like her more than any of the other candidates, said Tom Boyer, a retired math tutor from New Hampshire, who came to see Haley at a recent event I just like the way she presents herself and speaks to the people Im hoping she does well

Universities should be places where young people advocate for the causes they believe in, and yes, demonstrate But they should not condone or foster the kind of extremism condemning Palestinians to eternal hellonearth the type that extremist ministers in the Israeli governments, Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, openly promote

To all those protesting in support of the Palestinian people, thank you But to those who think you are supporting my people by defending Hamas, please be aware Your radical positions arent helping us They are hurting us more

In the tiny Gaza Strip, where 23 million Palestinians live, half of those are refugees from the newly founded state of Israel and their descendants from the 1948 ArabIsraeli war For 75 years the refugees have been living in crowded refugee camps depending on United Nations Relief and Works Agency for food rations, education and health care

Four months ago, I had the chance to visit the city of Safed, now in Israel, where my mothers house once stood As the son of a native Gazan father and a mother who was forced to flee Safed in the upper Galilee, I am a product of both lineages Recalling how my mom gave up her home, moving from one refugee camp to another, I was overwhelmed by sadness

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My peoples history has been marked by pain, but until October 7, I didnt know the full extent of the horrors we would endure More than two months into the IsraelHamas war in Gaza, more than 20,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli attacks and more than 50,000 have been injured, according to the Hamasrun health ministry, and thousands of homes have been destroyed Hamas October 7 attack on Israel killed at least 1,200 people The terrorist group also took around 240 hostages and has brought back the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip and marked a new catastrophe in the history of my people

The impact of this conflict has reverberated around the world, including on US college campuses where I have spent much of my life trying to build bridges Since 2015, when I started OneVoice on Campus, I have worked to counteract student body polarization related to the conflict These efforts build on my work dating back to 1990 when I first came to the United States to finish my degree in political science with a specialization in conflict resolution and peace building

In 2006, I opened the office of OneVoice Gaza in Gaza City to galvanize Palestinians behind the goal of a twostate solution reached through negotiation with Israel and our neighbors

As a proud Palestinian from Gaza who has dedicated my adult life to trying to put an end to this neverending cycle of war and suffering for my people, I have learned this No matter how much you and your people are hurting, more hateful absolutism from either side is never the answer While glorifying radical positions may feel like advancing social justice, it only contributes to the very extremism that makes peace impossible

On the Israeli side, the Knesset must move from an approach of conflict management to one focused on engaging in continuous negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization, aimed at reaching an end to the military occupation and the emergence of a negotiated twostate reality On the Palestinian side, those supporting Hamas terrorism must stop

In Gazas legislative council elections of 2005 and 2006, I, along with more than 50 of voting age Palestinians, voted for Fatah, which controlled the Palestinian Authority at the time I did not vote for Hamas because they rejected peace, coexistence and a twostate solution and adopted armed resistance against Israel Unfortunately, Fatah candidates split the vote, giving power to Hamas, who received only 4445 of the peoples vote with only one majority win in one out of 16 districts

Hamas should have been disqualified from running in the first place for its unwillingness to recognize the Oslo Accords of 1993 that made the election possible However, two factors led to Hamas participation in the 2005 elections First, thenPresident of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas thought Hamas would change and that his party, Fatah, would win Second, US President George W Bushs administration clearly misunderstood the situation in the region and, in his effort to spread democracy, supported the inclusion of all Palestinian factions in the election and didnt push to stop Hamas from running even though Hamas had been identified as a terrorist organization by the US Department of State in 1993

Since 2007, when Hamas administered its bloody coup against the Palestinian Authority, Gazans have been subject to collective punishment policies from Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt, which closed its border to Gaza only briefly opening it on occasion to allow the movement of people and some goods

Israel has imposed restrictive regulations, including on food and mobility in Gaza And Hamas October 7 massacre has thrown us deeper into violence and conflict Make no mistake Hamas does not represent me and my people

By using violence which it does not hesitate to inflict upon civilians to achieve its goals, Hamas is a terrorist organization by definition The overwhelming majority of Palestinians do not condone violence and acts of terror Those who lump us together with a terrorist group contribute to misconceptions and stereotypes about our people that sow antiMuslim hate

Associating our people with hatred and destruction has put us in harms way The Council on AmericanIslamic Relations reportedly saw a 182 jump in requests for help and reports of bias incidents against Muslims in the US from October 7 to October 22 from an average 16day period in 2022 And the US Justice Department is now investigating whether last months shooting of three Palestinian college students in Burlington, Vermont, was a hate crime

To those who were exhilarated at witnessing Hamas acts, I ask whether you have experienced the centuries of pain my people have suffered For us, it is not a video on TikTok its real life I ask whether you can bring us closer to the ultimate goal of peace

To those calling for absolutist solutions that rule out common ground between Israelis and Palestinians, you undermine the longterm dream of having an independent Palestinian state next to Israel a twostate solution won through negotiations and diplomacy If you really want to free us from the cycle of war and suffering, help free our world from the plague of radicalism altogether

The main UN agency in Gaza is in turmoil after Israel accused some of its staff members of involvement in Hamas October 7 terror attacks

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East UNRWA fired several employees in the wake of the allegations, which have not been made public

Following Israels allegations, UNRWAs main donor, the United States, and a growing number of countries have paused funding to the organization, which employs about 13,000 people in Gaza, as the humanitarian disaster spirals in the besieged Palestinian enclave

Heres what we know

What is UNRWA

UNRWA was established by the United Nations after the 1948 ArabIsraeli war to provide humanitarian assistance for displaced Palestinians

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The organization characterizes Palestinian refugees as any persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 War

Those who fit that definition and their descendants now number 59 million, all of whom are considered eligible for UNRWA support Israel has rejected the possibility of allowing the displaced Palestinians to return home, arguing that the move would change the countrys Jewish character

Since its establishment, the United Nations General Assembly a voting body of all member states has repeatedly renewed UNRWAs mandate The agency has provided aid to four generations of Palestine refugees, according to its website, covering education, health care, camp infrastructure, social services and emergency assistance, including in times of conflict

At least 152 UNRWA staffers have been killed in Gaza since the IsraelHamas war began, according to the agency

What are the allegations

Details remain scant Neither Israel nor UNRWA have specified the nature of the alleged involvement of UNRWA employees in the events of October 7

An Israeli official told CNN on Friday that Israel shared information about 12 staffers allegedly involved in the October 7 attacks both with UNRWA and the US

The head of Israels Military Intelligence Directorate, Maj Gen Aharon Haliva, met with senior US officials on Friday and gave them specific names and which organizations they are affiliated with, whether Hamas or PIJ Palestinian Islamic Jihad or others, and what exactly they did on October 7, the Israeli official said

We showed them that we had solid intelligence from difference sources

An Israeli official familiar with how the intelligence was gathered said it was taken from Hamas computers and documents confiscated during operations in Gaza, and from interrogations of detainees and alleged terrorists

Israeli officials say some of the attackers who were killed or detained on October 7 had UNRWA IDs on them CNN was not shown the IDs or other intelligence

Israel passed a dossier to the US government that includes specific and asyet unverified accusations against the 12 UNWRA employees, The New York Times reported on Sunday

The dossier alleges one person is accused of kidnapping a woman, another is said to have distributed ammunition, while another employee is described as participating in a kibbutz massacre in which 97 people were killed, the Times reported, adding that it had verified the identify of one of the employees Two Western officials told the Times they had been briefed on the dossier but had not yet verified the claims

UNRWA CommissionerGeneral Philippe Lazzarini has said he received information about the alleged involvement of several employees To protect the agencys ability to deliver humanitarian assistance in Gaza, he decided to immediately terminate the contracts of these staff members and launch an investigation in order to establish the truth, a statement said

Any UNRWA employee who was involved in acts of terror will be held accountable, including through criminal prosecution, he added

In a statement Sunday, UN SecretaryGeneral António Guterres said nine of the 12 UNRWA staff members at the center of the allegations had been fired One other was dead and the identities of two others were still being clarified

Any UN employee involved in acts of terror will be held accountable, including through criminal prosecution, Guterres said, adding that an independent review is forthcoming

In addition to the staffers alleged October 7 involvement, the Israel Defense Forces on Saturday alleged in a statement to CNN that UNRWA facilities were used for terrorist purposes

Asked about that claim, the agency told CNN, We dont have more information on this at this stage The Office of Internal Oversight Services the internal oversight body of the UN will look into all these allegations as part of the investigation the Commissioner General of UNRWA has requested them to undertake

In a statement Saturday, Hamas criticized the decision to end the employees contracts, and accused Israel of trying to undermine UNRWA and other organizations providing humanitarian relief in Gaza

How is Israels relationship with the UN

Israels relations with the UN have sunk to a historic low in recent months

Senior UN officials have been highly critical of Israels war conduct in Gaza, which has killed more than 26,000 Palestinians, according to the Hamasrun health authority in the territory Israeli diplomats meanwhile have been angered by UN calls for a ceasefire

In December, Israeli diplomats lashed out when UN SecretaryGeneral António Guterres invoked a rarely used diplomatic tool to bring the conflict before the UN Security Council In a letter to the 15member council, Guterres urged the body to press to avert a humanitarian catastrophe and unite in a call for a full humanitarian ceasefire

Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Gilad Erdan, who has argued that a ceasefire cements Hamas control of Gaza, criticized Guterres for the move, noting that recent wars in Ukraine, Yemen, and Syria hadnt prompted the same response

The Israeli allegations against UNRWA on Friday came on the same day that the UNs top court ordered Israel to act immediately to prevent genocide in Gaza

UNRWA has long been a target of Israeli criticism Israel has accused the UN agency of antiIsrael incitement, which UNRWA denies In 2017, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought to dismantle the UN body, saying it should be merged with the main UN refugee agency

In November, an Israeli journalist claimed on social media platform X that one of the hostage takers in Gaza was a teacher at an UNRWArun school That report was picked up by Israeli news outlets, prompting the UN agency call for an immediate stop to the spreading of unsubstantiated claims about the organization

UNRWA has repeatedly denied allegations that its aid is being diverted to Hamas or that it teaches hatred in its schools, and has questioned the motivation of those who make such claims The agency has condemned the Hamas attack on October 7 as abhorrent

How has the world reacted

Several Western countries announced the suspension of funding for UNRWA in the wake of the allegations The US State Department on Friday said it had temporarily paused additional funding to the agency

Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Finland and the Netherlands all followed suit Japan said Monday it has suspended funding for the time being

But other countries, including Ireland and Norway, said they would continue funding UNRWA

Norways government on Saturday said the situation in Gaza is catastrophic, and UNRWA is the most important humanitarian organization there International support for Palestine is needed now more than ever

In a statement Sunday, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas urged countries suspending funding for UNRWA to reconsider

Such positions, if maintained, would disproportionately punish millions of our people without just cause, Abbas said, according to WAFA, the official Palestinian news agency

Abbas accused Israel of acting out of hostility for the UN agency, saying Officials in the Israeli government openly expressed that there would be no role for UNRWA, revealing the true motive behind this campaign

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz suggested Friday that Israel will seek to stop UNRWA from operating in postwar Gaza

UNRWA chief Lazzarini described the funding suspensions as shocking and urged donor countries to reconsider Such decisions threaten the organizations humanitarian relief for millions of people, he warned

Funding has long been a challenge for UNRWA and the suspension of funding by key backers however brief raises question on how it will be able to continue to help people in Gaza amid growing fears of starvation

The US previously cut support altogether to UNRWA under the presidency of Donald Trump before being restored under Joe Biden

Hamas is considering a new framework proposed by Egypt that calls for the group to release as many as 33 hostages kidnapped from Israel in exchange for a pause in hostilities in Gaza, an Israeli source familiar with the negotiations and a foreign diplomatic source told CNN

The latest proposal, which Israel helped craft but has not fully agreed to, is laid out in two phases, the first of which calls for 20 to 33 hostages to be released over several weeks in exchange for the pause and the release of Palestinian prisoners The second phase is what sources described as the restoration of sustainable calm, during which the remaining hostages, captive Israeli soldiers and the bodies of hostages would be exchanged for more Palestinian prisoners

The diplomatic source familiar with the talks said the reference to sustainable calm was a way to agree to a permanent ceasefire without calling it that

At the same time, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he believes a deal is achievable because the Israelis put a strong proposal on the table The top diplomat, speaking to the press at a humanitarian aid site in Jordan, said Washington wants to see the agreement come together in the coming days

After months of deadlock, agreement from both sides would be a major step toward ending the war But a failure to agree could deepen Israels presence in Gaza if no deal is made, Israel is likely to launch a largescale ground invasion into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where more than 1 million Palestinians are sheltering Israels allies, including the United States, have warned against the operation due to the potential for largescale civilian casualties

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned on Tuesday, however, that Israel would launch an operation in Rafah with or without a deal

Israel is awaiting a response from Hamas, whose delegation met Egyptian and Qatari mediators in Cairo on Monday An Israeli official told CNN early on Tuesday that a midlevel Israeli delegation of security officials could travel to Cairo Tuesday, but it wasnt clear if it did

A response from Yahya Sinwar, the Hamas leader in Gaza, is expected within days

The length of the first phase of the pause in hostilities would be linked to the number of hostages released, with the latest framework calling for a oneday pause for each hostage, the Israeli source said, although this number is expected to shift during more indepth negotiations

The release of 40 hostages for a sixweek ceasefire had been the basis of negotiations for months, but Israel has agreed to accept fewer hostages in the first phase after Hamas dropped its offer to fewer than 20 people earlier this month

Extraordinarily generous proposal

Blinken said on Monday that Hamas has been presented with a ceasefire proposal that is extraordinarily generous on the part of Israel

In this moment the only thing standing between the people of Gaza and a ceasefire is Hamas, he told World Economic Forum WEF President Børge Brende in the Saudi capital Riyadh They Hamas have to decide and they have to decide quickly, he said Im hopeful that they will make the right decision

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, also speaking in Riyadh, said he was hopeful that Israel and Hamas will accept the proposal

There is a proposal on the table, up to the two sides to consider and accept but certainly the objective is a ceasefire, a permanent ceasefire and dealing with the humanitarian conditions, Shoukry told a panel at the WEF in Riyadh on Monday

He said he is hopeful that the proposal has been taken into account and that we are waiting to have a final decision

Israeli officials have expressed an openness to negotiating the restoration of sustainable calm as part of a comprehensive deal that would effectively end the war

An Israeli source familiar with the negotiations said Egypt has proposed the parties agree to a oneyear ceasefire as part of a comprehensive deal that would see Israeli forces withdraw from Gaza and the release of all remaining hostages and the bodies of those who have died

CNN has reached out to the Egyptian government for comment

Hamas has insisted that a permanent ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza should be part of the agreement Israel has thus far maintained that its operation in Gaza will continue until Hamas is eradicated

Israel has also now agreed to the unrestricted movement of Palestinians to northern Gaza, the sources said, a key demand by Hamas which has held back negotiations in the past

Rafah operation

Hanging over the negotiations is the prospect of an Israeli military offensive in Rafah, which Israeli officials have signposted for months but are now holding back, saying they want to give space to the negotiations

Israeli sources have characterized the latest Egyptian effort to broker a deal as the last chance to avert that offensive

Netanyahu complicated the situation on Tuesday, telling hostage families that Israeli troops will enter Rafah and eliminate the Hamas battalions there with or without a deal, according to the prime ministers office

On Tuesday, the Israeli military said commanders had approved upcoming missions for a possible offensive into Rafah, although US officials told CNN there were no signs of an imminent offensive

The US and other allies of Israel warned such an operation would not have their support unless adequate measures were taken to ensure the safety of civilians

Blinken said in Riyadh the US had not yet seen a plan that civilians can be effectively protected

US officials do not view Israels recent public threats of a potential Rafah incursion as empty rhetoric, one senior administration official said, adding that some signs of preparations related to the possible displacement of civilians had been seen The threat is also seen by US officials as part of the ongoing efforts to pressure Hamas to accept a ceasefire and hostages release deal

Our position on Rafah is absolutely the same, White House national security spokesman John Kirby told reporters on Tuesday

We dont want to see a major ground operation in Rafah, Kirby said Certainly, we dont want to see operations that hadnt factored in safety and security of those 15 million folks trying to seek refuge down there

In a call Sunday with Netanyahu, US President Joe Biden addressed the need for increased humanitarian assistance and reiterated his clear position on a potential Israeli invasion of Rafah, according to a White House readout of the conversation

Philippe Lazzarini, chief of the UNs Palestinian agency UNRWA, said there is an extraordinary deep anxiety prevailing in Gaza, as human rights organizations warned of cruel and catastrophic consequences ahead of Israels looming assault in Rafah

People have not yet been asked to evacuate from Rafah, but there is a sense that if there is no deal this week that this can happen at any time, he said in a press conference from Geneva on Tuesday

Rising death toll

The death toll from Israels bombardment in Gaza continued to climb over the weekend

Twenty two people, including at least one infant and a toddler, were killed following an Israeli airstrike over Rafah, Gaza, overnight into Monday, according to hospital officials

And in Gaza City, seven Palestinians were killed and dozens injured in two separate Israeli airstrikes overnight, Gaza Civil Defense spokesperson Mahmmoud Basal told CNN An Israeli airstrike struck a twostory house belonging to the Tartouri family in the port area west of Gaza City, killing 5 Palestinians and wounding several others, Basal said

In a separate attack, two people were killed and several others injured when an Israeli airstrike targeted a house belonging to the Hijazi family in the Sabra neighborhood in the center of Gaza City, according to Basal

Israeli attacks in Gaza have killed 34,535 Palestinians and injured another 77,704 people, the Ministry of Health there reported on April 30 At least 72 of those killed are women and children, according to the ministry

Twentytwo people, including at least one infant and a toddler, have been killed in an Israeli airstrike over Rafah, Gaza, overnight into Monday, according to hospital officials

The deceased were brought into Abu Youssef Al Najjar hospital in Rafah following the attack, as their loved ones gathered for their final farewells

A video filmed for CNN in the hospital courtyard shows several body bags laid on the ground with dozens of anguished people including men, women and children crowded around their late loved ones

People are seen crouching over the body bags, with some caressing their loved ones lifeless bodies At least one babys head can be seen sticking out of a bag, as the woman beside it shouts My whole family has perished

The babys uncle, Mahmoud Abu Taha, was carrying the 1yearolds lifeless body while talking to the camera, saying his parents had tried having children for 10 years before he was born

We were sitting in our homes, not doing anything It was unexpected when they struck the house Everyone was asleep in their beds most of the people that were killed were displaced they were women and children, he said

Lifting the baby boys body to the camera, Mahmoud Abu Taha cries out, this is who they are targeting This is their objective This is the generation theyre looking for This is the safe Rafah they talk about

In response to a CNN request for comment regarding the Rafah strike on Monday, the Israel Defense Forces IDF said in a statement that its fighter jets struck terror targets where terrorists were operating within a civilian area in southern Gaza

The IDF will continue to foil terrorist activity and protect Israeli civilians, in accordance with international law,

Another member of the Abu Taha family says in the video that 10 of his relatives were killed in the airstrike Some of his relatives were originally displaced from Khan Younis, where several of them were killed in a previous Israeli airstrike The remaining few who had fled Khan Younis for the safety of Rafah have now been killed overnight in Rafah, he says

They were sleeping in their homes when the airstrike hit at around 1220 amnowhere is safe The entire Gaza Strip is a target, he told CNN

He called on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to stop the war, saying we want to live We want peace Enough Arab bloodshed

Another eyewitness says a fivedayold boy named Ghaith Abu Rayya was killed in the airstrike The footage shows him opening a small body bag to reveal the infants head, saying his body has been dismembered

We are all alone Nobody cares about us, he cries

He is seen opening another body bag next to Ghaiths, sobbing, and saying, my beloved Ramy, who he says is Ghaiths 33yearold father

Several men are seen bringing in another body bag with the name Ahmad Saleem Abu Taha written across it, and the crowded people start wailing in distress

One woman caresses the lifeless face, which has been left exposed, saying Oh his smell Oh God Goodbye my beloved

The death toll in the Gaza Strip has risen to at least 34,454 following 205 days of war between Israel and Hamas, the Ministry of Health in Gaza reported on Sunday The ministry does not distinguish between casualties among civilians and Hamas fighters

The Israeli soldiers stand rifles in hand, arm over shoulder, speaking to the camera Behind them is the shell of a Gazan building

We are here adding light after the black sabbath that the people of Israel had, one of the men says in the video, circulating on Telegram We are occupying, deporting, and settling Occupying, deporting, and settling Did you hear that Bibi Occupying, deporting, and settling

As Israels war against Hamas enters its fourth month, the Israeli government has said little of substance, at least in any official way, on its plans for postwar Gaza

Hamas seized control of the territory home to about 22 million Palestinians from the Palestinian Authority in 2007, two years after Israel unilaterally withdrew all its troops and about 8,000 Jewish settlers Who governs it after Israels war against Hamas concludes is an open question

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected the idea of establishing Jewish settlements, but has said only that neither Hamas nor the Ramallahbased Palestinian Authority should govern the territory, and that Israel will keep full security control

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, a member of Netanyahus rightwing Likud party, has released his own proposal, saying that there should be no Israeli presence in the Gaza Strip, but light on detail about what governance there would look like

Into that void has stepped a group once fringe, but now in the governing coalition that hopes for full Israeli control, to resettle Gaza and even expel Palestinians And its ideas are permeating mainstream debate

We must promote a solution to encourage the emigration of the residents of Gaza, farright National Security Minister Itamar BenGvir said on January 1

Farright Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who also holds a position in the Defense Ministry, says that Israel will rule there And in order to rule there securely for a long time, we must have a civilian presence

The United States top diplomat is concerned enough that he has publicly rebuked those plans

These statements are irresponsible, theyre inflammatory, and they only make it harder to secure a future of Palestinianled Gaza with Hamas no longer in control, and with terrorist groups no longer able to threaten Israels security, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during a recent trip to Qatar

Polling in Israel on the question of reestablishing settlements varies widely, reflecting subtleties in how the question is asked, and the fact that public opinion in the wake of Hamas October 7 attack is wildly in flux, says Dahlia Scheindlin, a polling expert, journalist, and contributor to Israeli newspaper Haaretz

The general range goes from about 25 who want to reestablish permanent communities, Jewish Israeli communities in Gaza, to somewhere in the 40 range, she told CNN of several polls conducted in November and December That is not a small portion of Israeli society

There is also an established track record in Israel of politicians pushing seemingly extremist ideas into mainstream conversation, and even into law Netanyahu last year supported an effort started by a rightwing minister from his own Likud party to push through a law limiting the Supreme Courts ability to scrutinize legislation, despite months of protests that roiled the nation That proposal never had majority support, but the Knesset nonetheless passed it into law The Supreme Court struck down the proposal earlier this month, saying it would deal a severe and unprecedented blow to the core characteristics of the State of Israel as a democratic state

Ideas that often seem very extreme at a certain phase in Israels history can over time become increasingly normalized very incrementally sometimes a little bit below the radar, not exactly hidden, but not exactly advertised, Scheindlin said of Israeli policymaking

Diana Buttu, a Palestinian human rights lawyer who has served as an adviser to the Palestinian Authority, gives little credence to Netanyahus professed opposition to reestablishing settlements in Gaza

As much as Netanyahu may say that hes not going to do it, he will ultimately, she told CNN Because we as Palestinians have long learned that they end up finding some sort of excuse you know, the coalition needs to stay together, whatever And Palestinians always pay the price for it

People are waking up

Far from a new idea, the desire to resettle Gaza comes from decades of frustration with thenPrime Minister Ariel Sharons 2004 decision to dismantle 21 Israel settlements in Gaza known as Gush Katif and expel their 8,000 Jewish residents, a process which was completed in 2005

Settler activists like Yishai Fleisher, a spokesman for Jewish settlers in Hebron, in the Israelioccupied West Bank, sense an opportunity

For people like myself who are on the socalled Israeli right, who have been warning about this situation for years, who protested the 2005 disengagement, nothing has changed, Fleisher told CNN October 7 was just proof for what weve been saying all along

As a protester, in 2005, Fleisher was among those ejected from Gaza by the Israeli government With public opinion in flux, he hopes that his movements moment has come

People are waking up theyre trying to open their minds, he said of fellow Israelis, reevaluating their politics in the wake of October 7

If Palestinians in Gaza are postJihad, proIsrael, and want to live that good life in that beautiful soil, there should be an opportunity for that, he said AntiIsrael, projihad Arabs have got to leave And theyre going to have to find a different place to go It might be Turkey, and it might be Jordan, and it might be South America, he said If they cant muster in their heart to live in or next to the Jewish state, we cant have them

The Norwegian Refugee Council in December warned that any attempts by Israel to deport and permanently displace Palestinians within and from Gaza would constitute a serious breach of international law and an atrocity crime

Since October 7, about 85 of Gazas population, or some 19 million people, have been displaced from their homes, according to the United Nations many of them moved multiple times, fleeing airstrikes and heeding Israeli warnings of military attacks, and largely squeezed into a small, southwestern corner of the territory

Israel was last week accused of genocide in Gaza by South Africa, whose lawyers argued at the International Court of Justice in The Hague that Israels military campaign was intended to bring about the destruction of its Palestinian population, and that comments made by Israeli leaders signalled their genocidal intent Israel strenuously denied the accusation and said that the charge was a concerted and cynical effort to pervert the meaning of the term genocide itself

Humanitarian framing

At the Gush Katif museum in Jerusalem, former settlers are printing Tshirts in bright orange That color was adopted in 2004 and 2005 by the movement protesting Israels disengagement from Gaza At the time, Israel Defense Forces IDF soldiers pulled settlers from settlement synagogues Days later, Palestinian forces razed the buildings to the ground

Home, returning to Gush Katif, the slogan on the Tshirts reads

The movement to reestablish Gush Katif, has found a place, too, among some of the many IDF soldiers posting from Gaza on social media

A photograph from a ruined Gaza street shows two soldiers holding an Israeli flag, altered to include an orange stripe and the words, in Hebrew Coming home

Another photograph shows soldiers with an orange banner that reads Only settlement would be considered victory

hose advocating for renewed Israeli settlements often frame their arguments in humanitarian terms, arguing that Palestinians would have a better life elsewhere

This is a correct, just, moral and humane solution, said Ben Gvir, who has previously been convicted for supporting terrorism and inciting antiArab racism

Gila Gamliel, Israels intelligence minister and a member of Likud, suggested in November that Israel promote the voluntary resettlement of Palestinians in Gaza, for humanitarian reasons, outside of the Strip

Fleisher, too, told CNN I would want to leave if I was in a war zone with children

Between 68 and 81 of buildings in northern Gaza have been damaged by Israels war in Gaza, according to analysis of satellite imagery up to January 5 by researchers at Oregon State University and the City University of New York In all of Gaza, the figure is between 45 and 56

Ethnic cleansing

Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority, which exercises limited selfrule in the West Bank, has made clear his governments complete rejection of the displacement of any Palestinian citizen

However, the vision of voluntary emigration could become true by default, Omer Bartov, an Israeliborn professor of holocaust and genocide studies at Brown University, told CNN

Can the population now return to northern Gaza, which has largely been destroyed

As a result of this, there is an opening for those ministers, media people, and so forth on the Israeli right to say, Well the most humanitarian solution is to remove that population or to encourage, as they say to move out of Gaza If that happens, then this entire scenario that Im talking about will be seen as ethnic cleansing

Buttu, who said she has little doubt about the determination of some in Israel to resettle Gaza based on their settlement efforts in the West Bank, voiced a similar concern

Israel has created the conditions whereby Gaza is no longer liveable, she said Now theyre just simply repacking it as some sort of humanitarian gift, or humanitarian solution, when really what it is, is aiding Israel and ethnically cleansing Gaza of Palestinians

Netanyahu has rejected the idea of new settlements as unrealistic, saying in an Englishlanguage statement that Israel has no intention of permanently occupying Gaza or displacing its civilian population

In October, the Israeli government admitted that a leaked intelligence document proposing the relocation of millions of Palestinian Gazans to Egypts Sinai Peninsula was genuine, but downplayed its significance as a preliminary paper, like dozens of such papers prepared by all political and security echelons

Nonetheless, the fact the resettlement movement is now being openly discussed in Israels parliament, or Knesset, as it was during a committee hearing earlier this month, is a stepchange in the debate And despite international opprobrium, its farright proponents are not holding back

We first need to occupy, to annex, to destroy all the houses there, build neighborhoods there, Tzvi Sukkot, a member of Knesset from Smotrichs Religious Zionism said during the committee hearing

The only image that will convince Israels enemy of its defeat, said Limor Son Har Melech from Ben Gvirs Jewish Power Party, to applause, is the settlement, and Jewish children walking in its streets

Israel pledged that it will exact a price from Iran as the country weighs its response to an unprecedented overnight barrage of drone and missile strikes while facing international pressure to deescalate

The overnight attack which saw Tehran launch a series of strikes at Israel over a fivehour period threatens to tip the crisis in the Middle East into an untempered regional war

Israels war cabinet has been authorized to respond to the attack and met on Sunday, with one of its members, Benny Gantz, saying the event is not over

He cited the need to build a regional coalition and exact a price from Iran, in a way and at a time that suits us

Israels Defense Minister Yoav Gallant earlier said Israel had thwarted this attack in a way that is unparalleled but added we must be prepared for every scenario In his first comments, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said we have intercepted, we have contained Together we shall win

An Israeli official separately told CNN that Israel will respond to Irans attack, but the scope of that attack has yet to be decided The official said Israel is yet to determine whether to try and break all the dishes or do something more measured

But Israel is being urged by Western allies to deescalate an intensely fraught situation on Sunday and close, at least for now, a weekslong chapter of uncertainty and confrontation that had spiraled out of Israels war with Hamas that has killed more than 33,000 Palestinians in Gaza and caused a humanitarian disaster in the enclave

Irans retaliatory attack had been anticipated since a suspected Israeli strike on an Iranian diplomatic complex in Syria earlier this month, and finally came late on Saturday when over 300 projectiles including around 170 drones and over 120 ballistic missiles were fired toward Israeli soil Approximately 350 rockets were fired from Iran, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanons Hezbollah, according to Israel Defense Forces IDF spokesperson Daniel Hagari Israeli authorities said 99 of the projectiles were intercepted with help from allies including the US, the UK and France The only injury reported was a 7yearold girl who was seriously wounded by shrapnel

The reprisals brought years of clandestine conflict between the countries into the open, and marked the first time the Islamic Republic had launched a direct assault on Israel from its soil

Israel and Iran have long been rivals, but tensions escalated in the wake of Hamas attacks on Israel, which left about 1,200 people dead Iran backs a web of proxies across the Middle East that have frequently clashed with Israel since the attacks

The war cabinet meeting lasted for hours and ended Sunday night without a decision on how Israel will respond, according to an Israeli official

The war cabinet is determined to respond but has yet to decide on the timing and scope, the official said One of the key dilemmas facing the cabinet is determining how quickly Israel should respond The official said the Israeli military has been tasked with coming up with additional options for a response

Iran says next attack could be much bigger

On Sunday, Iran said a new equation in its adversarial relationship with Israel had been opened, and warned of a much bigger assault on the country should Netanyahu decide on a titfortat attack

We have decided to create a new equation, which is that if from now on the Zionist regime attacks our interests, assets, personalities, and citizens, anywhere, and at any point we will retaliate against them, the Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps IRGC Hossein Salami told Iranian state TV The Zionist regime is a term Iran uses to refer to Israel

Earlier, Sardar Bagheri, the Chief of Staff of Irans Armed Forces, had said If the Zionist regime responds, our next operation will be much bigger

Irans attacks targeted the Israeli airbase from which, it said, the strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus was launched Iranian ballistic missiles that reached Israel fell on the airbase in southern Israel, and caused only light structural damage, Hagari said

Bagheri said that from Irans perspective, the military operation against Israel has concluded But he emphasized that Iranian armed forces remain on high alert and are prepared to act if necessary, according to an interview on state IRINN TV on Sunday

Those warnings came as Western nations urged Israel to descend from the brink of open warfare with its foe

After the attack, US President Joe Biden spoke by phone with Netanyahu, and made clear that the US would not participate in any offensive operations against Iran, a senior White House administration official told CNN

Biden told Netanyahu he should consider the events of Saturday night a win as Irans attacks had been largely unsuccessful, and instead demonstrated Israels remarkable capacity to defend against and defeat even unprecedented attacks

Israel has told the US that its not looking for a significant escalation with Iran, a senior Biden administration told reporters Sunday

Theyre looking to protect themselves and defend themselves, the official said

The president was very clear that were going to help defend Israel, and he made very clear to the prime minister last night that we do have to think carefully and strategically about risks of escalation,

Biden has meanwhile reiterated that the USs commitment to Israels security against threats from Iran and its proxies remains ironclad

Showing some of the domestic pressure Netanyahu faces, two hardline government ministers called for a firm response Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich called for a retaliation that resonates throughout the Middle East, while National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir said Israel should go crazy

Calls for restraint have also been made across the Middle East Saudi Arabia, a major regional rival to Iran, stressed the importance of preventing any further exacerbation of the crisis, while Qatar, which enjoys close economic relations with Iran, expressed profound concern The United Arab Emirates warned of new levels of instability if the episode was not closed

Iran had vowed to retaliate after accusing Israel of bombing its diplomatic complex in Syria earlier this month

The airstrike destroyed the consulate building in the capital Damascus, killing at least seven officials including Mohammed Reza Zahedi, a top commander in Irans elite Revolutionary Guards IRGC, and senior commander Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi, Irans foreign ministry said at the time

Zahedi, a former commander of the IRGCs ground forces, air force, and the deputy commander of its operations, was the most highprofile Iranian target killed since thenUS President Donald Trump ordered the assassination of IRGC Gen Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad in 2020

Dozens of Palestinian students and children staged a display of solidarity at a demonstration in southern Gaza on Sunday to express gratitude for the support seen on US college campuses in recent weeks

Video from the Shaboura refugee camp in Rafah shows children holding banners with messages that read Students of Columbia University, continue to stand by us and, Violating our right to education and life is a war crime

The students gathered around makeshift tents near a school that now serves as a shelter for Palestinians displaced from northern Gaza Footage shows people spraypainting messages of gratitude on the fabric of the tents Thank you, students in solidarity with Gaza Your message has reached us, says one of the messages

Takfeer AbuYousuf, a displaced student from Beit Hanoun in Northern Gaza, told CNN from the camp he felt it was necessary to thank the students in the US who supported us with their humanity

Those are thank you messages on our tents, those tents that dont protect us from the heat or cold The least we can do is thank them We cant write these thank you messages on the walls of our homes because we have no homes They have been destroyed on top of our children, elders, and women,

Eighteenyearold Rana AlTaher pointed to the school in the camp, telling CNN that what should have been a place for learning and education has become a place for sheltering

That means that we have lost our education We have lost our only hope in Gaza and we want it back Were here to ask for it back Its our right to have it back thats why were here, she said

According to the UN, there have been direct hits on more than 200 schools in Gaza since Israels bombardment began The UN agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA has said that no education is happening in Gaza at all for nearly six months

In a recent report, UN experts decried the systemic obliteration of Gazas education system

The persistent, callous attacks on educational infrastructure in Gaza have a devastating longterm impact on the fundamental rights of people to learn and freely express themselves, depriving yet another generation of Palestinians of their future, the experts said

Firstyear university student Bayan AlFiqhi told CNN she has not been able to attend her classes at her university in Cairo since the war in Gaza began and was very appreciative to students in the US for staging their solidarity protest

We hope they add pressure on Israel and the US to stop the bloodbath that is taking place in the Gaza Strip and to prevent the invasion of Rafah, she added

The fate of Rafah has been hanging over the 13 million Palestinians displaced there There have been weeks of speculation around when Israel might begin its anticipated military operation in the city The UN has repeatedly warned against an Israeli ground invasion, saying an offensive could lead to slaughter in the southern region

Twentyoneyearold Nowar Diab told CNN she lamented the impact Israels bombardment of Gaza has had on her academic pursuits

I was supposed to be a graduate this year I studied English and French literature at AlAzhar university, but AlAzhar university got bombarded this war stood like a border between me and my dreams and the beginning of my career, she said

Today I am standing here to tell the whole world that we, Gazan students, go through pain and we suffer every single day, she added

Diab said that despite the brutality of Israels war, the resilience and determination of Gazan students to persevere was clear for the world to see

Prayers for peace

Elsewhere in Gaza, dozens of Palestinian Christians celebrated Orthodox Palm Sunday by attending mass at the Church of Saint Porphyrius, the oldest in Gaza City, and praying for peace

Videos show men, women, children, and the elderly singing prayers inside the church, asking for peace to prevail over Gaza Children are seen dressed up, carrying flowers and candles, and playing in the churchyard decorated with palm trees

Gaza City resident Khader Nasrawi, who attended the church celebrations, told CNN he is hoping for a better tomorrow

We are celebrating the holiday this year while there is a lump in our hearts and wounds for the loss of our loved ones and our homes throughout this brutal warWe are asking for the world to give us peace because we are peaceloving people Jesus Christ called for peace and love, as did all other religions, he added

Another resident, Ihab Ayad, told CNN he was injured by an Israeli airstrike that hit the churchs campus in October last year

Ayab said despite what hes been through, he remains united and steadfast with his Palestinian community

This holiday is different for us, because of the tragedy of the war that the Palestinian people have suffered from, whether they are Christian or Muslim The occupation doesnt distinguish between Christian or Muslim, it is a criminal assault, he said

Not too far away from the church, residents and eyewitnesses told CNN an Israeli airstrike Sunday hit a fourstory residential building in the Yarmouk neighborhood in Gaza City They said the Israeli military gave them a warning before the strike, and there were no casualties

Palestinians and Israeli security forces clashed early Thursday around the entrance to the AlAqsa Mosque in Jerusalems Old City and Israel responded to rockets fired from Gaza with airstrikes, as the worst tensions in months continued to simmer

Videos showed dozens of Israeli police on the compound outside the mosque just after sunrise Thursday as Palestinians launched fireworks towards them from inside the building Other videos showed police firing stun grenades

Later, at around 730 am, a group of Jewish visitors entered the compound, many of them in religious clothing, protected by Israeli security forces

The hilltop site is holy to both Muslims and Jews and has been a flashpoint for decades Jews call it the Temple Mount and revere it as the place where the first and second temples stood Muslims refer to it as the Haram al Sharif and believe it is the place from where the prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven

Since 1967, arrangements have been governed by a status quo understanding, which allows only Muslims to pray on the site, though anyone is allowed to visit during certain hours In an effort to reduce tensions, and in line with similar Israeli government decisions in recent years, from today there will be no further visits by Jewish groups until the end of Ramadan in about ten days time

In common with recent days, this morning, at the end of the dawn prayer, dozens of lawbreakers and masked men rioted and disturbed the order on the Temple Mount, with severe violence, an Israeli police statement said Thursday

Police described the recent throwing of fireworks from inside the mosque, at least one of which caused a small fire in a carpet, as an act of desecration Accusations that the AlAqsa mosque is being abased are regularly hurled between the two sides, with Palestinians and others saying Israeli security forces defile the building when they set foot inside it

Israel blames Hamas for inciting Palestinians over the mosque, and believes the militant group is weighingup whether to escalate the conflict over Gaza as well On Thursday night, at least five rockets were fired from the coastal enclave towards Israel The Israeli military said most were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system

Israeli warplanes carried out subsequent airstrikes on Hamas targets in Gaza, the military said One strike hit the entrance to an underground facility involved in the manufacture of rocket engines, it said There are no reports from Gaza of any injuries

Earlier, on Wednesday evening, tensions in Jerusalem spiked when Jewish nationalists, led by extremist lawmaker Itamar Ben Gvir, attempted to march towards the Damascus Gate, one of the main entrances to the Old City used by Palestinians

Police had refused to grant a permit for the march and succeeded in preventing the main group of mostly young men from getting to the Gate, but later there were minor clashes on the Old Citys narrow streets between Jewish nationalists, local Palestinians and Israeli police

In one video, a group of nationalists breaks into a chant of Death to Arabs as they surround Palestinian men at a food stall and start pushing them around

The city has been on edge for the last week with periodic clashes breaking out on or around the AlAqsa mosque compound Friday saw the most serious unrest when more than 150 Palestinians were injured, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent, along with several police None of the injuries were lifethreatening, reports suggested

The 10monthold Israeli coalition government is facing its deepest political crisis to date, after weeks of highprofile attacks across Israel, military action in the West Bank, and after Israeli police entered and arrested hundreds at one of Jerusalems holiest sites

From its inception, the coalition government had a razor thin margin, made up of a historically diverse lineup of political parties from the far left to the right wing, including the first Arab party to be an active member of a government coalition

Because of that diverse makeup, the government said early on that it had no intention of tackling the most contentious issues in Israeli politics But escalations in recent weeks have placed those issues front and center

Its oneseat majority in parliament was lost earlier this month when Idit Silman, a member of Prime Minister Naftali Bennetts own party, defected The move sent political shockwaves throughout Israel but did not necessarily mean the current government would collapse, especially since the opposition, led by former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, doesnt have the numbers for a majority itself

But that could be changing In recent days, during commemorations of both Passover and Ramadan, Israeli police say they arrested more than 300 people at the alAqsa mosque compound, where police say people throwing rocks and launching fireworks were jeopardizing safe worship The Palestinian Red Crescent said scores of people were injured by rubber bullets, stun grenades, and police batons The presence of Israeli police inside the mosque itself became a flashpoint, as it is regarded as offensive to Muslims and puts a strain on a decadesold status quo agreement about the site In response, the United Arab List party, also known by its acronym Raam, suspended its membership in the coalition to protest what it said was Israeli police violence at the holy site that is sacred to both Jews and Muslims

If the government continues its steps against AlQuds and its people, AlAqsa, its worshipers and its sanctuaries in this holy month, we will submit a collective resignation, and we call on all parties to cooperate with and support this decision, party members said in a statement

For the moment, the action has no immediate consequences Israels parliament, the Knesset, is in recess for a few more weeks and by the time it returns, the party could decide to sit with the coalition once again

But if even just one member of the UAL party defects from the coalition, Netanyahu could potentially have the numbers in hand to call for a vote to dissolve parliament and trigger new elections, giving him a pathway back to power

Never before in Israeli history has the fate of a government been in the hands of an Arab, nonJewish party Without UALs support, the coalition would never have taken power And even before joining the government, party leader Mansour Abbas had said that while hes a proud member of the government with the aim of improving the lives of the approximately 20 of Israels population that identifies as Arab, he has his own red lines though it remains unclear exactly where those lines are

I said and I continue to say that the blessed AlAqsa Mosque is a red line in which there is no compromise, Abbas wrote in a Facebook post last week This is what I conveyed today in my conversation with the officials with whom I communicated, and I explained to them my position

Apart from Abbas vaunted leverage in the governing coalition, there are other officials whose influence may be moderating the response of Israeli police as well Israeli Minister of Public Security Omer Bar Lev is a member of the leftleaning Labor Party And Defense Minister Benny Gantz has pushed forward increasing the number of work permits, believing that giving Palestinians more economic opportunity will bring more calm

In Jerusalem, Israeli officials believe they have shown restraint in policing tactics on Palestinians around the mosque and Old City Israeli media report police have been more reserved in their responses during clashes than in previous incidents and havent employed the kind of tactics that inflamed tensions during Ramadan last year, like barring people from gathering at the Damascus Gate plaza

Israeli officials emphasized that even after the worst of the clashes on Friday, more than 50,000 Muslim worshippers attended prayers at the compound peacefully, although at various points since then Muslim worshippers were blocked from Al Aqsa as police accompanied Jewish groups and foreign tourists on scheduled visits

The compound is often a flashpoint in the IsraeliPalestinian conflict It lies in East Jerusalem, which most of the international community regards as having been under Israeli occupation since 1967 Israel disputes that and claims all of Jerusalem as its undivided capital, while Palestinians want the eastern sector as the capital of their future state

This Ramadan, Israeli restrictions on movement of Palestinians between the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem have not been as tight as before for those with Israeliissued permits

At the same time though, Israel has launched raids across the West Bank in response to Palestinian attacks, and 14 Palestinians have died since late March in clashes with Israeli security forces or been shot dead by Israeli soldiers for allegedly throwing Molotov cocktails or running towards soldiers at a checkpoint

The real test for the Israeli government will come in early May, when parliament comes back into session That is when the true fragility of their position will be made clear

Other top Middle East news

Watchdog claims Middle East states, others spied on UK government

Digital rights watchdog group Citizen Lab said on Monday it had warned British officials that electronic devices connected to government networks, including some inside the prime ministers office and foreign ministry, appeared to be infected with Israelimade spy software It said the government was targeted by the United Arab Emirates, Cyprus, Jordan and India

Background The spy software allegedly used is known as Pegasus, a product of Israeli cyber arms dealer NSO Group An NSO spokesperson told Reuters the allegations were false A British government spokesperson refused to comment on security matters, and government spokespeople for the UAE, Jordan and India didnt immediately respond to requests for comment Cyprus authorities categorically denied involvement to Reuters

Why it matters Both Jordan and the UAE enjoy good relations with the UK and the allegations are likely to embarrass them

UAE summons Israeli ambassador to protest Jerusalem violence

The UAE foreign ministry summoned the Israeli ambassador to protest the treatment of Palestinians in Jerusalem by Israeli forces, the foreign ministry said in a statement on Tuesday

Background More than 150 people were injured in clashes with Israeli police on Friday, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent The Emirati minister of state for international cooperation Reem Al Hashimi told Israels ambassador Amir Hayek that the UAE strongly protests attacks on civilians and incursions into holy places, the statement added

Why it matters Since spearheading a wave of Arab normalization agreements with the Jewish state in 2020, this is the first time the UAE has summoned Israels envoy

Turkey arrests journalist over posts on personal information leak

Turkish authorities jailed a journalist on Tuesday pending trial after he announced hackers had stolen personal information from government websites and shared some of it with him, including President Tayyip Erdogans ID card, as proof, his lawyer said

Background The independent journalist, Ibrahim Haskologlu, posted the announcement on Twitter, illustrating it with a partially obscured photo of what he said was Erdogans ID His lawyer, Emrah Karatay, said his client was arrested on a charge of illegally obtaining and disseminating personal information due to his social media posts

Why it matters As well as sharing the purported photo of Erdogans ID, Haskologlu also published an image of what he said was the ID card of Hakan Fidan, head of Turkeys National Intelligence Agency Most of the information on the cards was concealed Turkey is one of the worlds top jailers of journalists and mainstream media is controlled by those close to Erdogans government

his Ramadan, drama went beyond the screen with the premiere of television series From the pyramid road to about a love triangle that involves a sultry Egyptian woman and a Kuwaiti couple

The Saudi stateowned channel MBCs broadcast of the Kuwaiti family drama is raising eyebrows in the Kuwaiti government and as far away as Egypt

Written by Kuwaiti writer Hiba Hamada, the show follows the struggle between Abla, a doctor and wife of a wealthy Kuwaiti, and an Egyptian belly dancer trying to drive a wedge between them for selfinterest Kareema, the dancer, is hired to perform at the wedding of Ablas son After the celebrations, she is unable to return home and stays at Ablas family home, where she tries to seduce her husband

The show touches on topics deemed controversial in Kuwait such as gender roles and relations and has prompted accusations of stereotyping on social media In one scene, Abla is shown lecturing her son about mens perceptions of womens clothing, saying women will be harassed in Kuwait no matter what they wear Egyptians took issue with the portrayal of Egyptian women as dancers chasing after wealthy men from the Gulf

The controversy led the Kuwaiti ministry of information to distance itself from the show, saying on Twitter that it is not produced by a Kuwaiti company, has been filmed outside Kuwait, and is broadcast on platforms outside of Kuwait While the show was filmed in the UAE, the ministry said it will launch an investigation into any scenes that may have been filmed within Kuwait without a permitA series of terror attacks and violent incidents have put Israel and the Palestinian territories on edge again

In just one week, 11 people were killed in three attacks in Israeli towns and cities It was the deadliest week Israel had seen in years and follows weeks of rising tensions that saw Israelis targeted in stabbing attacks and several Palestinians shot dead by Israeli forces in the West Bank

The overlap of three major religious holidays over the next month Ramadan, Passover and Easter could heighten tensions further, exacerbating a potent mix of factors that could spark yet another cycle of violence

Here are five things you need to know about the recent uptick in violence

Attacks hit deep in Israel

The lethal attacks took place not in the typical hot spots, disputed areas like Jerusalem or the West Bank, much of which is considered by the international community to be occupied territory Instead they happened in Israeli towns and cities that are not used to such violence

Unusually, two of the attacks were carried out by IsraeliArabs On March 22, an IsraeliArab killed four Israeli civilians in a stabbing and ramming attack in the southern city of Beer Sheva, Israeli police said The attacker had previously been imprisoned for supporting ISIS

On Sunday, two IsraeliArab men killed two border police officers and wounded six passersby in the northern city of Hadera, local media reported The two were also affiliated with ISIS, which claimed responsibility for the incident the first such ISIS claim for an attack in Israel since 2017

Then on Tuesday night, a Palestinian from the West Bank shot and killed five people in Bnei Brak, a mostly Orthodox city just east of Tel Aviv Two of those killed were Ukrainian citizens, two were Israeli civilians and one was a police officer who responded to the scene, according to Israeli police In all three cases the attackers were shot and killed by either civilians or security forcesTensions rising in the West Bank and Jerusalem

Tensions had already been on the rise for weeks, even before the three attacks There had been several stabbings carried out by Palestinians against Israelis in Jerusalem in March and several Palestinians, including teenagers, had been shot dead by Israeli forces in the West Bank during clashes over the past several weeks

The security situation is escalating While many of the recent attacks targeted police or military forces within Jerusalems Old City, the most recent stabbing targeted an Israeli out for a jog in a popular neighborhood outside the Old City Two of the three attacks in the past week targeted civilians

The cycle of violence has continued since then On Thursday, two Palestinians including one teenager were killed and 15 others wounded during an Israeli police raid in the West Bank city of Jenin targeting suspects connected to the Bnei Brak shooting The family home of the attacker has also been scheduled for demolition, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said, a standard practice by Israeli forces to create deterrence the Israeli Army says families can try to appeal demolitions

A few hours later, an Israeli was stabbed on a bus in the West Bank just south of Bethlehem The attacker, a Palestinian, was shot dead by an armed civilian on the bus, the Israeli military said

And for months, Palestinian and Israeli activists have warned that violence against Palestinians carried out by Israeli setters is at an alltime high Israels Defense Minister Benny Gantz has vowed to treat settler violence with a heavy hand, calling perpetrators terrorists and promising special military teams that are supposed to help monitor areas where clashes tend to erupt although most Palestinians are already wary of the Israeli military, saying they believe they only help protect settlers

PM calls on civilians to carry firearms as Israel goes on high alert

Israels security alert status has been raised to its highest level That means police are much more visible on the streets, working longer shifts and focusing their presence on schools and popular gathering spots

Troop presence in the West Bank hand around the Gaza strip has also increased, with the Israel Defense Forces IDF announcing they are adding 14 battalions and combat soldiers from special forces units Soldiers who carry a certain class of weapon will also be required to take their weapons with them even while on leave,

Bennett has also made the unusual call to all civilians with a license to carry a firearm to now keep their guns on them at all times, saying Israelis need to be alert

Open your eyes Whoever has a license to carry a weapon, this is the time to carry it, he said in a video statement Wednesday

Palestinian militant groups mobilize

Palestinian militant groups have praised the attacks and called for further action, especially in reaction to raids in the West Bank and violence from Jewish settlers

Hamas, the militant group that controls Gaza, said in a statement The continuous crimes of the occupation portend a comprehensive explosion, which will be more powerful and more painful, in which our people will be involved in all parts of our occupied land

Abu Hamza, the military spokesman for the AlQuds Brigades of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, announced the raising of full readiness among our fighters in all military formations

Behind tables laden with more than 50 assault rifles, Israels farright national security minister, Itamar Ben Gvir, smiled at a crowd of people who had come to the coastal city of Caesarea for a ceremony to receive the firearms

The divisive politician has been crisscrossing Israel in the past weeks handing out guns to civilian members of security squads as he expands Israeli citizens access to guns in the wake of Hamas attack last month The aim, according to the Ministry of National Security, is to create teams to respond to future terror incidents

The successes of some volunteer security units in southern Israel, who were able to push Hamas gunmen back on October 7 in certain locales, have attracted new members to the initiative

The Israeli government says around 700 volunteer security squads, which will operate under the command of Israeli police, have been established since then, tapping into the wellspring of insecurity in the country following Hamas militants massacre of an estimated 1,200 people in Israel that day

We saw this in the first days of the war, wherever there were weapons, the scale of the disaster was smaller, Ben Gvir said in a press release

Critics see it as part of a farright vision to inflame IsraeliPalestinian relations in the country, especially in the Israelioccupied West Bank Ben Gvir, who leads the Otzma Yehudit Jewish Power party, pledged to give 10,000 guns to towns and cities across Israel, including Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory, according to the New York Times

Weapons will be distributed to squads all around the country, with an emphasize on near border fence communities in the north and south, mixed cities and settlements in Judea and Samaria, Ben Gvirs office said in a statement shared by the Jewish Power party and seen by CNN which used the biblical names for the West Bank

Palestinians fear these guns will be used against them Mariam Barghouti, a Palestinian writer and policy analyst, described Ben Gvirs pledge as green lighting an intensification of killing Palestinians ¬ although that has consistently been the reality in the West Bank, she told CNN

Violence has spiked in the West Bank since Israel declared war on Hamas last month and at least 176 Palestinians have since been killed by Israeli forces or Jewish settlers, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health

The United Nations and many foreign countries consider the West Bank and East Jerusalem as occupied land and therefore view Israeli settlements there as illegal under international law But Israel says the status of the West Bank is disputed and denies its settlements there are illegal while it regards all of Jerusalem as sovereign Israeli territory Some in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus cabinet, such as Ben Gvir and farright Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, support annexing the West Bank

Abdelathim Wadi, who lives in Qusra, south of the West Bank city of Nablus, lost his brother and nephew to an attack by armed settlers as they made their way to a funeral for four other Palestinians, he said

Theres no one to defend us Our movement is so restricted, were constantly living in fear that if we leave our house, well be shot, he said

When CNN

In a later statement to CNN, Ben Gvir said forming and arming the security squads will increase the probability that many Israeli families will survive a similar attack to the one on October 7

It added that the Israel Defense Forces is the one responsible for arming and forming the squads in Judaea Samaria, and not the police under Ben Gvir

And to be clear, the ministers vision and acts are to provide security to the citizens of Israel, if his views were met in the months prior the massacre, the present day could have been different and safer, the statement added

Causing chaos

Ben Gvir, who has previously been convicted for supporting terrorism and inciting antiArab racism, loomed on the edges of the Israeli farright before his party and other extremist figures shored up Netanyahus ruling coalition the most rightwing in Israels history

Ben Gvirs party draws its core support from Israeli settlers in the West Bank Last week, Heritage Minister Amichay Eliyahu, who is in Ben Gvirs party, suggested that dropping a nuclear bomb on Gaza could be one way for Israel to deal with Hamas Eliyahu said later he did not mean his answer to be taken literally

Outside the sports hall, where the ceremony was taking place in Caesarea, a small group of demonstrators gathered against Ben Gvirs arrival in their neighborhood Amid chants of fascist, protester Roy Malkan accused the minister of provoking the situation in the West Bank, and hoping for riots from the Israeli Palestinians,

Others against the mass distribution of arms believe the government should be shoring up the police force and the military instead, and not risk weapons falling into the wrong hands

In a video shared on Ben Gvirs Facebook page, controversial farright rapper Yoav Eliasi was seen being embraced by the politician after he received a rifle at a Tel Aviv security squad weapons ceremony

The rapper for years has incited against Palestinians, against activists, and he also incited against me personally, Ori Givati, a former tank commander for the Israeli military and advocacy director of NGO Breaking the Silence, told CNN He adds that arming people like that is only showing what he Ben Gvir is trying to cause, which is chaos

CNN has reached out to Eliasi for comment He addressed criticism of him in a November 12 post on Instagram, saying I am certified and trained by the police

Go, arm yourself

In addition to the hundreds of new volunteer units, Ben Gvir has called on individuals to go, arm yourself Shooting ranges and gun stores in Israel have seen an increase in foot traffic as private gun licensing rules were relaxed by Ben Gvir in recent weeks, Reuters reported

A press release by the Ministry of National Security said that Hebrewspeaking citizens who have military training, no criminal record, and live in an eligible area can undergo a telephone interview instead of an inperson one, and be issued a firearm license within a week

A 2017 report from the Small Arms Survey, a Swiss nonprofit tracking global firearms holdings, found civilians owned approximately 557,000 registered and unregistered guns in Israel, or 67 guns per 100 people a tiny fraction of Americas 120 guns per 100 people Israeli officials in October estimated that at least 300,000 Israelis would be eligible for the new licenses

Guy BenPorat, a politics professor at Israels BenGurion University, told CNN that while he does not want to discount the fear of the wider Israeli population, who feel that they have been neglected by the military and the government and the instinct is to demand weapons, he believes Ben Gvir has been exploiting the opportunity to promote what he has wanted for a long time that is arming Jewish civilians

What the country needs is a reduction in arms, he said, pointing to the issue of illegal guns fueling gangrelated violence among Arab citizens of Israel The community which makes up 20 of the population has been calling for more measures to help curb criminal violence to deaf years, according to BenPorat

Theres a gun culture because people are insecure, so they buy guns, and every local feud can turn into a gun battle, BenPorat, who is also an expert on minority policing, said However, the answer is not to give guns to Jewish citizens, but to take the guns away

Security squad members at the Caesarea event believe the opposite, telling CNN that the process is regulated with a background check and proof of prior military experience Those with prior police, national or civil service experience, or an exemption, is also accepted, according to a volunteer signup sheet A large proportion of Israelis have undergone mandatory military service Israels October call for 300,000 reservists, despite having a population 34 times smaller than the US, is nearly equal to the total size of the USs military reserves

One of the new recruits, educator Liat Eisner, stressed it was pragmatism that led her to join the volunteer security unit We are not fanatics Were not crazy for guns We are concerned citizens who are not willing to be butchered again, she said

Eisner said shes no fan of Israeli politics and previously protested Netanyahus attempt at judicial reform But her priorities have changed since the start of Israels war with Hamas

Listen, Im not going to sit like a duck waiting for someone to slaughter me, she said while filling a rifle magazine with bullets outside the event The only thing is us we have to win against Hamas This is survival

As three pistolholding Jewish women aligned their muzzles with the outdoor targets at the Magen Am gun range in Piru, California, one of the shootersintraining Dani, a granddaughter to Holocaust survivors on both sides of her family fired a single shot

Whoa, Dani said as her earmuffed head tilted slightly back after the bullet pierced the cardboard, as if amazed at the power of the weapon she gripped

Good, finger off the trigger, go ahead and put it down, said the firearms instructor teaching the women how to defend themselves amid the recent spike in antisemitic incidents as the IsraelHamas war unfolds in the Middle East

With threats against American Jews on the rise, many have begun seeking firearms training and purchasing weapons out of fear for the safety of their communities and families, according to interviews CNN has conducted with gun range operators, firearms instructors and Jews in the US in recent days

The AntiDefamation League said it recorded 312 antisemitic incidents across the United States over the first three weeks after the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas broke out, including instances of harassment and assault

A person making death threats to Jewish people near a kosher restaurant a Jewishowned business vandalized with antiIsrael phrases and a driver swerving toward Jewish children while shouting, Allahu akbar are among the recent haterelated encounters, according to the league

Several of those occurred throughout Southern California, where Dani lives

Now more than ever with the rise in antisemitism, I feel we have a responsibility as Jews to speak up and speak out, and also know how to protect ourselves because the reality is people dont seem to want us around, and its hard, Dani, who declined to share her last name for her safety, told CNN

Some gun range operators and firearms instructors throughout the country have noted more Jewish people looking for ways to protect themselves with guns either for the first time or to inquire about obtaining additional weapons, experts say

Gene Petrino, a retired SWAT commander in Coral Springs, Florida, told CNN hes gotten roughly 15 to 20 Jewish people per week seeking training since the war broke out

They want to know about situational awareness and how they can learn to spot a threat before an attack occurs, said Petrino, who coowns Survival Response LLC, a company offering workplace violence prevention, active shooter and firearms training

He says the Jewish people hes worked with are prioritizing not only buying a gun, but learning how to use them safely

A rise in American Jewish gun ownership would come as a noticeable shift for a group that is historically liberal and a majority of which are registered Democrats

Im definitely finding that to be the case with the Jewish community right now, they will take lessons and understand the safety, how they function and what they can and cant do, Petrino said

Theyre making sure they have whats practical, whats needed based on their own set of circumstances, he said Theyre very pragmatic in how theyre going about this

The desire for gun training and ownership differs from the usual views on firearms in the Jewish community, according to Mark K, a Jewish photographer in Houston who owns two guns and requested CNN not reveal his full last name for safety

Im actually surprised to hear that other Jewish people have guns, Mark told CNN

In terms of the Jewish community overall, I know most people do not own guns just because most Jews are liberal and want gun control, he said

A 2018 American Jewish Committee poll showed 70 of Jewish respondents thought it was more important to control gun ownership than to protect Americans rights to own guns

The US government does not keep official statistics on gun ownership, including demographic information Research from industry groups like the National Shooting Sports Foundation break down gun ownership by race and gender but not by religious affiliation The Pew Research Centers demographics include age, gender, party affiliation, urbanrural residency and education but not religion

Gun ownership brings sense of comfort for some Jews

A poll conducted last week by the Jewish Federations of North America found Jews were roughly twice as likely as nonJewish people to say theyve been worried about their safety in the past month, according to data shared with CNN

Mark K says hes among those concerned He had not regularly carried his concealed weapon since his business was robbed in 2015, which is why he initially began carrying Heightened antisemitism over the past month has changed that, he said

I wish I didnt have to have the weapon on me That makes me nervous as it is, just having a weapon on me I dont like to keep it on me Im certainly more aware of my surroundings because of the weapon thats on me

While hes relieved by the added security measures at his local Jewish Community Center, hes still worried when he goes out for lunch with his elderly mother, Mark shared

He doesnt think anyone can tell he or his mother are Jewish by looking at them, but noted his mom wears a Star of David

In his metro area community of approximately 51,000 Jews, he says he was never nervous about being Jewish in Houston, where hes lived since the late 1970s

And now I am, he said

Daniel, a resident of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, who only wanted his first name used, said he was waiting for the firearm he purchased last week to arrive at the shooting range hed recently visited

As soon as its delivered, Ill pick it up, said Daniel, whos lived in the South Florida city for the past eight or so years

The spike in violence and hateful rhetoric has evoked fears within the Jewish community of another Holocaust, according to Daniel

In the decades prior to Nazi Germanys systematic extermination of Jews, Germany had and its religious freedom laws served as a safe haven for its massive Jewish population in much the same way American Jews have considered the United States for over a century The rise in antisemitic attacks have worried many American Jews that history may be repeating itself

Hamas October 7 attack against Israel represented the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust

I think a lot of people were hoping that we were past that I know I definitely was but I think current events have shown us that may be coming, and that there is that type of hate in the world, he said Its very scary

Hed never before felt the need to be armed, but says hes changed his sentiments in light of recent events

Daniels relatives, who live in Los Angeles, said they heard about a burglary in the city that concerned them

I think the level of hate has really kind of heightened it to a sense of, I need to make sure I can protect my family, Daniel said

Whats triggered them is there was a breakin recently into somebodys home, and the guy was spewing all this hate speech, and like, No, never again, was in their minds immediately, he said, referring to the Jewish communitys refusal ever to be genocide victims again

Daniels relatives in Los Angeles recently experienced a breakin in their neighborhood, he said

The ultimate sense of comfort Daniel says hell feel with owning a gun brings with it the unease of handling a lethal weapon Knowing how to use it responsibly, he shared, is something he doesnt take lightly

Theres a sense of responsibility that comes with that, he said I would definitely, 100, intend to continue to do weapons training courses and go to the shooting range on a regular basis so I can use it effectively, and not harm anybody I dont intend to harm

Firearms classes at four or five times the size

In Rockland County, New York, the founder of the New York State Jewish Gun Club told CNN hes trying hard to keep up with the increase in demand for training

Im getting extra help, to help answer the phone, to reply to the emails and to make sure that everyone is serviced, said Tzvi Waldman, who started the club in 2017 to unify Jewish gun owners

Their club normally offers a firearms class needed for obtaining a pistol permit about once or twice monthly for around 12 people, Waldman said

Since what happened in Israel, we have done three classes at probably four or five times the size, he said

Waldman explained Jewish views on gun ownership vary on a spectrum, with Orthodox Hasidic Jews more conservative and leaning toward social issues and family values, and other Jewish people who share more leftleaning political views

There is a notion out there that Jews are anti guns, but in reality, at least in my community, I think the Second Amendment is very strong over here, Waldman said What happened in Israel was like a rude awakening for people that no matter where you are on the spectrum in Judaism, youre hated the same

Hes been shocked, he shared, at the type of people joining his classes recently people who were previously unaccepting of guns as a means of safety who now see the value in it, he said

The recent visitors explaining why they want to learn to shoot have voiced their safety concerns with fear and worry over handling a deadly weapon, according to Waldman

Its coming from a level of anxiety They want to make sure that they know how to use it and that they know which one to get, Waldman said

A lot of people are scared of it, but its either that or death, and they would rather learn something that they were uncomfortable with and to know that theyre safe,

FBI Director Christopher Wray said Tuesday that antisemitism is reaching historic levels in the United States

This is a threat that is reaching, in some way, sort of historic levels, Wray said during a Senate hearing Tuesday The FBI director said that was in part because the Jewish community is targeted by terrorists really across the spectrum including homegrown violent extremists, foreign terrorist organizations, and domestic violent extremists

In fact, our statistics would indicate that for a group that represents only about 24 of the American public, they account for something like 60 of all religiousbased hate crimes,

Wray said that the FBI is tackling the rise in antisemitism through a series of law enforcement efforts including joint terrorism task forces, hate crime investigations, and intelligence sharing

This is not a time for panic, but it is a time for vigilance, Wray said addressing public fear over the rise in hate crimes We shouldnt stop conducting our daily lives going to schools, houses of worship, and so forth but we should be vigilantYou often hear the expression if you see something, say something thats never been more true than now, Wray said And thats probably partly why the American people are reporting more tips and leads to us, and were pursuing those threats and leads as vigorously and responsibly as we can

Dr Mohammed Ghneim has not left his hospital in Gaza City in four weeks He cant remember the last time he slept or ate, and his blue scrubs are stained in the blood of patients whove died in his arms

His voice cracks under the weight of the horrors hes seen fetuses pulled from the wombs of dying mothers, children with crushed lungs struggling to breathe, and his own colleagues doctors, nurses and EMTs transported to the hospital morgue in body bags

We are doing our best this is why we havent left here for days but the situation is very horrible Theres no way to describe it in any language or with any words, Ghneim told CNN in a voice message on November 7, as sounds of chaos and panic unfolded around him Many times I want to go to the side and cry, but unfortunately there is no time

Ghneim is an emergency room doctor at Dar AlShifa, also known as AlShifa Hospital or Shifa, and is Arabic for house of healing But at this hospital the largest medical complex in Gaza theres far too much death

Shifa is running dangerously low on clean water, medicine, supplies and fuel Meanwhile, thousands of Palestinians, injured or displaced by Israels war against Hamas, continue to pack its wards, seeking shelter from the seemingly endless barrage of airstrikes

Israeli forces on Saturday surrounded Shifa in all directions, threatening the health and safety of those inside, according to Dr Munir AlBursh, directorgeneral of the Hamascontrolled health ministry in Gaza

An Israeli airstrike destroyed the hospitals generator, AlBursh said, cutting electricity to the building, including lifesaving equipment used by 39 infants in neonatal care Three infants have already died, he added

The Israeli military denied that the hospital is under siege, telling CNN it was engaged in ongoing intense fighting against Hamas in the vicinity of Shifa, but declined to comment further on its forces proximity to the complex because military activity was still underway Israel has accused Hamas of using hospitals as cover a charge doctors at Shifa and the militant group deny

We are trained to deal with mass casualties, but not like this, Ghneim, 28, said We have no anesthesia to treat patients with severe pain, patients with shrapnel in their head or abdomen, people whose arms or legs have been amputated

Alarming scenes from inside Shifa, and other hospitals across Gaza, have sparked international calls for a ceasefire and more aid to be allowed to enter the territory, home to some 2 million Palestinians, currently closed off to the world by Israel and Egypt

Nonprofit medical groups across the United States are mobilizing to raise funds and ship medicine and supplies to failing hospitals before its too late But with the situation in Gaza spiraling and few diplomatic or humanitarian solutions in sight, many worry the delay will result in more deaths

I want to say to the world, this is a humanitarian crisis, this is a genocide, Ghneim pleaded from his crowded emergency room Please stop this

Desperate to send help

More than 7,000 miles away, in Houston, Mosab Nasser is making travel plans to visit communities where he can spread awareness about the situation in Gaza and raise funds for struggling hospitals

The proud Texan, born and raised in Gaza, says its all hes been doing since October 7, when Israel declared war following a brazen attack by Hamas that killed around 1,200 people and took more than 230 others hostage, according to Israeli authorities

Israel responded by imposing a siege and launching devastating airstrikes across Gaza, which Hamas governs Israel says its goal is to destroy the militant group and return the hostages, but it is the Palestinian people living there who are bearing the brunt of the attacks

The airstrikes have killed at least 11,025 Palestinians, including 4,506 children, and wounded more than 27,000 others so far, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah, which draws its figures from sources in Hamasrun Gaza

Nasser says three of his relatives all young children, including one who was only 8 months old were killed when Israeli airstrikes caused their home to collapse, but he has no time to grieve

As CEO of the nonprofit medical group FAJR Scientific, he is obligated to find a way to deliver aid and other resources to hospitals in need

FAJR Scientifics goal is to raise enough money to fill five 40foot containers with medical supplies, surgical tools and sterile instruments, and ship them to Gaza, Nasser says

Doctors in Gaza dont get to go home Its traumatic for them, Nasser said They are exhausted Their bodies are physically at the hospital, but their minds are with their families trying to check on them

In some cases, Nasser says, medical workers have discovered their own loved ones among the injured or dead, compounding the fears and anxieties they already experience

Its not the first time FAJR Scientific has supported Gazas medical community The group has led several surgical missions to Gaza and trained nearly 100 Palestinian medical workers on the ground, Nasser says In August, they provided more than 4 million in medical supplies to hospitals across the territory

The Palestinian American Medical Association PAMA, another USbased nonprofit, is also leading efforts to assist health care workers in Gaza

The group, which has more than 6,000 members and supporters and leads medical missions to the region, has raised over 2 million so far, PAMA president Dr Mustafa Musleh told CNN

They will use the money to purchase critical medicine and supplies, including anesthetics, antibiotics and other medications to fill containers that will be sent to Gaza The group also has more than 1,000 healthcare professionals on standby to enter the enclave as soon as Israel and Egypt allow entry to humanitarian workers, Musleh says

Were desperate to send help, the Palestinian American doctor from Dayton, Ohio, said Its a catastrophic situation Theres 10 times more patients than what the hospitals can take care of and theyre all coming with serious lifethreatening injuries that need immediate attention, and a lot of people die because of that

Waiting for a miracle

Ahmad Muhanna, director of Al Awda Hospital in Jabalya, says the real nightmare is treating maimed children, whose faces he sees even when he closes his eyes

Im being torn apart inside witnessing our children being martyred and receiving the carnage of their body parts, when they have no fault in this conflict, Muhanna told CNN on October 29 from his hospital in northern Gaza

Doctors are performing surgeries, including amputations, on children without clean water, let alone anesthesia or antibiotics, he says Many are being treated on the floor due to a lack of empty hospital beds

Israeli airstrikes at or near medical facilities have further complicated the matter, Muhanna, 49, adds Medical workers are in constant danger

As of November 10, 198 health care workers have been killed and 130 others wounded in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah It also reports 21 hospitals and 51 primary health care centers are out of service

Israel says its only targeting Hamas, whom it accuses of using hospitals to hide and launch attacks The Palestinian Ministry of Health and Hamas deny such claims

Israel says civilian deaths and the destruction of vital facilities, including hospitals, are collateral damage it tries to mitigate, and that Palestinians should flee to safer areas But doctors in Gaza say its impossible to evacuate patients without causing more death, and that nowhere is truly safe

The Israeli air force is terrorizing us day and night above our tiny spot in the world, said Muhanna, who believes high casualties prove Israel is not trying to mitigate civilian deaths They dont have boundaries, no red lines they cannot cross They have crossed every line by targeting women, elders, children, men, the disabled and every possible living thing

The chaos unfolding at Shifa, Al Awda and other hospitals across Gaza has left doctors exasperated But with no ceasefire on the horizon and the borders tightly controlled, preventing vital supplies from reaching hospitals, more people will continue to die

We feel helpless towards our patients, said Ghneim, the emergency room doctor at Shifa We want to provide patients with appropriate health care, but in many cases theres nothing we can do

Meanwhile, Nasser and Musleh scramble to fundraise, buy supplies and coordinate shipping to the Rafah border crossing, where truckers anxiously await permission to enter Gaza and unload their lifesaving cargo

The whole world turned their back on the people of Gaza, Nasser said And right now were only waiting for a miracle

The Israeli military on Wednesday said that a February strike on Khan Younis in southern Gaza may have led Hamas militants to execute six hostages

The bodies of those six male hostages were recovered in late August Two days later, the Israel Defense Forces IDF said that all of them had been shot, but it could not definitively say whether it was the cause of death The slain hostages were Yoram Metzger, Alexander Dancyg, Avraham Munder, Chaim Peri, Nadav Popplewell, and Yagev Buchshtab

It is highly probable that their deaths were related to the strike near the location where they were held, the military said in a Wednesday statement on the investigation

Speaking at a press briefing about an investigation into the hostages deaths, an IDF official said the Israeli military struck a terror target on February 14 in Khan Younis, but did not know that hostages were being held nearby The investigation did not find anything wrong with this attack, in the planning process or the execution, the official said

After a forensic examination and other investigations, the military now believes that the most plausible scenario is that the hostages and their guards survived the initial effects of that strike but that the strike may have led militants to shoot the six hostages The guards themselves subsequently died, the military official said, from a secondary effect of the strike, such a lack of oxygen in the tunnel where they were living

IDF spokesperson Daniel Hagari later raised the possibility of the aftermath of the strike killing the hostages He said that while the most likely way the hostages died was at the hands of militants following the February attack, with the militants then dying from secondary effects of the strike, there were also other possible explanations

Another possibility is that the hostages were killed by secondary effects along with the terrorists and subsequently shot by other terrorists who arrived later, he said, adding, a less probable possibility is that the hostages were killed before the strike

Hagari said that due to the amount of time that passed from when the hostages were killed to when the forensic exams took place, it is not possible to definitively determine whether the hostages were killed by gunfire or as a result of exposure to the aftermath of the strike

Operational lessons from this incident have been incorporated to minimize risks to hostages in the future, he said

Another hostage recovered

As the six hostages families were presented with the findings of the investigation surrounding their deaths, the military announced on Wednesday that it recovered the body of yet another hostage

Israel recovered 38yearold dual GermanIsraeli citizen Itay Svirskys body from Gaza, after he was killed by his captors, the Israeli military and security agency Shin Bet announced

In a special operation, the body of the abductee Itay Svirsky was recovered, who was kidnapped on October 7, 2023, from Kibbutz Beeri and murdered in captivity by Hamas terrorists in January 2024, the Prime Ministers Office PMO said, adding that the operation was carried out by Israels military and security agency

Our heart is torn by the heavy loss of the Svirsky family, who also lost Itays parents, Orit and the late Rafi, who were murdered in the murderous attack by Hamas, it added

The Hostages and Missing Families Forum said Svirsky was laid to rest in Israel, and on behalf of his family, requested the public not to share images of him from the Hamas video that was distributed in January

In January, Hamas released a video showing clips of three hostages Noa Argamani, Svirsky and Yossi Sharabi speaking to the camera, ending with a caption saying, Tomorrow, we will inform you of their fate The next day, another video appeared to show the dead bodies of Svirsky and Sharabi In the video, Argamani said both men had been killed by Israeli bombing

This brings the number of hostages currently held dead and alive to 100, of which 96 were taken on October 7

Qatar is suspending its role as a mediator in talks between Israel and Hamas after concluding that the two sides are no longer negotiating in good faith, its foreign ministry said Saturday

Qatar, which has hosted Hamas political office in Doha since 2012, has alongside Egypt served as an intermediary for the two sides, which do not officially maintain direct contact

A diplomatic source briefed on the matter told CNN that the Qatari government made the decision after concluding that both sides are now refusing to engage constructively

The State of Qatar notified the parties 10 days ago during the last attempts to reach an agreement, that it would stall its efforts to mediate between Hamas and Israel if an agreement was not reached in that round, Majed AlAnsari, the spokesperson for the Qatari Foreign Ministry, said in a statement Saturday

Except for a brief flurry of activity last month, there have been no real negotiations since six Israeli hostages were executed by Hamas and discovered in a Gaza tunnel at the end of August During a temporary ceasefire mediated by Qatar and Egypt last November, Hamas released 105 hostages and Israel released 240 Palestinian prisoners

The Qataris have concluded that there is insufficient willingness from either side, with the mediation efforts becoming more about politics and PR rather than a serious attempt to secure peace, save the hostages and Palestinian civilians, the diplomatic source told CNN As a consequence, the Hamas political office no longer serves its purpose

A separate diplomatic source told CNN that Hamas political office in Doha wont be operational so Hamas may leave The office could open again if talks restart

Hamas has insisted that any agreement with Israel must lead to a permanent end to the war in Gaza Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has refused that demand In July he effectively spiked a draft hostage and ceasefire deal by introducing a raft of new, 11thhour demands

There are 101 hostages still held in Gaza Israels military campaign, launched in response to Hamas October 7 attack, has killed more than 43,000 Palestinians in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health the UN reported that 70 of the fatalities in the first six months of the conflict were women and children

The Israeli minister of economy, Nir Barkat, appeared to offer the first official Israeli reaction to the move, saying on X that Qatar was never a mediator, but Hamas defender, the one to fund and protect the terrorist organization Netanyahu for years backed payments to Hamas through Qatar, in order to divide Palestinian politics and detractors allege prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state

It is not the first time the Qatari government has expressed frustration particularly with insinuations that it was too close to Hamas In April, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said that Qatars efforts were being misused for narrow political interests by some involved in the conflict, which required the state of Qatar to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of its role

The Qatari government has now told the Biden administration that it is willing to restart its mediation efforts when both sides reach an impasse and demonstrate a sincere willingness to return to the negotiating table with the objective of putting an end to the war and the suffering of civilians

A senior American official told CNN that while Qatar had played an invaluable role in helping to mediate a hostage deal last year, following Hamas repeated refusal to release even a small number of hostages, including most recently during meetings in Cairo, their continued presence in Doha is no longer viable or acceptable

Omer loved sports, playing soccer, basketball, and volleyball, and served as the captain of his schools sports teams, the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said in a statement Family and friends described him as a warm, optimistic, and caring individual who lights up the room the moment he enters

Israels Foreign Minister Israel Katz said in a statement that Neutra fell in a heroic battle near Nir Oz on October 7 Nir Oz, a small kibbutz near Gaza in southern Israel, was one of the communities worst impacted by the terror attacks of October 7, with one in four residents murdered or kidnapped

Neutras parents Ronen and Orna Neutra spoke to CNN last week, describing the pain of having to celebrate their second Thanksgiving without their son at the table

Believing Omer to be alive, they said they were hoping the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon could serve as a time to refocus on securing his release

We have seen that attention both in Israel and around the world was taken from the war in Gaza to the war in Lebanon in the last four or five months, and that was a concern to us, Ronen Neutra said But at the same time, we are disappointed that it was not combined with a hostage deal, which is really the most urgent element right now We consider it a missed opportunity

US President Joe Biden said in a statement on Monday that he and first lady Jill Biden were devastated and outraged following the announcement of Neutras death

Less than a month ago, Omers mother and father joined me at the White House to share the pain theyve endured as they prayed for the safe return of their son pain no parent should ever know, Biden wrote in the statement

During this dark hour as our nation joins Omers parents, brother, and family in grieving this tragic loss we pray to find strength and resilience And to all the families of those still held hostage We see you We are with you And I will not stop working to bring your loved ones back home where they belong, the president added

Devastating news

The announcement of Neutras death sparked an outpouring of grief from Israeli officials Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called him a person of great values, rich in talents, and a Zionist in every fiber of his being

Israels President Isaac Herzog, who has met Neutras family on several occasions, described the news of his death as devastating

Omer was born and raised in the United States and chose to come to Israel, and enlist in the IDF to stand in the defense of our people, Herzog said

The news of Neutras death came just days after Hamas released a video of Edan Alexander, one of the three IsraeliAmerican hostages still believed to be alive in Gaza

The propaganda video was released on Saturday It shows Alexander, 20, who appears to be under duress, stating he has been held captive for more than 420 days and begging Israels Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US Presidentelect Donald Trump for his release Monday marked 423 days since the war between Israel and Hamas erupted

Speaking in front of thousands at a rally on Saturday night at Hostage Square in Tel Aviv, Alexanders mother Yael Alexander said she was shaken by the video

She told the crowd she had been contacted by the Israeli leader following the release of the video

My Edan, my love, we miss you so much I want to tell you that following your request, about an hour ago, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called me He strengthened me and assured me that now, after the deal in Lebanon, the conditions are ripe to release you and bring you home, she said

According to Israeli authorities, Hamas is holding 101 hostages in Gaza 97 taken on October 7, 2023 and four others who were kidnapped before that At least 37 of the hostages have now been confirmed dead by Israel The hostages include 13 women and two children under the age of five, according to the authorities

A ceasefire deal in Gaza that would see Israeli hostages freed and the first break in the fighting in more than three months is unlikely to happen by the start of Ramadan which the Biden administration had been aiming for, according to sources familiar with the negotiations

Negotiators had hoped to have a draft agreement this week after days of meetings in Cairo, but it wont happen, said one diplomat familiar with the discussions who described the last few days of talks as very hectic

Two American officials agreed that the prospects are not promising of Israel and Hamas agreeing to the temporary truce by the start of the Muslim holy month early next week

Hope is fading, one US official said

A failure to achieve a deal in the next few days would come after weeks of US President Joe Biden and administration officials saying an agreement needs to be in place by Ramadan to avoid escalation of the fivemonth war He warned Tuesday that without a ceasefire by then the region could become very, very dangerous

Israel has also warned that if the Israeli hostages being held in Gaza arent home by Ramadan they will launch a military offensive into Rafah in southern Gaza where around 15 million Palestinians are trying to seek safety from the fighting

Representatives from Hamas, Egypt, Qatar and the United States had gathered this week in the Egyptian capital for more talks while Israel refused to send a delegation because Hamas has not yet provided a list of hostages who are alive and dead, a recent demand by Israel

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The Biden administration insists Israel has already accepted the broad terms of a sixweek pause while Hamas is holding out

A Hamas delegation left Cairo on Thursday after days of talks with no obvious breakthrough in negotiations aimed at reaching a ceasefire in exchange for hostage releases Egypt staterun Al Qahera news, citing a senior source, said that the delegation has left to consult on the proposals, and that negotiations will resume next week

Its in the hands of Hamas right now, Biden told reporters on Tuesday as he boarded Air Force One He had raised hopes last week saying that a ceasefire could be in place by this past Monday, a prediction he later admitted was unlikely

One thing the administration and Hamas agree on is the desire for a temporary, sixweek truce to turn into a permanent ceasefire without a resumption in the fighting Biden officials have said they believe the pause could evolve into a more enduring peace, while Israel has maintained they plan to continue efforts to dismantle Hamas, particularly in Rafah

Hope is not lost that a first phase could be launched soon, the diplomat cautioned, saying they believe an agreement could be possible in the first week or two of Ramadan

But the deadly incident last week in which more than 100 Palestinians were killed in Gaza City when an aid convoy was mobbed and Israeli forces opened fire took us back 10 steps, the diplomat said Hamas then presented a response to a negotiated framework to mediators that no one is happy about

A deal, if successful, is expected to include multiple phases In the first stage, when the fighting would stop for at least six weeks, around 40 Israeli elderly, female, sick and wounded hostages are expected to be released In parallel, Israel would also free Palestinian prisoners from Israeli prisoners, a number that could be in the hundreds

Hamas had backed off some of its more stringent demands, sources had told CNN, but following last weeks Flour Massacre, as it has become known, the group pushed for more assurances Namely that in the first phase the Israeli military would pull back from Gazan cities and in a second withdraw from the enclave altogether, according to the diplomat who said the IDF is refusing to agree to those points

Not only do Palestinians from northern Gaza need to be able to return to what is left of their homes, Hamas has argued in the talks, but do so without going through IDF checkpoints There are demands by Hamas, the diplomat said, that specific machinery be provided to move rubble as well as field hospitals and clinics

Hamas said its delegation left Cairo Thursday to consult with the movements leadership, as negotiations and efforts continue to stop the aggression, return the displaced, and bring relief aid to our Palestinian people, the group said in a statement

On Wednesday Hamas argued that it had shown flexibility but Israel continued to evade the obligations of the agreement being discussed

We have affirmed our conditions for a ceasefire complete IDF withdrawal from the sector, the return of displaced persons to the areas they left, especially in the north, and the provision of sufficient aid, relief, and reconstruction, Hamas senior leader Osama Hamdan told a news conference in Beirut on Tuesday

Ramadan, a month of fasting and piety for Muslims, is a period in which you have calm and youre able to do the essential humanitarian work, a senior administration official told reporters in a weekend briefing

About a quarter of Gazas population is on the brink of famine, according to the United Nations The Biden administration has escalated its criticism of Israels refusal to open more border crossings to allow aid into Gaza, particularly to address needs in the north

There are no excuses, Biden posted on X

Even without a ceasefire, said US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday, it is urgent to dramatically increase the humanitarian assistance thats getting to people inside of Gaza The situation with children, women and men who are caught in this crossfire of Hamas making inside of Gaza is unacceptable and not sustainable

Blinken made the comments before a meeting with Qatars Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim alThani, a central player in the ceasefire mediation In their meeting, Blinken acknowledged that the pause and hostage deal is unlikely before the start of Ramadan, said a person familiar with the meeting

The same person said the CIA Director Bill Burns, who has been leading the administrations efforts in the negotiations, had a long meeting with Thani during the latters visit to Washington

Bill Burns has traveled back to the Middle East, according to a US official and another source familiar with the trip

The sources said Burns was in Egypt on Wednesday before traveling to Qatar on Thursday Burns is not expected to stop in Israel on this trip, the US official said, nor is there expected to be a quad format meeting with the Egyptian and Israeli intelligence chiefs and the Qatari Prime Minister, as there was in Paris two weeks ago

We continue to believe that the obstacles are not insurmountable and that a deal can be reached, State Department spokesman Matt Miller said Wednesday when asked about the lack of a breakthrough The deal is in the interest of Israel Its in the interest of the Palestinian people And its in the interest of the broader region, so were going to continue to push for one

Saadi Baraka wakes at dawn and works until dusk, digging on his knees in the dirt as he tries to bury Gazas dead with dignity in a cemetery he says has run out of room

The graveyard at Deir alBalah in central Gaza, dotted with the green and gray of shrubs and tombs, has been expanded several times in recent months to accommodate the interminable flow of bodies

Baraka says he has buried 16,880 people since Israel launched its assault on Gaza in response to Hamas October 7 terror attack more than half of the 30,631 reported dead by the enclaves ministry of health Israel estimates about 10,000 of those killed are Hamas fighters CNN cannot independently verify the casualty tolls in Gaza or the Israeli estimates of Hamas fighters killed

I come to the cemetery at 6 am and stay until 6 pm to prepare mass graves for 30, 40 people, Baraka told CNN Monday I have made 167 mass graves I only hope they send us some tiles and cement so we can bury the people with dignity

Baraka, 64, was a gravedigger long before October 7 But he says the horrors he has seen since then dismembered children, whole families buried together, graves filled with tens of people in each have been hard to comprehend

I try to go to sleep, and I swear I cant even if I take 2 kilos of sleeping pills, he said

Baraka estimates around 85 of those he has buried have been women and children They killed all the women They were all killed because they are the ones that stayed at home, he said

Of the thousands of bodies that have poured into his cemetery, he claimed he has buried no more than three Hamas fighters He said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is lying when he says he is killing Hamas

CNN footage shows workers building new graves with concrete blocks above ground instead of digging fresh ones in the crowded earth Baraka pours dirt through a sieve, separating the rocks from the silt, then adds water and churns the cement with a shovel, before smoothing it with a spade over the top of a grave, covered with a flap of corrugated iron

Most tombstones are a single concrete block the same used to build the walls of the grave Epitaphs are scratched into the concrete with a nail, or simply etched into the wet cement with the tip of a spade

As Baraka and his men work, they are surrounded by the buzz of Israeli drones and the stench of death

Of course it smells, those are mass graves, he says He remembers many of the dead by name This is the Laghi family, this is the Abu Hasanein family, those are Abu Hattab,

While many of the dead have been killed by Israeli airstrikes, which have pummeled Gaza for nearly five months, many are now dying of hunger, according to the World Health Organization WHO

A WHO team said Monday it found severe levels of malnutrition, children dying of starvation, serious shortages of fuel, food and medical supplies, hospital buildings destroyed, during a recent visit to the north of Gaza

The warning came just days after scores of Palestinians were killed trying to access food in Gaza City on Thursday At least 118 were killed and 760 injured in an incident where Israel Defense Forces IDF troops used live fire as hungry and desperate Palestinian civilians gathered around food aid trucks, according to the Palestinian ministry of health

After the incident, the US for the first time airdropped humanitarian aid into Gaza More than 38,000 meals were dropped Saturday along the Gaza coastline in a combined operation by the US Air Force and the Royal Jordanian Air Force A further 36,800 were dropped Tuesday, according to CENTCOM

But Baraka dismissed the operations as a political stunt We dont want them to drop fast food from airplanes They are showing off

While CNN filmed, a woman entered the cemetery with several men carrying the bagged body of her lifeless daughter She begs Baraka to see her daughter before he buries her Baraka agrees, then asks the men to let the woman look upon her daughter for the last time while he prepares her grave Later, dozens stand and pray while her body is lowered into the ground

Baraka said he worked in Israel for 28 years and wants to live to see an end to generations of violence

I only want peace and I see no other solution We should live as one and thats it Its enough with all those wars, he said

He said he supports two states for two people living together with love, but warned that Israels attempt to destroy Hamas will not bring this about

You are wasting your time, Netanyahu, Baraka says in Arabic, before switching to Hebrew If you want to finish Hamas I tell you in Hebrew so you can hear me you are wasting your time

Hamas media outlet Al Aqsa TV said Saleh AlArouri, deputy head of the political bureau of Hamas, was martyred in a treacherous Zionist airstrike in Beirut

Arouri was considered one of the founding members of the groups military wing, the Izz adDin alQassam Brigades, and was based in Beirut Two other leaders from Hamas military wing, Samir Findi Abu Amer and Azzam AlAqraa Abu Ammar, were also among those killed in the strike, according to Hamas officials

At least four people were killed in the attack that targeted an office belonging to Hamas in the southern Beirut suburb of Dahieh, Lebanese news agency NNA reported The area is also a stronghold of Iranbacked Hezbollah

The Israel Defense Forces IDF declined to comment when asked about the announcement and its spokesperson Daniel Hagari skirted a question from a reporter on Tuesday about the matter saying we are focused on fighting against Hamas

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But in a seemingly veiled reference to the killing, Israels far right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich wrote on his official social media platforms that all of Israels enemies will perish

Meanwhile, a former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon, praised the Israeli security and intelligence agencies for what he said was the assassination of Arouri on Tuesday Anyone who was involved in the 710 massacre should know that we will reach out to them and close an account with them, Danon said on X

If true, Arouri would be the most senior Hamas official killed by Israeli forces since the start of the war sparked by the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel

In addition to dealing a blow to Hamas leadership, the apparent attack also risks further broadening the arena of the IsraelHamas conflict It would mark the biggest Israeli strike on the Lebanese capital since the 2006 war between the two countries

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati condemned the attack and said the explosion is a new Israeli crime aimed at drawing Lebanon into a new phase of confrontation, referring to the monthslong titfortat conflict between Hezbollah and Israeli forces in the LebanonIsrael border region

We call on the concerned countries to put pressure on Israel to stop its targeting We also warn against the Israeli political level resorting to exporting its failures in Gaza to the southern Lebanese border, Mikati wrote on X

It has become clear to everyone near and far that the decision to go to war is in the hands of Israel, and what is required is to deter it and stop its aggression, he added

Israel vowed to annihilate Hamas after its militants killed hundreds of people in Israel on October 7 Israels Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in November told a press conference that he had instructed the Mossad spy agency to act against the heads of Hamas wherever they are

Israeli government spokesperson Mark Regev noted in an interview with MSNBC that Israel had not taken responsibility for the attack in Beirut Regev, who is a senior adviser to Netanyahu, said whoever did it must be clear that this was not an attack on the Lebanese state It was not an attack even on Hezbollah, Regev said

Regev said that although individuals who kill Israelis can expect the Israeli state and the Israeli armed forces to ultimately reach them, this rather is a general statement of Israels policy

Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas political leader, called Arouris killing a cowardly assassination and blamed Israel for the deadly strike, as did the Iranbacked Houthi rebels in Yemen, who have launched more than 100 attacks against about a dozen commercial and merchant ships transiting the Red Sea over the past few weeks

Fears of escalation

For nearly three months, titfortat fighting between Israels military and Hezbollah has largely stayed within a roughly fourkilometer range of the border region, with Hezbollah striking Israel while Israel struck Lebanon

The fighting has raised fears among the United States and other Western countries that a fullscale war could break out between Israel and the Middle Easts most powerful paramilitary, Hezbollah

Those fears have so far failed to materialize, but the blast in Beirut on Tuesday afternoon is likely to fuel concerns about the potential for escalation

During a televized address last summer, Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah warned against Israeli assassinations in Lebanon, saying that they would inspire a strong response from the militant group

Nasrallah also said in the August 2023 speech that the group would try to prevent Lebanon from becoming an arena for assassinations, invoking the countrys tumultuous past

On Tuesday, Iran which backs Hezbollah condemned Arouris assassination and blamed the attack on Israel

Arouris death comes as Israels military begins to draw down the number of soldiers on the ground in Gaza as it looks to move to a new phase of its war on Hamas amid a spiraling civilian death toll in the besieged enclave

Who is Saleh AlArouri

The prominent Hamas political and military leader was born in 1966 in the village of Aroura in the Ramallah district of the West Bank He went on to play a role in founding the AlQassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas in the West Bank, and is considered to be the mastermind behind arming the group

He was a member of Hamas since 1987 and considered its leader in the West Bank prior to his death, according to the European Council on Foreign Relations ECFR He has been a member of Hamas Politburo since 2010 and was elected its deputy head in 2017, ECFR added

Israel considers him one of the key founders of the AlQassam Brigades in the occupied West Bank and accused him of being behind the kidnapping of three settlers in Hebron, which led to the demolition of his house He began establishing and organizing a military apparatus for the movement in the West Bank in 19911992, which contributed to the actual launch of the AlQassam Brigades in the West Bank in 1992

He helped negotiate the release of captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, in 2011, in exchange for 1,027 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails

He had been repeatedly detained by Israel, including for long periods between 19851992, and 19922007, according to ECHR In 2010, he was deported by Israel to Syria, living there for three years before moving to Turkey and traveling to several countries, including Qatar and Malaysia He finally settled in the southern suburbs of Lebanon

The Israeli army demolished Arouris house in Aroura in October The IDF said at the time that forces operated in the town to demolish the residence of Saleh AlArouri, deputy head of the Hamas terrorist organizations political bureau and in charge of Hamas activities in Judea and Samaria

In 2015, the US Department of the Treasury designated Arouri as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist and offered a reward of up to 5 million for information on him CNN has reached out to the US State Department to see if the reward will be paid and to whom

He was married with two daughters and lived in Lebanon at the time of his deathThe Biden administration has told Israel that the strikes are unacceptable, officials said One senior US official said that the US believes at least some of those strikes have been accidental, intended instead for the powerful Shiite Lebanese militant group Hezbollah which also operates along the LebanonIsrael border and has been hitting Israeli military positions But the intention of other strikes has been less clear, the official said, and more junior Israeli troops may not be exercising enough restraint

But the scope of the incidents, which has not been previously reported, has frustrated US officials because the US believes the LAF will need to be part of any eventual diplomatic solution between Israel and Lebanon to quiet the current violence The US is also deeply concerned that the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza could expand to the north, and US officials have been working with Israel and Lebanon to try to contain the war

The United States has been clear we do not want to see this conflict spread to Lebanon and we continue to urge the Israelis do all they can to be targeted and avoid civilians, civilian infrastructure, civilian farmland, the UN, and the Lebanese Armed Forces, a spokesperson for the White Houses National Security Council told CNN The United States is proud of its partnership with the LAF, an essential institution, not only to the stability and security of Lebanon, but of the entire region

A spokesperson for the Israel Defense Forces told CNN on Friday that any harm caused to other forces is unintentional

In response to Hezbollahs aggression, the IDF strikes the terrorist organizations military infrastructure and works to eliminate any threat to the State of Israel, IDF spokeperson Nir Dinar said

Any harm to civilians and other forces is unintentional Such incidents are reviewed in order to improve operational precautions and to ensure accountability when necessary, Dinar added

The Lebanese military is not as strong as Hezbollah, which gets funding, training and weapons from Iran and is one of the most formidable paramilitary forces in the Middle East But the US backing of the LAF gives Washington a partner in an active region that it can work with on a range of priorities, including counterterrorism The senior US official noted that the LAF is popular among the Lebanese public and, while not seen as a perfect counterweight to Hezbollah, is a neutral alternative that the US believes will be an important player in any future peace settlement

US officials believe Israels attacks on the Lebanese military have resulted in at least eight injuries and one death since October 7

According to a US list of the strikes seen by CNN, one Lebanese soldier was killed and three were wounded on December 5 after four tank shells hit a position on the Blue Line, the UNs demarcation of the border between Israel and Lebanon

The Israeli military apologized and said the Lebanese Armed Forces were not the target of the strike The LAF has not struck back militarily, US officials said

Among the other incidents in southern Lebanon were Israeli strikes on two LAF positions on October 21 that destroyed an observation post Six days later, a LAF patrol that included a brigade commander came under direct fire, according to US officials On December 8, one Lebanese soldier suffered from the effects of white phosphorous

That followed an October incident in which Israel reportedly used USsupplied white phosphorous munitions and injured at least nine civilians, according to The Washington Post The White House said it would be seeking answers from Israel about its use of white phosphorous

The IDFs continued pattern of strikes against LAF positions are concerning and irresponsible The LAF is a critical and independent force that successive US administrations have supported in recognition of its important role in stability in Lebanon, said a senior congressional aide Many members of Congress share the administrations strong concerns with such actions

As the pace of the strikes escalated, administration officials made clear to Israeli leadership that they need to be more careful, US officials told CNN Meanwhile, the US has been working with Lebanon to try to quell the violence between Israel and Hezbollah and quiet the northern border Israel wants Hezbollah to retreat north of the Litani River, which is about 18 miles away from the border, Israeli defense minister Yoav Gallant has said

On October 13, a Reuters journalist was killed and six other journalists were wounded in two tank artillery strikes in southern Lebanon while covering the fighting The journalists, clearly wearing blue flak jackets marked Press, were on an exposed hilltop as Israeli helicopters and drones buzzed above

Investigations by two human rights groups as well as Reuters and Agence FrancePresse found that the targeting was likely deliberate Human Rights Watch called the attack a potential war crime

This is not the first time that Israeli forces have apparently deliberately attacked journalists, with deadly and devastating results, said Ramzi Kaiss, a Lebanon researcher at Human Rights Watch Those responsible need to be held to account, and it needs to be made clear that journalists and other civilians are not lawful targets

Britains Prince William has shared his concern over Israels five monthslong military offensive in Gaza, saying he wants to see an end to the fighting as soon as possible

I remain deeply concerned about the terrible human cost of the conflict in the Middle East since the Hamas terrorist attack on 7 October Too many have been killed, the prince said in a statement on Tuesday

The heir to the throne said that he like so many others wants an end to the fighting as soon as possible

The Israeli military launched its campaign in Gaza after the Hamasled October 7 attacks that killed around 1,200 people in southern Israel Israeli attacks on Gaza have since killed at least 29,092 Palestinians and injured another 69,028, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza

Israels bombardment and besiegement of the strip have crushed the health care system, wiped out entire neighborhoods and exposed the population of nearly 23 million people to starvation, dehydration and deadly disease At least 17 million people have been forcibly displaced, according to the UNs Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

A growing chorus of leaders have condemned the mounting death toll in Gaza Earlier this week, the US proposed a UN Security Council draft resolution calling for a temporary ceasefire

The prince used his message to call for increased humanitarian support to Gaza, calling it critical for both aid to be allowed in and the hostages taken by Hamas to be released

Sometimes it is only when faced with the sheer scale of human suffering that the importance of permanent peace is brought home, Prince William said

Even in the darkest hour, we must not succumb to the counsel of despair I continue to cling to the hope that a brighter future can be found and I refuse to give up on that, he said in his concluding remark

Deeply moved as a father

The prince said he was deeply moved as a father by a meeting he had with workers from an aid charity working in Gaza, according to Kensington Palace

He paid a visit on Tuesday to the London headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross ICRC who have been providing a humanitarian response to the war in Gaza

At least 17,000 children in Gaza about 1 of the total displaced population are unaccompanied or separated from their parents, according to the UNs childrens agency More than one million Palestinian children now require mental health and psychological support

A royal source told CNN that Prince William has followed the region closely since he visited in 2018

Although the prince did make a statement not long after the Hamas attacks on October 7, it was the extent of the human suffering that is on display that led him to make the statement on Tuesday, the royal source added

The British royal family has long taken a stance of political neutrality and does not comment on political issues The royal source told CNN that the British government was briefed by the foreign office in advance of the princes statement and engagements this week

United Nations experts have called for an investigation into what they described as credible allegations of egregious human rights violations against Palestinian women and girls in Gaza and the West Bank by Israeli forces

The allegations include extrajudicial killing, arbitrary detention, degrading treatment, rape and sexual violence, according to a statement by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights released on Monday It did not detail how they did their factfinding, but they referred to photos of female detainees in degrading circumstances reportedly taken by Israeli troops and uploaded online

The Israel Defense Forces IDF denied the accusations and said it adheres to international law Without precise details or proof of individual cases it is not possible for us to examine them in depth, the IDF said in a statement to CNN

Israels mission to the UN in Geneva also said it forcefully rejects what it called despicable and unfounded claims by the group of UN experts

It said authorities had received no complaints of abuse but stressed Israel remains ready to investigate any concrete claims of misconduct by its security forces when presented with credible allegations and evidence

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pointed to the Israeli statement when CNN asked for a response to the UN experts call for an independent investigation into the allegations

The experts, who are part of the largest body for independent factfinding and monitoring in the UN human rights system, expressed their concerns over the arbitrary detention of hundreds of Palestinian women and girls since the Hamas attacks of October 7

Many Palestinian women and girls have reportedly been subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment, denied menstruation pads, food and medicine, and severely beaten, the statement said On at least one occasion, Palestinian women detained in Gaza were allegedly kept in a cage in the rain and cold, without food

The UN experts further said they were distressed by reports of multiple forms of sexual assault against Palestinian women and girls in detention, including being stripped naked and searched by male Israeli army officers

At least two female Palestinian detainees were reportedly raped while others were reportedly threatened with rape and sexual violence, the statement added, calling on Israel to uphold the rights and dignity of Palestinian women and girls

CNN cannot independently verify the allegations

The UN and human rights organizations were criticized for being slow to denounce the reports of rape and mutilation against Israelis mostly girls and women but also men by Hamas fighters on October 7

The UN agency UN Women released a statement in December condemning the attacks saying it was alarmed by the numerous accounts of genderbased atrocities and sexual violence during those attacks

CNN has previously reported on testimony from a survivor of the Nova music festival in the desert of southern Israel describing sexual violence by Hamas fighters against Israeli women

Responding on Monday to the UN experts call for an investigation, Israel again accused the UN of remaining silent on the horrific sexual violence and genderbased violence perpetrated by Hamas on and since October 7

The meeting follows visits from Wang to Israel and the occupied West Bank making him the first known envoy Beijing has sent to either location since Hamas deadly October 7 attacks and the ensuing Israeli bombardment of Gaza

Wang and Haniyeh exchanged views on the Gaza conflict and other issues during their meeting Sunday, according to a brief readout from Chinas Foreign Ministry Tuesday

Haniyeh stressed in the meeting the need to quickly stop the aggression and massacres, for the Israeli military to withdraw from Gaza, and achieve the political goals and aspirations of establishing an independent Palestinian state, according to a press release from the Hamas government media office Chinese Ambassador to Qatar Cao Xiaolin was also present at the meeting, the statement said

Haniyeh praised the role played by China in the Security Council, the United Nations, and the International Court of Justice, the Hamas statement said, referring to Beijings recent diplomacy related to the war

The militant group also said they had met with Cao late last month in Qatar Chinas Foreign Ministry and its embassy in Qatar did not release any information about that meeting

Wangs visit comes as Beijing aims to step up its profile as a peace broker and has become increasingly vocal in its opposition to the Gaza war

Wang, a former ambassador to Lebanon, has been in the region since at least March 10 when he met with counterparts in Egypt, before traveling to the West Bank, Israel and Qatar as part of a previously unannounced trip in which the war in Gaza has been high on the agenda

Fighting began on October 7 when Hamas carried out a deadly attack on Israel, killing more than 1,200 people and taking some 250 hostages, according to Israel Israeli forces have since launched months of ongoing bombardment and ground operations in the Hamasruled enclave of Gaza, where the death toll stands higher than 31,000, according to the Ministry of Health in the strip

Beijing did not name or condemn Hamas in the wake of the October 7 attacks Since then, it has condemned the war and been a vocal proponent of an immediate ceasefire and the implementation of a twostate solution

During his visit to the West Bank, Wang met with the Palestinian Authoritys foreign minister Riyad alMaliki, where the Chinese envoy said Beijing is deeply concerned about the conflict in Gaza

He also pledged to work with the international community to swiftly extinguish the flames of war and achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question based on a twostate solution, according to a readout from Chinas Foreign Ministry

In a subsequent visit to Israel Thursday, Wang met with Israeli foreign affairs officials, stating that the top priority is a comprehensive ceasefire, cessation of the war, guarantee of humanitarian aid and protection of civilians, a separate Chinese readout said

China dispatched Zhai Jun, a special envoy for the Middle East, to the region in the weeks following the October 7 attack and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held meetings in Egypt at the start of the year, but neither were confirmed to have visited the Palestinian Territories or Israel

Chinese officials have had other contact with Israeli and Palestinian officials since the start of the war, including when Beijing hosted a delegation from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, the Palestinian National Authority, and Indonesia in November

Solidarity with Global South

Beijing has also used the war as a platform to showcase its solidarity with the Arab world and Global South, while positioning its views as in opposition to those of the United States

Speaking to reporters in Beijing earlier this month, Foreign Minister Wang said the failure to end the humanitarian disaster in Gaza was a disgrace for civilization and he urged the international community to act promptly to promote an immediate ceasefire as its overriding priority

China supports Palestines full membership in the UN, and urges certain UN Security Council member not to lay obstacles to that end, Wang said in a veiled swipe at Washington, which has backed Israels right to retaliate following Hamas terror attack

China has also called for convening an international peace conference and setting a specific timetable for implementing a twostate solution

Though it is unclear how much sway China has in the region to play a strong role backing such an effort, an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel is consistent with Beijings longstanding foreign policy It was one of the first countries to recognize Palestine as a sovereign state in the late 1980s and has long advocated for a twostate solution

Beijings growing criticism of Israels treatment of Palestinians comes as it too has been accused of rights abuses against minorities, particularly in its western Xinjiang region

The UNs highest human rights office said serious human rights violations that could amount to crimes against humanity have been committed against Uyghur and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, where rights groups and researchers have said more than a million people may have been placed in reeducation camps Beijing denies committing rights abuses in Xinjiang

Famine is imminent in northern Gaza where 70 of the population are already suffering with catastrophic levels of hunger, a UNbacked report said Monday, as the EUs top diplomat accused Israel of using starvation as a weapon of war

All 22 million people in Gaza do not have enough food to eat, with half of the population on the brink of starvation and famine projected to arrive in the north anytime between midMarch and May 2024, according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification IPC

Acute hunger and malnutrition have already far exceeded the threshold for famine in northern Gaza and the IPC warns of a major acceleration of death and malnutrition

This is the highest number of people facing catastrophic hunger ever recorded anywhere, anytime, by the IPC, said United Nations SecretaryGeneral Antonio Guterres

At least 25 people, including children and babies, have died from starvation and dehydration in the north, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza People have resorted to scavenging, eating grass and animal feed, and drinking polluted water Starving mothers are unable to produce enough milk to feed their babies and parents beg for infant formula at overwhelmed health facilities, parents and doctors told CNN

The crisis has been described as entirely manmade and preventable due to Israels throttling of aid and widespread destruction of Gaza The report said famine conditions will spread unless there is an immediate cessation of hostilities and full aid access granted to the strip

People in Gaza are starving to death right now The speed at which this manmade hunger and malnutrition crisis has ripped through Gaza is terrifying, said World Food Programme Executive Director Cindy McCain

There is a very small window left to prevent an outright famine and to do that we need immediate and full access to the north If we wait until famine has been declared, its too late Thousands more will be dead

The European Unions top diplomat Josep Borrell accused Israel of using starvation as a weapon of war, saying the famine was not a natural disaster but caused by Israel preventing humanitarian support entering into Gaza

Hundreds of trucks were waiting at the border and being prevented entry into Gaza by Israel, he said

The support is there waiting Trucks are stopped, people are dying, Borrell said Aid delivery by sea and air was only necessary because the natural way of delivering aid by land was artificially closed by Israel, he added

The World Food Programme estimates that at least 300 trucks are needed to enter Gaza every day and distribute food to meet only the basic hunger needs The UN agency has only managed to take nine convoys into northern Gaza since the start of the year, it said in a statement

A ceasefire remains the only way for agencies such as the WFP to roll out a massive relief operation reaching all the communities in need,

Famine will spread, warning over Rafah offensive

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told CNN in an interview on Sunday that his countrys policy is to let as much humanitarian aid into Gaza as is necessary But that claim has been disputed by aid agencies and even contradicts his own statements

Our policy is to not have famine, but to be the entry of humanitarian support as needed, and as much as is needed, Netanyahu told CNN

Aid workers and government officials say a pattern has emerged of Israeli obstruction, where Israels Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories COGAT, the agency that controls access to Gaza, has imposed arbitrary and contradictory criteria on relief entering the enclave

About 210,000 people in the northern Gaza governates are already thought to be in Phase 5 of the IPC Food Insecurity Scale known as the Catastrophe Phase

One in three children below the age of 2 are acutely malnourished, the report said

In the south, the governorates of Deir alBalah, Khan Younis and Rafah are all in a Phase 4 or the Emergency Phase and in the worstcase scenario face the risk of famine through July 2024, according to the report

Between midMarch and midJuly, in the most likely scenario and under the assumption of an escalation of the conflict including a ground offensive in Rafah, half of the population of the Gaza Strip 111 million people is expected to face catastrophic conditions IPC Phase 5, the report warned

Scarce supplies mean that virtually all households are skipping meals every day and adults are going without so their children can eat, the report said In twothirds of households in northern Gaza, people went entire days and nights without eating at least 10 times in the last 30 days, the report found In the southern governorates, this applies to one third of the households

Famine could be halted if aid organizations are allowed full access to Gaza to bring food, water and other supplies to the civilian population, the report said

For this to happen, a ceasefire is needed immediately, it said

But Netanyahu has vowed to push ahead with a planned ground offensive in Rafah, which has been under Israeli bombardment for weeks and where an estimated 15 million Palestinians are now sheltering

International alarm is mounting over the pending operation, with fears that further escalation of violence will lead to more deaths and suffering, and exacerbate the hunger crisis

On Monday, US President Joe Biden voiced deep concerns over Rafah in a phone call with Netanyahu, according to Bidens top national security official

National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said Biden sought to explain to Netanyahu why the plan for Rafah could prove catastrophic for Palestinian civilians and hamper the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza

The concerns fall within three areas that civilians sheltering in Rafah have nowhere safe to go that Rafah is an entry point for critical humanitarian assistance and that neighboring Egypt has voiced serious concerns about a potential military operation there, he said

Sullivan said Israel has not presented a plan to the United States or the rest of the world on protecting Palestinian civilians in Rafah

With aid deliveries on land falling far short of the numbers needed to ward off famine in the enclave, it is hoped these airdrops will provide a lifeline to people in Gaza

But the UN and aid agencies have questioned how effective they will be at alleviating the situation, and their risks were shown starkly on Friday when malfunctioning parachutes caused aid pallets to hurtle from the sky at breakneck speed, killing five unsuspecting civilians

Weve been taking a closer look at the use of airdrops in warzones

What are airdrops

The UN carried out its first airdrop in August 1973 and since then they have been used by aid agencies and governments to deliver food to conflict zones across the globe

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Packages of food and medicines are wrapped typically with six layers of packaging to provide protection and sewn together using a handheld stitching machine Agencies use different colors to denote the contents of the packages with the World Food Programme using white for cereals, red for pulses and blue or green for specialized nutritious food

Packages are then loaded onto aircraft before being dropped via parachute anywhere from 300 to up to 5,600 meters above, according to the World Food Programme WFP

This is not the first time the US government has carried out airdrops over conflict zones In 2001, the US dropped food packets over Afghanistan accompanied by leaflets explaining how civilians could tell the difference between airdrops and cluster bombs In 2014, when Islamic State was at its peak in Iraq, the US dropped aid into areas where food and water supplies had been cut

Do they work

Airdrops evade the often rigorous examinations carried out at land checkpoints, so are undoubtedly a speedy way of getting supplies into a conflict zone

But despite this advantage, aid agencies say their drawbacks overwhelmingly outweigh their benefits

For starters, they are more expensive Airdrops cost up to seven times as much as land deliveries, the WFP says They also have much more limited delivery capacity For example, one truck is capable of delivering nearly 10 times the amount one aircraft could deliver roughly 20 to 30 metric tonnes, according to the UN

Humanitarian workers always complain that airdrops are good photo opportunities but a lousy way to deliver aid,

Experts have also questioned whether countries have plans in place for the aid once it reaches the ground The UN special rapporteur for food, Michael Fakrhi says airdrops usually culminate in chaos

Youre throwing aid into the wind to people whove been starving and have been denied humanitarian access This will create chaos, predictably, and we cannot blame the people for that, Fakrhi said Friday

The US administration has acknowledged the pitfalls of airdrops with White House spokesperson John Kirby telling CNN Tuesday that they are not an ideal way of getting aid to people in Gaza They airdrops are certainly an indication of how desperate things are that we are now going to have to resort to airdrops, Kirby continued

Palestinians have voiced some practical concerns Mahmoud Shalabi who is senior program manager of NGO, Medical Aid for Palestinians MAP, said some meals needed microwaves when we dont even have electricity right now Speaking from the city of Beit Lahia in northern Gaza, Shalabi said most packages have only contained enough food for just two to three meals

A Palestinian journalist based in northern Gaza, Abdel Qader Al Sabbah said the wrong type of meals were being sent, calling instead for flour, rice, oil, salt, and other seeds and beans, so people here can benefit from these and prepare several meals

So why are airdrops being carried out

Aid agencies have consistently said not enough aid is reaching Gaza

Even before the war, Israel restricted access and to and from Gaza, stringently controlling the entry of goods through land crossings After Israel imposed a complete siege on Gaza following the October 7 attacks controls have significantly tightened further

Israel has been carrying out security checks on goods entering its own crossing into Gaza, Kerem Shalom but also on goods that passed through Israeli crossings before transiting onto Egypts entry point into Gaza, the Rafah crossing

A CNN investigation found evidence of goods being subject to arbitrary and contradictory controls as authorities strive to prevent the entry of dual use goods which they say could can also be used to serve military needs for the strengthening of Hamas

An average of 95 aid trucks per day entered Gaza between October 10 and February 1, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent, down from 500 commercial and aid trucks a day before the war It is the challenges of getting aid via road that has prompted countries to carry out recent airdrops, to the dismay of organizations such as the UN who say they should only be used when all other options have been exhausted

When countries use airdrops and these maritime piers is usually if not always in situations when you want to deliver humanitarian aid into enemy territory Thats when you use these methods of last resort, Special Rapporteur for Food, Michael Fakhri said Friday

Israel has denied claims it is limiting aid into Gaza, telling CNN in a recent statement that the country assists, encourages and facilitates the entry of humanitarian aid for the residents of the Gaza Strip

A former US Aid official, Dave Harden, described airdrops to Gaza as dangerous and expensive ventures which are primarily for the Biden administrations benefit to paper over a massive policy failure

As the threat of famine looms larger and larger, aid agencies such as Médecins Sans Frontières MSF are calling on the US to instead focus on pressuring Israel to allow more aid into Gaza via road

This is not a logistics problem it is a political problem Rather than look to the US military to build a workaround, the US should insist on immediate humanitarian access using the roads and entry points that already exist,

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday refused to answer whether he would take responsibility for failing to prevent the October 7 attack on Israel, saying that there would be time for such difficult questions once the war is over

In an interview with CNNs Dana Bash, Netanyahu acknowledged that it is a question that needs to be asked, but that the country for now needs to unite around the goal of defeating Hamas the militant group that controls Gaza and launched the assault on Israel

Were going to answer all these questions, the prime minister said, adding that, Right now, I think what we have to do is unite the country for one purpose to achieve victory

Lets focus on victory thats my responsibility now

Netanyahu has been criticized for failing to anticipate the deadliest attack on Israel since the countrys founding in 1948, when Hamas militants killed more than 1,200 people and took more than 200 hostages last month, according to Israeli authorities

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During a Saturday demonstration in Tel Aviv, families of hostages held by the militant group in Gaza called on Netanyahu and the government to do more to secure the release of their loved ones

The prime minister told CNN Sunday that Israel is doing all it can around the clock to release the hostages, saying it is one of his two war goals, along with the destruction of Hamas

He also reiterated his stance regarding international calls for a ceasefire, saying the only halt in fighting he would accept is one in which we have our hostages released

For days, tens of thousands of Gazans have fled to the south of the enclave using temporary evacuation corridors Asked if he would allow dayslong pauses, Netanyahu told CNN, thats not a pause

If youre talking about stopping the fighting, thats exactly what Hamas wants, Netanyahu said, arguing that Hamas would use those extended pauses to replenish its supplies

Hamas wants an endless series of pauses that basically dissipate the battle against them, he said

No reason why we cant just take the patients out of there

Since the October 7 attacks, Israel has been bombarding Gaza, killing at least 11,025 Palestinians, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah, which draws figures from the Hamascontrolled territory

This toll includes 4,506 children and 3,027 women, according to the ministry, which said that over 27,000 other individuals have sustained injuries

Asked about hospitals in Gaza that health officials and aid agencies say are suffering a catastrophic situation, as Israels ground offensive moves forward in northern Gaza, Netanyahu told CNN that Israel is helping patients by establishing safe corridors on the ground, but insisted that no immunity will be given to Hamas

We have designated routes to a safe zone south of Gaza City, he said We want all civilians to be moved out of harms way

Netanyahu blamed Hamas for the civilian casualties and said that 100 or so have already been evacuated from AlShifa hospital, Gazas largest healthcare facility Theres no reason why we cant just take the patients out of there, he said

CNN cannot verify those claims Israel earlier on Sunday announced a corridor near AlShifa Hospital, but the International Committee of the Red Cross said it could not confirm if any evacuations had taken place

Palestinian authorities in Gaza and the West Bank claimed the Israeli military had fired at people who moved between hospital buildings an allegation the Israeli military has denied

Postwar Gaza

With fighting raging, it remains a major open question about who will run postwar Gaza

This week, the US suggested that the Palestinian Authority which exercises limited selfrule in the occupied West Bank could play a role

Netanyahu said Israels security role in a postwar Gaza would be an overriding, overreaching military envelope, but did not explain what that meant

It would be accompanied by a reconstructed civilian authority some kind of civilian Palestinian Authority in control of Gaza that is willing to fight the terrorists and educate children for a future of peace, cooperation, prosperity, cooperation with Israel, and not the annihilation of Israel

So far, that hasnt happened, he added

There has to be something else Otherwise were just falling into that same rabbit hole and were going to have the same result Remember the PA Palestinian Authority was already in Gaza, Netanyahu continued

The PA used to run both Gaza and the West Bank but was ousted after a brief civil war with Hamas

The world must must act urgently to stem the conflict in Gaza, Chinas top diplomat said Monday during a meeting with officials from Arab and Muslim majority nations, as Beijing steps up its efforts to play a role in establishing a ceasefire in the IsraelHamas conflict

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi welcomed counterparts from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, the Palestinian National Authority, and Indonesia, as well as the head of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for a twoday visit to the Chinese capital, the start of the delegations expected tour of several world capitals

The international community must act urgently, taking effective measures to prevent this tragedy from spreading China firmly stands with justice and fairness in this conflict, Wang told the visiting leaders in opening remarks ahead of talks, where he reiterated Chinas call for an immediate ceasefire

Visiting ministers voiced their own strong calls for an end to the conflict, with Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud saying The message is clear the war must stop immediately, we must move to a ceasefire immediately, and relief materials and aid must enter immediately

Countries represented in the delegation hoped to cooperate with China and all countries that are responsible and appreciate the seriousness of the situation, he said

Israel has launched weeks of bombardment and ground operations in the Hamasruled enclave of Gaza following a deadly attack on its territory by the group on October 7 More than 200 hostages were taken in that attack, according to the Israel Defense Forces

The gathering in Beijing comes as sources tell CNN that a possible deal to secure the release of some hostages held by Hamas and a several days pause in fighting may be in sight, following weeks of negotiations between the United States, Israel and the militant group, mediated by Gulf state Qatar

Beijing has been at odds with Washington an Israeli ally and long a major power broker in the region over their approach to the conflict, including when it comes to an immediate ceasefire, which Washington does not support Beijing has also criticized Israels retaliation and failed to condemn Hamas or name the group in its statements, sparking backlash from Israeli officials

Israel should stop its collective punishment on the people of Gaza, and open up a humanitarian corridor as soon as possible to prevent a humanitarian crisis of a larger scale from taking place, Wang was cited as telling the delegation during the talks, according to a readout from Chinas Foreign Ministry

Israel has staunchly defended its actions as rooting out terrorism following a barbaric invasion and has rejected any ceasefire without the return of hostages

Chinas push for peace

China has been attempting to play an active role in finding a solution to the conflict as it seeks to expand its position as a major global power

Beijing dispatched a peace envoy for a multicountry tour of the region last month and has acted as a strong voice pushing for an immediate ceasefire at the United Nations, including the Security Council, where China now holds the rotating presidency

Last week the UN body passed its first resolution on the conflict, which called for the immediate release of all hostages held by Hamas and for extended humanitarian corridors throughout the enclave to protect civilians The US and the United Kingdom abstained, citing the resolutions failure to condemn Hamas

For reasons known to all, in particular, the repeated and persistent obstruction of a permanent member of the Council, this resolution at present can only serve as a first step based on minimum consensus, Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jun said following the vote, in an apparent veiled jab at the US

In his comments Monday in Beijing, Saudi Arabias minister commended the Security Councils decision, under Chinas leadership

The conflict has also given China an opportunity to bolster its already strengthening ties with a number of countries across the Arab world a region where observers say it hopes to drive a wedge between the US and the countries with which it has longstanding ties

We have always firmly defended the legitimate rights and interests of Arab and Muslim countries, and have always firmly supported the Palestinian peoples efforts to restore their legitimate national rights and interests, Wang told the visiting delegation

Engaging major players

Immediate ceasefire and longerterm peace were also key topics during a roughly 10day tour in the Middle East last month from Chinas special envoy for the region, Zhai Jun, who visited Egypt, Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, according to Chinas Foreign Ministry

Last week the envoy visited and met with officials in Turkey and Bahrain, where Zhai also discussed the regional situation with representatives from Singapore, the US and Europe on the sidelines of an international conference

So far there have been no apparent concrete outcomes from the diplomacy

Zhais itinerary thus far has also not included stops in Israel, Palestiniancontrolled territories, or Iran, per information released by Chinas Foreign Ministry Wang spoke with Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen on the phone last month Its not clear if China has been in contact with Hamas officials during the latest conflict

Visiting officials in Beijing this week include Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad alMaliki of the West Bankbased Palestinian National Authority

China earlier this month dispatched the head of its Foreign Ministrys West Asian and North African affairs department to Iran, where the conflict was part of discussions, according to a post on the departments WeChat social media account

Iran is a longtime backer of both Hamas and Lebanonbased Hezbollah

During hourslong talks between Chinese leader Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden in California last week, Biden encouraged Xi to use Chinas leverage with Iran to warn against a wider regional escalation, a senior US official told CNN

In the talks, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said theyd already held discussions with the Iranians on the topic, the senior official said

Biden also made clear to Xi that he viewed Hamas as separate from the Palestinians The US views Hamas as a terrorist organization that has perpetuated the suffering of Palestinian people, and has upheld Israels right to retaliate against the group

Beijing has not referred to Hamas in its statements, but instead frames the current situation as a PalestinianIsraeli conflict

Speaking to reporters in Washington Monday, State Department spokesperson Matt Miller said the US would welcome China playing a constructive role in the Middle East

Secretary of State Antony Blinken had made this clear personally in conversations with Chinas Wang,

Talks over a hostage deal and a ceasefire in Gaza between Israel and Hamas have reached another stalemate but are not over, according to three people familiar with the negotiations

A diplomat described the talks as stuck but ongoing, saying that there continues to be proposals going back and forth A second source confirmed the parties are still engaged but said the negotiations are in a pause

There was no breakthrough after CIA Director Bill Burns traveled to Doha late last week to meet with Israeli, Egyptian and Qatari counterparts Burns put forward a proposal that was accepted by Israel and sent back to Hamas, the second person and an Israeli official told CNN

On Tuesday morning, Israel was informed that proposal was rejected by Hamas, the Israeli official said, and Israel decided to pull back the team of negotiators that had remained in Doha after Burns and Israels Mossad chief, David Barnea, had left Qatar

The negotiations are not only centric around the prisoner exchange deal, Hamas senior official Basem Naeim told CNN on Monday Israel has not agreed to any of Hamas requests related to a complete ceasefire, the withdrawal of all forces from the Gaza Strip, even in stages, and the return of all displaced people to their homes

In the latest talks, Israel had agreed to release around 700 Palestinian prisoners including many with life sentences in exchange for 40 Israeli hostages held in Gaza, the Israeli official and the source familiar with the discussions said Those releases would take place during the first phase of a ceasefire, which would be expected to last around six weeks

But other major discussion points for just the first phase are still being fiercely debated the ability for Gazans in the south to return home to the north, a surge of humanitarian aid for Gaza and the locations of Israeli troops

Hamas has regularly taken a more maximalist approach to what is expected to be a threephase deal demanding eventual discussions on an end to the war and the full withdrawal of IDF troops from Gaza Israel has refused to engage on either point, insisting on the need to continue efforts to dismantle Hamas

The Israeli official said that Hamas didnt counter their latest proposal that around 2,000 Palestinians be allowed to go back to the north per day, instead saying all the displaced Gazans should be allowed to return Hamas again argued all IDF troops should leave Gaza, including from the new checkpoint road Israel has built that cuts across the middle of the enclave

The National Security Council declined a request for comment Wednesday

American officials have said this week that progress was made during the weekend talks in Doha The process is complex and slow, one US official argued, in part because the Hamas negotiators need to get responses from the head of the group in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, who is believed to be somewhere in the vast underground tunnel system

On Tuesday, State Department Spokesman Matthew Miller criticized the argument by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus office that Hamas rejected the American ceasefire proposal in light of the United Nations Security Councils passage of a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire, which the US did not veto

That statement is inaccurate in almost every respect, and it is unfair to the hostages and their families, Miller said

The inability to achieve a ceasefire could accelerate Israels plans to launch a largescale ground offensive into the southern Gaza city of Rafah The US has repeatedly warned Israel against an operation without a coherent plan for the safety of the 14 million Palestinians sheltering there, which the Biden administration says it has not heard

Israels defense minister, Yoav Gallant, visited Washington this week for a whirlwind series of meetings with top Biden national security officials, including an unannounced meeting with the CIA director on Tuesday night

The senior US officials and Gallant did not reach any agreements on how Israel will move forward with an operation in Rafah in southern Gaza, US and Israeli officials told CNN

Gallant was told that Israel needs to find an alternative option to a major assault of Rafah Israeli officials said Gallant was open to the US recommendations about how to proceed with an attack on Hamas in Rafah, but ultimately Israeli officials said they will execute the plan they think is necessary to eliminate the remaining five Hamas battalions in the area

In a series of interviews with key Israeli players conducted in collaboration with Israeli investigative journalism organization Shomrim, CNN was told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continued the cash flow to Hamas, despite concerns raised from within his own government

Qatar has vowed not to stop those payments Qatari minister of state for foreign affairs Mohammed bin Abdulaziz AlKhulaifi told CNNs Becky Anderson on Monday that his government will continue to make payments to Gaza to support the enclave, as it has been doing for years

Were not going to change our mandate Our mandate is our continuous help and support for our brothers and sisters of Palestine We will continue to do it systematically as we did it before, AlKhulaifi said

Ad Feedback

Israeli sources responded by pointing out that successive governments had facilitated the transfer of money to Gaza for humanitarian reasons and that Netanyahu had acted decisively against Hamas after the October 7 attacks

Heres what we know about those payments and Israels role in facilitating them

When did the Qatari payments start

In 2018, Qatar began making monthly payments to the Gaza Strip Some 15 million were sent into Gaza in cashfilled suitcases delivered by the Qataris through Israeli territory after months of negotiation with Israel

The payments started after the Palestinian Authority PA, the Palestinian government in the Israeli occupied West Bank that is a rival of Hamas, decided to cut salaries of government employees in Gaza in 2017, an Israeli government source with knowledge of the matter told CNN at the time

The PA opposed the Qatari funding at the time, which Hamas said was meant for the payment of public salaries as well as medical purposes

Israel approved the deal in a security cabinet meeting in August 2018, when Netanyahu was serving his previous tenure as premier

Even then, Netanyahu was criticized by his coalition partners for the deal and for being too soft on Hamas

The prime minister defended the initiative at the time, saying the deal was made in coordination with security experts to return calm to Israeli villages of the south, but also to prevent a humanitarian disaster in Gaza

Ahmad Majdalani, an Executive Committee member at the Palestine Liberation Organization in the West Bank, accused the United States of orchestrating the payment

The US was aware of the Qatari payments to Hamas, a former senior State Department official involved in the region told CNN on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter

Qatar was prepared to provide funds to the Gaza Strip through Hamas as early as the 2014 IsraelHamas war to alleviate the humanitarian crisis there, the official said, and the US at the time left it up to the Israelis to decide whether they would permit this

We deferred completely to the Israelis as to whether this was something they wanted to do or not, the official said

Why did Israel back the payments

Israeli and international media have reported that Netanyahus plan to continue allowing aid to reach Gaza through Qatar was in the hope that it might make Hamas an effective counterweight to the PA and prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state

PA officials said at the time the cash transfers encouraged division between Palestinian factions

Major General Amos Gilad, a former senior Israeli Defense Ministry official, told CNN the plan was backed by the prime minister, but not by the Israeli intelligence community There was also some belief that it would weaken Palestinian sovereignty, he said There was also an illusion, he added, that if you fed them Hamas with money, they would be tamed

Shlomo Brom, a former deputy to Israels national security adviser, told the New York Times that an empowered Hamas helped Netanyahu avoid negotiating over a Palestinian state, saying the division of the Palestinians helped him make the case that he had no partner for peace in the Palestinians, thus avoiding pressure for peace talks that could lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state

The former State Department official said that after the 2014 war, Israel felt it was better off with Hamas controlling Gaza as opposed to multiple Islamist groups, or leaving it in a political vacuum

It was our impression that the Israelis were comfortable with keeping Hamas in power in a weakened form, the official said Our understanding was that Hamas was the lesser of a whole bunch of bad options in Gaza, the official added, noting that at least the competing PA could keep Hamas out of the West Bank

Naftali Bennett, a former Israeli prime minister, told CNN Sunday that after years of flagging his concerns to the Netanyahu government when he was minister of education, he stopped the suitcase cash transfers when he became prime minister in 2021

I stopped the cash suitcases because I believe that horrendous mistake to allow Hamas to have all these suitcases full of cash, that goes directly to reordering themselves against Israelis Why would we feed them cash to kill us Bennett asked

The cash payments stopped, but the transfer of funds to Gaza continued under Bennetts leadership, according to the New York Times

An Israeli official told CNN that any suggestion that Netanyahu wanted to maintain a moderately weakened Hamas was utterly false and that he had acted to weaken Hamas significantly

He led three powerful military operations against Hamas which killed thousands of terrorists and senior Hamas commanders, the official said Successive Israeli governments before, during and after Netanyahus governments enabled money to go to Gaza Not in order to strengthen Hamas but to prevent a humanitarian crisis by supporting critical infrastructure, including water and sewage systems to prevent the spread of disease and enable daily life

Has Netanyahu faced a backlash

Netanyahu has come under increasing criticism as the depth of his governments involvement in the move, as well as the motivations for it, come to light again

The funding deal is one reason why many Israelis today place part of the blame for the October 7 Hamas terror attack on Netanyahu personally Numerous people told CNN they believed that allowing the payments made Hamas stronger and, ultimately, made the brutal attacks worse

The premiers policy of treating the terror group as a partner, at the expense of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Palestinian statehood, has resulted in wounds that will take Israel years to heal from, wrote Tal Schneider in an opinion piece in the Times of Israel on October 8, a day after Hamas devastating attack

Gilad, the former Israeli defense official, said he was among those to argue against allowing money to reach Hamas, saying the permitted cash flow over the years was a dramatic, tragic mistake

With the funds, they could take care of the population They could take care of the military enhancement, and build up their capabilities, Gilad said last week

Criticism of Netanyahu among Israelis soared after the attack, with many blaming the prime minister for failing to prevent it

What backlash has Qatar faced

Qatar maintains close ties with both Hamas and Western states, including the United States It has come under harsh criticism for allowing the Iranbacked group to establish a political office in Doha, which has been operative since 2012

But it has also proven useful to Israel, having played a leading role in the release of hostages kidnapped on October 7 and held by Hamas in Gaza

But some Israeli officials have pointed to Qatar as among those responsible for the attack, saying the Gulf Arab state is supporting Hamas

Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen accused Qatar of financing Hamas and harboring its leaders in October

Qatar, which finance and harbor of Hamas leaders, could influence and enable the immediate and unconditional release of all, of all hostages held by the terrorists You, members of the international community should demand Qatar to do just that, Cohen said at a highlevel UN meeting

Qatar has rejected accusations made by Israeli officials, warning that these provocative statements could undermine mediation efforts and even endanger lives

Gilad also blamed Qatar, saying the Gulf state gave Hamas 1 billion shekels per year 30 million per month and they have used it to enhance, to cement their grip on Gaza For them Hamas, it was like a relief It was like oxygen, he told CNN

Qatar denies that those funds were intended for Hamas, saying they are meant as aid to pay salaries of workers in the besieged enclave

The State Department official said that while the US has always been wary of Qatars ties with Hamas, as well as with the criticism from both inside and outside the US about sending money to Gaza through the militant group, it was clear that Qatar had the most leverage with the group

The Gulf nation, which hosts a major US airbase, has also come under pressure in Congress A bipartisan group of 113 US lawmakers sent a letter to President Joe Biden on October 16 asking him to put pressure on countries who support Hamas, including Qatar

AlKhulaifi, the Qatari minister who leads his countrys mediation in the IsraelHamas war, said that his country will continue to engage with regional and international partners to make sure that those funds reach out could have the most vulnerable and to the important and vital infrastructure

The Israeli prime minister said Wednesday that Israeli forces had surrounded the house of Yahya Sinwar, potentially closing in on the top Hamas official in Gaza and the man most wanted by Israeli authorities

The Israel Defense Forces IDF said Sinwar was not in the house and was believed to be hiding underground in Gaza, but a senior adviser to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday that it was only a matter of time before we get him

Israel has publicly accused Sinwar of being the mastermind behind Hamas terror attack against Israel on October 7 though experts say he is likely one of several making him one of the key targets of its war in Gaza

A longtime figure in the Islamist Palestinian group, Sinwar was responsible for building up Hamas military wing before forging important new ties with regional Arab powers as the groups civilian and political leader

He was elected to Hamas main decisionmaking body, the Politburo, in 2017 as the political leader of Hamas in Gaza branch However, he has since become the Politburos de facto leader, according to research by the European Council on Foreign Relations ECFR

He has been designated a global terrorist by the US Department of State since 2015, and has been recently sanctioned by the United Kingdom and France

Harel Chorev, senior researcher at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, said that while Sinwar is a key player within Hamas, he shouldnt be seen as its sole leader

He is perceived as the most senior one because he has a very high public profile, but Hamas doesnt work this way, he said Hamas is a decentralized organization with several separate power centers and he is one of them

Chorev said that while Sinwar is a prominent figure, he is one of a triumvirate of Hamas officials responsible for the October 7 attack, along with Mohammed alMasri, popularly known as Mohammed Deif, the commander of the AlQassam Brigades, the military arm of Hamas, and Deifs deputy, Marwan Issa

Sinwar, with his silver head of hair and dark eyes set deep under prominent eyebrows, is by far the best known and most recognizable of the three, but it was Deif who announced the October 7 attacks

But while Sinwar has spent the past few years giving speeches and being photographed, Deif is an extremely secretive, shadowy figure who hasnt been seen in public in decades

Dead man walking

Sinwar was born in 1962 in a refugee camp in Khan Younis, southern Gaza His family was displaced from AlMajdal, a Palestinian village in modern day Askhelon, during the ArabIsraeli war

He joined Hamas in the late 1980s and became one of the founders of its feared internal intelligence apparatus, known as the Majd

He was convicted in 1988 of playing a role in the murder of two Israeli soldiers and four Palestinians suspected of collaboration with Israel, and spent more than two decades in Israeli prison

Sinwar later said he had spent those years studying his enemy, including learning to speak Hebrew

He was released in 2011 as part of the deal that saw more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners exchanged for Gilad Shalit, an IDF soldier who had been captured and taken to Gaza, where he was held for more than five years

At that time, Sinwar called the exchange one of the big strategic monuments in the history of our cause

Chorev said his release was helped by the fact that his brother was one of Shalits kidnappers and insisted on him being included in the deal

Back in Gaza, Sinwar has risen through the ranks and quickly became a key player within Hamas Chorev said he became known for his brutality and the violence he inflicts on anyone he suspects of betrayal or collaboration

It is well known that while in prison, he tortured people, mostly members of Hamas, using a hot plate to cause them burns his role in the Majd really tells you a lot about his character, his cruelty But at the same time, Israelis who met him said that he can also be very practical, openly discussing options, Chorev said

As the political leader of Hamas, Sinwar focused on the groups foreign relationships According to the ECFR, he was responsible for restoring Hamas relationship with Egyptian leaders who were wary of the groups support for political Islam, and for pulling in continued military funding from Iran

Sinwar was considered a vital decisionmaker and likely the main point of contact within Gaza during the intense negotiations over the return of the more than 240 hostages taken into the enclave by Hamas in the October 7 attacks The talks involved senior figures from Israel, Hamas, the United States, Qatar and Egypt

At the end of the day there are two people atop the negotiations, said Gershon Baskin, a wellknown Israeli peace activist involved in the 2011 release of Shalit, the Israeli soldier One is Yahya Sinwar on the Hamas side, and the other is Benjamin Netanyahu on the Israeli side

More than 100 Israeli and foreign hostages were released by Hamas and 240 Palestinian prisoners and detainees released by Israel as part of a truce won in those talks, before the temporary ceasefire collapsed on December 1, with Israel and Hamas blaming each other for the failure

Sinwar has been called many things over the past two months Israeli military spokesman Lt Col Richard Hecht called Sinwar the face of evil and declared him a dead man walking Israeli media compared him to Osama bin Laden, while a profile published by the IDF nicknamed him the Butcher from Khan Younis

But Chorev said that despite his position in the spotlight, Sinwar is just one of many commanders Israel needs to remove before it can say it has destroyed Hamas

To put it simply, if Israel will kill Sinwar, it doesnt mean necessarily that it will topple down Hamas However, Hamas can still be toppled down even if Sinwar stays alive because its not a hierarchical organization In order for Israel to destroy Hamas, it needs to destroy a critical mass of power centers, not just him, he said

The ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon appears to be largely holding, despite accusations of violations from both sides of the border

US President Joe Biden said the deal that took effect early Wednesday morning raising hopes of a lasting respite after a 13month border conflict that spiraled into an allout war in September is designed to be a permanent cessation of hostilities

Since then, thousands of displaced Lebanese people have begun returning to their homes in the south, despite both Lebanons army and the Israeli military warning residents not to return home yet

But a fragile and complicated process must still play out over the next 60 days, and it remains to be seen how permanent the pause will be in the long term

Heres what you need to know about the ceasefire and the weeks ahead

What the deal entails

The deal stipulates a 60day cessation of hostilities, which negotiators have described as the foundation of a lasting truce During that time, Hezbollah fighters are expected to retreat some 40 kilometers 25 miles from the IsraelLebanon border, while Israeli ground forces withdraw from Lebanese territory

UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended the last allout war between the two countries in 2006, has been the basis of the deal and the negotiations have mainly revolved around the treatys enforcement

Under the agreement, Lebanon would implement a more rigorous supervision of Hezbollahs movements south of the countrys Litani river, to prevent militants from regrouping there United Nations peacekeeping troops, the Lebanese military and a multinational committee will be tasked with supervising the Iranbacked groups movements

Israel has vowed to resume military operations in case of a breach of the agreement

Will the truce hold

The ceasefire agreement heralds muchneeded respite for Lebanese civilians, hundreds of whom have been killed in Israeli airstrikes, as well as for Israelis, millions of whom have taken to shelters amid Hezbollahs daily barrage of rocket fire

Thousands of Lebanese have begun to travel back to their homes in the south, despite warnings from the Israeli and Lebanese governments not to return immediately

Residents in the southern Lebanese town of Qlayaa were seen cheering and throwing rice in the air a gesture of celebration as a Lebanese regiment arrived in the town on Wednesday evening Under the truce, the Lebanese military will ramp up its presence in the south to help preserve the peace

But there are questions about how long the truce may hold Israel insists that it will take military action in response to any breach of the agreement That could reignite the conflict, putting USbacked diplomatic efforts in jeopardy

Meanwhile, Hezbollah has agreed to withdraw its forces north of the Litani river, some 40 kilometers from the IsraelLebanon frontier at its furthest point It made that concession in 2006 but violated it, building a vast underground infrastructure in an area where its members are part of the social fabric Israel also breached the 2006 agreement by conducting near daily overflights in Lebanon

On Thursday, however, both countries in the agreement accused the other of violating it

In a statement, Israels military that said that it had thwarted terrorist activity in a facility used by Hezbollah to store midrange rockets in southern Lebanon

Meanwhile, the Lebanese army said that Israel had breached the terms of the ceasefire agreement several times since it went into effect, through aerial infiltrations and the targeting of Lebanese territory with various weapons

Dozens of people, including children, have been killed as extremely intense Israeli airstrikes and shelling pounded multiple locations in Rafah overnight Monday, according to the Palestine Red Crescent Society, as international alarm mounts over Israels planned ground offensive in the southern Gazan city

More than 100 people were killed due to Israeli airstrikes as warplanes targeted different areas of the city and helicopters fired machine guns along the border areas, the PRCS said early Monday

The Hamascontrolled health ministry in Gaza said 94 people lost their lives CNN cannot independently verify either number The discrepancy likely exists because the health ministry only updates death toll numbers after bodies have been identified Both groups warned the figure was likely to rise and the PRCS said people remained trapped beneath the rubble

The director of Abu Yousef AlNajjar Hospital said medical facilities in Rafah cannot handle the large number of injuries due to the Israeli occupations bombardment

Footage obtained by CNN showed a chaotic scene inside Rafahs Al Kuwaiti hospital, with medics trying to resuscitate a motionless child in one scene and another showing doctors treating a wounded man on the hospital floor In another video a woman was inconsolable as she held a childs body wrapped in white cloth

At least two mosques and around a dozen homes were targeted in the strikes, the Rafah municipality said Monday

The Israeli military confirmed it conducted a series of strikes on what it said were targets in the Shaboura area of Rafah and that two Israeli hostages were rescued in a special operation

In a joint statement, the Israel Defense Forces, Israel Security Agency Shin Bet and Police identified the hostages as Fernando Simon Marman, 60, and Louis Har, 70, and said they were kidnapped by Hamas on October 7 from Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak

They are both in good medical condition and were transferred for medical examination at the Sheba Tel Hashomer hospital, the statement said

IDF spokesman Daniel Hagari told reporters the covert operation to secure the hostages began at 149 am local time, with the airstrikes on Rafah launching a minute later

In a statement Monday, Hamas condemned what it said was a horrific massacre by Israel against civilians in Rafah

The Israeli militarys attack on Rafah and its horrific massacres against defenseless civilians and displaced children, women, and the elderly is considered a continuation of the genocidal war and the forced displacement attempts it is waging against our Palestinian people, Hamas said

More than 13 million people more than half of Gazas population is seeking refuge in Rafah, with the majority of people displaced from other parts of the besieged enclave crammed into a sprawling tent city

There are severe shortages of food, water, medicine and shelter, and the city has been described as a pressure cooker of despair by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs OCHA spokesperson, Jens Laerke

Rafah has experienced aerial assaults from Israeli forces for months, but Mondays bombardment has heightened fears that an anticipated Israeli ground campaign would result in a bloodbath, with those trapped in the overcrowded city having no remaining escape route

According to the Gazan health ministry, more than 28,100 people have been killed in the enclave since October 7

Last bastion

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday directed the countrys military to plan for the evacuation of the population from Rafah after saying that the IDF would soon go into Rafah, Hamass last bastion

His comments set off a firestorm of criticism, with Human Rights Watch saying forced displacement of Palestinians in Rafah would have catastrophic consequences The United Nations said it was extremely worried about the fate of civilians in Rafah, according to UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric, who said people need to be protected

A Hamas leadership source said that an assault on Rafah would mean the destruction of negotiations that have been ongoing for weeks, according to Hamasrun AlAqsa TV

And Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Kingdom joined a growing list of countries to express concern over Israels planned offensive

Saudi Arabias foreign ministry warned of very serious repercussions of storming and targeting the city, while Qatar a key mediator in talks between Israel and Hamas on Sunday urged the UNs Security Council to prevent Israel from committing what it described as genocide and warned of a humanitarian catastrophe in the city

In a call with Netanyahu on Sunday, US President Joe Biden reaffirmed his stance the IDF should not proceed with the military operation in Rafah without a credible and executable plan to ensure the safety of civilians, according to a White House release

But Netanyahu has brushed off the criticism, saying that telling Israel not to enter the southern Gazan city was like telling the country to lose the war

Victory is within reach Were going to do it Were going to get the remaining Hamas terrorist battalions in Rafah, which is the last bastion, but were going to do it, Netanyahu told ABC News in an interview Sunday

An Israeli official told CNN that Netanyahu wants the Rafah operation completed by the start of Ramadan, expected to begin in early March

Netanyahu said Israel would provide safe passage for the civilian population but did not provide details on how that would happen Were working out a detailed plan, he said

Many Palestinians fleeing Israeli bombs and shelling have trekked through the enclave and taken refuge in the city as the IDFs campaign has moved south through Gaza

It has rapidly become home to a huge population of displaced Palestinians Satellite images showed last week how a tent city in Rafah has swelled in size in just a few weeks, as more Gazans descend on the area to escape the IDFs campaign

It is unclear where next they could go the city borders Egypt to the south, but the border into the country has been closed for months

The dead are better than us

For the more than one million Palestinians in the southern city, the expected push into Rafah is causing alarm and fear

We are praying to God that what happened in Gaza City does not happen in Rafah because if the same happens in Rafah we will have no place to go, Mohammad Jamal Abu Tour, a Palestinian living in Rafah, said

If we go to Gaza City or Khan Younis or El Nuseirat we are not going to find the supplies that were provided for us here in Rafah, he added We keep hearing that in Gaza City they cant find clean water and that they are eating grass, they drink from the sea, God help them

Mahmoud Khalil Amer, who was displaced from the Al Shati refugee camp in northern Gaza, said he stayed in a tent near a cemetery in Rafah We are not living, the dead are better than us, he said

Rafah is the last major population center in Gaza not occupied by the Israeli military

Other cities stormed by the IDF in its mission to destroy Hamas have been turned into wastelands a grim preview of what could be in store for Rafah

People in the Tal El Hawa neighborhood of Gaza City described scenes of total destruction following Israeli operations in northern Gaza, with some people saying they have had to drink from toilets due to a lack of water

We were besieged We tried to go back to the north, but we were besieged here, Abdul Kareem AlQaseer told a journalist working for CNN Every day there were martyrs Every day there was shelling Every day there was hunger

We even had to drink water from the toilets We had to drink from it and make our children drink from it There was no food, no drink, he added

Olfat Hamdan said she had witnessed dead bodies on the streets of Gaza City, noting that nobody was able to drag them or move them

What have I seen Total destruction look at of the scale of the destruction, she said in a video commissioned by CNN, as she pointed to damaged buildings and rubble around her

In the southern city of Khan Younis, where the Israeli military urged large numbers of civilians to flee in the early days of the war, the devastation witnessed by CNN was described as being beyond imagination

Since the IDF focused its campaign on Khan Younis, many buildings have been completely destroyed and the rubble bulldozed away The ones that are left standing appear damaged beyond any chance of repair Some look like the ruins of medieval castles lone walls with holes where windows used to be

At the heart of crescendoing fears surrounding an Israeli ground offensive in Rafah is a largescale human toll from a war that has already inflicted a catastrophic humanitarian crisis on the people of Gaza, including starvation, looming famine, a medical disaster, and the deaths of more than 28,100 Palestinians, according to information released by the Hamasrun Ministry of Health in Gaza

Scattered around a huge crater are the remnants of a life that is gone Random pieces of clothing and a red makeup bag lie in the mud Nearby, an English language textbook, bits of broken furniture and a pillow with floral embroidery are jumbled together in one large pile

The crater sits right in the middle of a residential neighborhood in central Khan Younis, the besieged city in southern Gaza that is the current epicenter of the war between Israel and Hamas

The city is the hometown of Hamas leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, and, according to the Israel Defense Forces IDF, a major Hamas stronghold Its also an area to which the Israeli military urged large numbers of civilians to flee in the early days of the war, when northern Gaza was the focus of Israels operations

Looking around, its clear that the IDF went into Khan Younis with full force

According to the IDF, the crater is all that is left of a building similar to the others in the area The military said it was flattened because it sat on top of an entrance to a vast underground tunnel complex

The IDF says the complex has been used by Sinwar and other Hamas officials to hide since the war began and some of the hostages kidnapped from Israel by Hamas on October 7 were held there Its not clear for how long

CNN was among a small group of reporters granted a military escort by the Israeli army to see the tunnels As a condition of entering Gaza under IDF escort, news outlets must submit photos and raw video footage to the Israeli military for review prior to publication The IDF did not review this written report

Being accompanied by the IDF meant the journalists were only able to see what it allowed them to see

Even so, the devastation witnessed by CNN in Gaza was beyond imagination

Driving from the border fence to the heart of Khan Younis in a military vehicle offered a limited vantage point, but there didnt seem to be a single building that was untouched by the war

Many buildings have been completely destroyed and the rubble bulldozed away The ones that are left standing appear damaged beyond any chance of repair Some look like the ruins of medieval castles lone walls with holes where windows used to be

The scale of the bulldozing is apparent when driving through In some areas, the roads are lined with banks of rubble that are so high that the military vehicle is completely boxed in, driving below the street level Heavy price

Early in the war, the Israeli military designated Khan Younis as a safer zone and told residents from northern Gaza to seek shelter there But as the IDF pushed to the south, the city became its next focus The IDF says Khan Younis is a Hamas stronghold, adding that the tunnel network underneath civilian buildings in the city was likely where Hamas planned the October 7 attacks from

Hamas has denied hiding in hospitals and other civilian structures and CNN cannot independently verify either claim

Local journalists have told CNN there were as many as 100,000 displaced people in United Nationsrun shelters and other facilities in the area before the IDF issued evacuation orders last month

Many had nowhere else to go and remained sheltering in medical centers and UN facilities in Khan Younis, including the Nasser Medical Complex, Al Amal Hospital and the Palestine Red Crescent Society headquarters The UN said thousands are still there, and those facilities have also come under attack, according to Hamasrun Palestinian health officials

The IDF has repeatedly asserted that it seeks to minimize harm to civilians but has come under pressure from the United States and others to do more

Brig Gen Dan Goldfuss is the commanding officer of the IDFs 98th division, the unit that is leading the offensive in Khan Younis He accompanied the small group of reporters, including CNN, on a tour of two Hamas tunnel compounds in the area

Standing inside the massive crater in Khan Younis on Sunday, Goldfuss admitted the destruction was significant But he blamed it on Hamas

Goldfuss said the tunnel network was used by the Hamas leadership to plan the attacks in which Hamas and Islamic Jihad killed more than 1,200 people and abducted more than 250 others to Gaza Some of the hostages are still likely being held inside the tunnels, he said

Ive been asked many questions about the price that Gaza, Khan Younis pays, the houses yes, definitely, there is a price that has been paid, Goldfuss said

But look around We are in an ordinary neighborhood and there is a shaft in every place you can find Theres a shaft in the kindergarten, theres a shaft in the school, theres a shaft in the mosques, theres a shaft in the supermarket, everywhere you go, he said

CNN cannot verify Goldfuss claims because Israel doesnt allow journalists to travel to Gaza independently However, the tunnel complex visited by CNN on Sunday was under a residential area

Even this limited glimpse of Gaza makes it clear that four months of Israeli military operations have completely transformed the enclave

Seen from above, Gaza used to be green and gray large swaths of fields alternating with densely populated cities Now, satellite images show a land thats mostly brown bombed out and bulldozed over

Displaced Palestinians crowded into tents in Rafah are waiting with dread for an anticipated Israeli ground assault on the city with nowhere left to flee once troops move in

One million people are estimated to be crammed into a tent city in the southern Gaza location, with satellite images showing that the makeshift shelter is rapidly expanding

Others are packed into houses in the city, where rocket attacks are already commonplace

We hear drones very, very loud, and we hear the sounds of bombing at night, Kareem Dahman, a displaced Palestinian in the city, told CNN The most recent bombing was very close to where Dahman lives, with more than a dozen family members in a single room of a friends house, he said

He said conditions in Rafah are very difficult, describing a large number of people, chaos, and high prices

Dahman, like countless others, found himself in the city after a very arduous journey through the besieged enclave Rafah was the last refuge for Palestinians trekking south to avoid Israels air and ground campaigns, following orders from Israel Defense Forces IDF officials for Palestinians to leave Gaza City, and then Khan Younis, as their ground campaign moved further south

Rafah has experienced aerial assaults from Israeli forces for months, but the new anticipated ground campaign brings with it heightened fears of a bloodbath

Those trapped in the city have no remaining escape route The city borders Egypt, and the crossing into that country has been closed for months

We were buying some supplies from a small grocery store The last time we bought from it was yesterday, Dahman told CNN In the morning, we went to buy things and found it had been bombed

The bombing is getting closer slowly in Rafah, he said We do not know where we will go after Rafah

Everyone is afraid

Israeli leaders have set their sights on Rafah in recent days, claiming the city is the last remaining Hamas stronghold and that the militant groups leadership, including Gaza leader Yahya Sinwar, is on the run

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on Monday said the military would soon achieve its goals as it pushed into Rafah

Gallant claimed in a televised briefing that Sinwar had no contact with his fighters and was forced to flee from one hideout to another with the IDF in close pursuit He is not leading the forces he is busy with his own personal survival He became, instead of the head of Hamas, a fugitive terrorist, Gallant said

But the top commander in charge of Israels military operation in southern Gaza has said that there is no plan in place yet for how to minimize civilian deaths in Rafah

Brig Gen Dan Goldfuss, who oversees the Israel Defense Forces 98th Division, said on Sunday he would work on such a if and when he receives the order to maneuver his forces into the area, and that as of Sunday, the order had not been issued yet

An IDF spokesperson told CNN that as of Wednesday, the information was still accurate an order to move into Rafah has not been issued yet

For the more than one million Palestinians in the southern city, the expected push into Rafah is causing alarm and fear

Everyone is afraid of the expanding of the ground operation in Rafah, Raed AlNims, Media Director of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society in Gaza, said on Monday

Ismail AlThawabta, the head of the Hamasrun Government Media Office in Gaza, told CNN on Monday that the IDFs entry into Rafah will cause a real disaster on top of the disasters to which the Gaza Strip is exposed

More than half of the estimated more than 2 million people in Gaza are seeking refuge in the Rafah area, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs OCHA OCHA said Monday that refugees facing acute shortages of food, water, shelter and medicine are still pouring into Rafah as fighting worsens nearby

We buy food and drink on a daily basis, which are canned foods of beans and meat Water is available but we need an hour to fill water from a water station, Dahman told CNN

Electricity is almost nonexistent, he added, a fact which makes it difficult for Palestinians to see communications regarding the IDFs approach We charge our phones using solar energy which is available at our friends house in Rafah, he said There is no phone signal except on the Israeli and Egyptian networks

Dahman and his family left Gaza City in midOctober, days after Hamas October 7 attacks on Israel sparked an IDF bombardment on the city In November, they went to Khan Younis, before again being uprooted in December and heading to Rafah

We live in tents in the Mawasi area of Rafah Our number exceeds 20 people, he told CNN Food and drink is hard to come by, and if they are available, they are at very expensive prices, he said

As for medical supplies, they are completely nonexistent, he added

The UNs humanitarian office has issued regular warnings about the situation on the ground, calling the city a pressure cooker last week

In recent days, thousands of Palestinians have continued to flee to the south, which is already hosting over half the Gazas population of some 23 million people Most are living in makeshift structures, tents or out in the open, a spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs OCHA, Jens Laerke, told a media briefing

Rafah is a pressure cooker of despair, and we fear for what comes next,

The US is allowing Israel to make its own calls on timing and strategy in its war with Hamas, but US President Joe Biden did weigh in on the matter during his visit with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the war cabinet in Tel Aviv earlier this week, according to a senior administration official

He asked some hard questions about what was being planned and what the effects would be, the official told CNN, adding Were not directing the Israelis, the timeline is theirs their thinking, their planning

The White House late Friday sought to clarify a brief comment made by Biden after he was asked by a reporter whether Israel should delay a ground invasion in Gaza until more hostages can get out As he climbed the stairs to Air Force One, the president responded, Yes

The White House immediately moved to explain the presidents comments which could be seen as the US staking out a role in the war between Israel and Hamas that erupted on October 7

The president was far away He didnt hear the full question The question sounded like Would you like to see more hostages released He wasnt commenting on anything else, White House communications director Ben LaBolt said less than an hour after the presidents comment, according to the press pool

Earlier Friday, Hamas released two American hostages in a deal brokered by the Qatari government A number of foreign nationals were among those kidnapped by Hamas, but information about the status, location and identity of all the hostages remains scarce

As CNN has reported, the US and its allies have been urging Israel to be strategic and clear about its goals if and when it launches a ground invasion of Gaza, warning against a prolonged occupation and placing a particular emphasis on avoiding civilian casualties, according to US and Western officials

During the October 7 attack, Hamas militants killed more than 1,400 people, including civilians and soldiers, according to Israeli authorities It was the most deadly attack by militants in Israels 75year history and revealed a staggering intelligence failure by the countrys security forces

Israel has since responded by enacting a blockade on Gaza and launching a barrage of airstrikes into the Palestinian enclave, sparking a humanitarian crisis Israeli airstrikes in Gaza have killed more than 4,100 people, according to the Palestinian health ministry

Biden suggested earlier Friday that Hamas attack on Israel was in part to derail USbacked efforts to normalize IsraelSaudi relations

One of the reasons Hamas moved on Israel they knew that I was about to sit down with the Saudis, Biden told supporters at a campaign fundraiser in Washington, according to a pool report

Guess what The Saudis wanted to recognize Israel, Biden said at the event, which was hosted at the home of a Democratic National Committee official in Washington The president added that the Saudis were about to recognize Israel

The president has maintained in recent weeks that the effort to normalize relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia is still alive and remains crucial amid the ongoing conflict, though he has said its going to take time to get done

The Saudis, and the Emiratis and other Arab nations understand that their security and stability is enhanced if theres normalization of relations with Israel, Biden told CBS News in an interview that aired Sunday, adding that the direction of moving into the normalization makes sense for the Arab nations as well as Israel

The war between Israel and Hamas has raised concerns that it could widen into a regional conflict that could snowball into an even greater geopolitical crisis With US Secretary of State Antony Blinkens trips to multiple Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, and Bidens visit to Israel this week, the administration has attempted to make clear that they remain hopeful and committed to a normalization deal

A senior US official told CNN last month that Biden and Netanyahu discussed normalization efforts in some depth during a September meeting Netanyahu and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman expressed optimism that they were close to reaching a deal with Netanyahu telling CNN last month that the agreement would change the Middle East forever and would be a quantum leap in the region

However, when repeatedly asked by CNNs Kaitlan Collins at the time what kind of concessions he would make to get the deal across the line, Netanyahu refused to answer MBS had previously said a deal to recognize Israel would have to ease the life of the Palestinians though he stopped short of calling for an independent Palestinian state to be established, which has been the kingdoms official position for decades

The US and its allies have been urging Israel to be strategic and clear about its goals if and when it launches a ground invasion of Gaza, warning against a prolonged occupation and placing a particular emphasis on avoiding civilian casualties, US and Western officials told CNN

In private discussions with their Israeli counterparts, Western defense officials have not tried to dissuade Israel from moving into Gaza with ground forces, the sources said But they have emphasized that Israel should have clear objectives when it comes to degrading Hamas and seeking to avoid a longterm occupation of the Gaza Strip

Our advice to them isnt Dont do it, because we completely respect their right to go after Hamas and that means going after them wherever they are, a NATO defense minister told CNN So its not Dont do it, but it is Think about what happens and have a strategy, not just a tactical maneuver We expect Israel to act within international humanitarian law, but we understand that theyre dealing with an enemy here

President Joe Biden expressed a similar sentiment in an interview with 60 Minutes last week While he said that taking out the extremists is a necessary requirement for Israel, Hamas and the extreme elements of Hamas dont represent all the Palestinian people And I think that it would be a mistake for Israel to occupy Gaza again

requires clarity about the objectives and an honest assessment about whether the path youre on will achieve those objectives

An Israeli official confirmed that these discussions with the US and other allies are taking place A separate senior Israeli official said Friday that Israel is well aware of the humanitarian issues and is taking steps to address it in cooperation with the US government Its Hamas who has turned the 2 million people of Gaza into a human shield

Earlier this week, Israels ambassador to the UN, Gilad Erdan, told CNN that Israel has no interest in occupying Gaza, although Israeli officials have warned the operation there will be lengthy

Hamas is also believed to be holding over 200 hostages, who could be endangered if Israel invades The group released two American hostages, a mother and her daughter, on Friday

US officials dont yet have a clear sense for Israels intentions in Gaza and believe it will be difficult for Hamas to be eradicated entirely

At least publicly, Israeli officials have articulated their plans only in broad strokes, saying that the goal is to eliminate Hamas and its infrastructure

Our responsibility now is to enter Gaza, go to the places where Hamas organizes, operates, plans and launches, Israel Defense Forces Chief of the General Staff Herzi Halevi said Sunday, according to Israeli newspaper Haaretz To hit them severely everywhere, every commander, every operative, and to destroy infrastructure In one word to win

In 2014, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu set out to debilitate Hamas with the last ground invasion into Gaza While that war dealt Hamas a significant blow, it was a huge challenge, and Israel hasnt attempted another incursion since

Concerns about further inflaming tensions

There is also a rising concern that a ground invasion could further inflame tensions in the region, officials explained, which heightened after a hospital blast in Gaza that Israel and Hamas have blamed on each other The US has assessed that Israel was not responsible but has yet to conclusively identify a culprit

Protests have erupted across the Arab world in the wake of the hospital explosion, and a largescale and seemingly indiscriminate Israeli ground incursion into Gaza could fuel further unrest, US and Middle Eastern officials told CNN

US troops have already been attacked multiple times in recent days in Iraq and Syria, with drones and rockets targeting coalition bases there And Hezbollah the Iranianbacked militant group in Lebanon has threatened further action if Israeli boots step into Gaza

I think we all understand the importance of the information warfare spare, said one source familiar with US intelligence Whatever they do, it needs to be thoughtful and deliberate

US officials also fear that a particularly bloody assault on Gaza could risk drawing Hezbollah, to the north, or even Iran into the conflict Right now, multiple officials familiar with US and Western intelligence say, it appears that neither Tehran nor Hezbollah are particularly keen to intervene directly But if there is a parade of images of Palestinians suffering under an Israeli assault, their domestic politics could shift

A senior US official told CNN that among the benefits of Bidens trip to Israel this week was that it buys us some time when it comes to a potential Israeli ground incursion It was generally understood before the trip that Israel would not escalate in Gaza while Biden was visiting, the official said

The official added that the longer the Israelis hold off on this kind of military operation the better, because it allows Israel to plan more strategically and not respond as emotionally to the horrors of October 7

Jonathan Panikoff, a former senior intelligence analyst specializing in the region, told CNN that the good news is they Israel forces have taken the time They didnt go immediately and launch a ground operation the next day I think the president deserves some credit for buying time

But Panikoff added that any kind of ground operation wont be quick or easy, because urban warfare in such a densely populated area is a unique challenge especially in a place where Hamas is embedded with the civilian population

I dont think that necessarily the goal of Bidens trip was to prevent a fullscale invasion, he said I think the goal was to show clear support and to understand Israels strategy of what comes after an invasion if Israel is successful in decimating Hamas Whats the plan for governance in the Gaza Strip

Two of those sites, including the arid training site shown in the December video, were a little more than a mile from the most fortified and patrolled section of the GazaIsrael border Of the remaining sites one is located in central Gaza, and the other three in far south Gaza

Two years of satellite imagery, also reviewed by CNN, show no indication of an offensive Israeli military action against any of the six identified sites

Not only was there activity in the last several months at the camps, but some camps also absorbed surrounding farmland, converting it from agriculture to barren area for training in the last two years, according to satellite imagery

In the stunned aftermath of Hamas ruthless incursion where militants abducted 150 people, overran Israeli military bases, and laid waste to towns and farms questions are being raised about the intelligence and operational failures by Israels security apparatus

The fact that Hamas trained for the attack in plain sight for at least two years raise further questions as to why Israel, home to the Middle Easts most sophisticated military and spying operation, was unable to pick up on and stop the October 7 attack

When CNN reached out to the Israel Defense Forces IDF for comment, its international spokesperson Lt Col Jonathan Conricus said the findings were nothing new

He added that Hamas has had many training areas and Israels military had struck many training areas over the years in the different rounds of escalation

Conricus noted that Israel has not had a major escalation with Hamas in over two years, in reference to when hostilities between Israel and Hamas erupted in 2021 It followed weeks of tension in Jerusalem, where a group of Palestinian families faced eviction from their homes in East Jerusalem in favor of Jewish nationalists

Conricus also said that Hamas may have made the facilities look civilian

However, five of the sites the sixth is a landing strip do not have civilian features and are nearly identical in how they are constructed and arranged

They are all surrounded by massive earthen berms, which are taller than the buildings in the camps The buildings most have no roofs are nearly all made from cinderblocks and cement

Some camps have gates and fences, while others have street curbs but no paved roads

Asked about the camps, Conricus said they could not answer CNNs questions since they relate to the complex analysis of intelligence at the same time that we are fighting a war

This topic, together with numerous other issues, will be investigated by the IDF at the end of the war, he added

In plain sight

Senior Hamas official Ali Baraka, the head of the Lebanonbased Hamas National Relations Abroad, told RT Arabic following Saturdays attack that the terror organization has been preparing for the attack for two years

Metadata analyzed by CNN indicates that Hamas conducted the trainings for months, sometimes over a year, before releasing the propaganda montages on their social media channels

In one clip, militants are seen practicing takeoffs, landings and assaults with paragliders The metadata showed it was filmed over a year ago The shadows and position of the sun in the video also indicates that filmed training sessions either lasted for hours, or took place on multiple days

During the October 7 attack, paragliders took off at dawn close to two training camps geolocated by CNN that are near the GazaIsrael border

The videos show that the same practice takeoff location the paragliders used had also been used to test Hamas own homegrown drones Metadata indicates those tests took place months before the paragliding montages took place

Hamas terrorists are also seen in propaganda videos practicing with the type of weaponry they would use to attack on October 7 They created mock Israeli buildings and streets and are seen executing a number of different assault tactics on them

At a training site hundreds of feet from the Erez Crossing, a wall of a building has a drawing of two palm trees and an animal figure that looks similar to Israels Erez Crossing battalions insignia

The video shows them even practicing taking prisoners and ziptying their hands at the camp

Satellite imagery shows that the camp was constructed within the last year and a half

In three of the training camps, they even created fake Israeli tanks consisting of what appears to be a large outer shell surrounding a truck Fighters are seen practicing an attack against it, launching RPGs and other explosives

Police Superintendent Dudi Katz said officers have collected more than 1,000 statements and more than 60,000 video clips related to the attacks that include accounts from people who reported seeing women raped He added that investigators do not have firsthand testimony, and it is not clear whether any rape victims survived

About 1,200 Israelis were killed and more injured that day in villages and farms near Gaza when Hamas militants struck across the border in coordinated attacks, taking more than 240 hostages and precipitating the current war More than 11,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to authorities in Hamascontrolled Gaza

Police Commissioner Yaakov Shabtai said the investigation could potentially lead to prosecutions, but for now, documentation is the primary mission

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Cochav ElkayamLevy, a human rights law expert at Hebrew University, has formed a civil commission with colleagues to document evidence of the atrocities, fearing that as the war devastates Gaza and the lives of thousands of Palestinians, the world seems willing to look over the violence against Israeli women and girls Well never know everything that has happened to them, ElkayamLevy told CNN We know that most women who were raped and who were sexually assaulted were also murdered

She pointed to a United Nations statement just a week after the terror attacks that did not mention sexual violence

Its much worse than just silence or an insult to us as Israeli women and to our children and to our people, she said of the UN When they are failing to acknowledge us, to acknowledge what happened here, they are failing humanity

Harrowing reports

Accounts given to CNN detail horrific, almost inhuman, crimes

A paramedic from the Israel Defense Forces elite 669 Special Tactics Rescue Unit said he had encountered all kinds of casualties before, but the violence from October 7 was unimaginable

In one kibbutz, he went house to house looking for anyone still alive after the carnage and found the bodies of two young teenage girls in a bedroom

One is lying on the bed One on the floor, he told CNN

The combat paramedic, who did not want his name published, said the girl on the floor was on her stomach He had no doubt the teenager was raped, but he did not know if she died first

Her pants are pulled down toward her knees and theres a bullet wound on the back side of her neck near her head, he recountedTheres a puddle of blood around her head and theres remains of semen on the lower part of her back

The girl on the bed had bruises all over her body and a bullet wound to the chest, he said

These are two girls that were just killed, executed, perhaps raped in their own bedroom, he told CNN

In response to subsequent reports raising questions about the account specifically about the location, which he identified as Kibbutz Beeri the paramedic referred questions to the IDF A spokesman pointed to a report from the United Nations that found grounds to believe accounts of rape and gang rape in the October 7 attacks, and added In the case in question, the combat paramedic shared his personal experience when he arrived at the scene of the massacre Considering the privacy of the victims and their families, it is not possible to provide more information about the case

In a statement to CNN, the kibbutz said We have no other information It is important to note that we do not dispute that sexual violence has been part of Hamas plan and been conducted in other places according to testimonies, just not on said girls, who have been brutally murdered nonetheless

Others reported similar horrors at the Nova music festival where hundreds of young people were killed by terrorists

Rami Shmuel, an organizer of the festival, said he saw female victims with no clothes as he made his escape, and has no doubts about what happened

Their legs were spread out and some of them were butchered, he told CNN

He added that it appeared women were specifically targeted for sexual violence

Why didnt they take clothes off men he asked Only women, only young girls, beautiful girls, why

A long investigation ahead

Israels police acknowledge their investigation may take months, and ElkayamLevy said it remains unclear how or where any prosecutions would be handled, though she noted that some families of dual nationals could seek justice in countries other than Israel as well as pursue cases in international courts

But officials provided a stark window into the evidence they have been gathering at a press briefing, which included a statement from a woman who witnessed the Nova festival attack from her hiding place on October 7

They bent someone over and I understood he was raping her, and then he was passing her on to someone else, the woman, who was not identified, said of what she saw

She was alive, she stood on her feet and she was bleeding from her back I saw that he was pulling her hair She had long brown hair I saw him chop off her breast and then he was throwing it toward the road, tossed it to someone else and they started playing with it

The witness added I remember seeing another person raping her, and while he was still inside her he shot her in the head

Lengthy inspections, rejected humanitarian aid and Israeli bombs raining down Those are some of the hurdles to relief reaching the 22 million Palestinians in wartorn Gaza

The United Nations UnderSecretaryGeneral for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief, Martin Griffiths, has described the process as in all practical terms, impossible

Gaza was placed under a complete Israeli siege on October 9, when Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said he would halt the supply of electricity, food, water and fuel to the enclave after Hamas attacked his country, killing 1,200 people and taking more than 250 hostages Israel has since begun allowing some aid to enter

Some four months since Israel began its retaliatory military campaign in Gaza, it is yet to complete its objective of destroying Hamas and the war rages on, leaving most of Gazas civilian population at the mercy of aid that must be approved by Israel

While aid reaching the Gaza Strip was insufficient even before October 7, according to the UN, the humanitarian situation has been greatly hit by the conflict, which has killed more than 27,000 people, according to the Hamasrun health ministry in the enclave, and displaced more than 19 million others

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Getting any form of relief into Gaza is a long and arduous process, aid workers and the UN say

An average of 95 aid trucks per day entered Gaza between October 10 and February 1, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent, down from 500 commercial and aid trucks a day before the war, when Palestinians werent facing mass displacement and starvation Some 2 million Gazans are dependent on UN aid now

The humanitarian operation and the delivery of trucks continues to be cumbersome and continues to be unnecessarily complex, Juliette Touma, director of communications for the UNs agency for Palestine refugees UNRWA, told CNN

Relief operations are expected to be further hampered after the United States and other top donors suspend funding for UNRWA, the main agency responsible for aid distribution in Gaza The donors pulled their funding over allegations by Israel that some of its staff were involved in the Hamas attacks

UNRWA has warned it may be forced to halt its operations by the end of the month due to lack of funds And on Thursday, UNRWA CommissionerGeneral Philippe Lazzarini said the agency has not been able to deliver food into Gaza since January 23, adding that since the beginning of the year, half of UNs aid mission requests to the north were denied

The UN has identified deep pockets of starvation and hunger in northern Gaza where people are believed to be on the verge of famine, Lazzarini said on X

Following a CNN request for comment, Israels Coordinator of the Government Activities in the Territories COGAT said Israel operates in accordance with international law and is neither preventing nor blocking the entry of humanitarian aid but rather facilitates the transfer of aid by the international aid organizations in accordance with operational conditions in the field

Israel has also been accused of deliberately obstructing aid Egypt, which shares a border with Gaza, has charged that the policy is systematic, and aimed at pushing Palestinians to leave Gaza under the continued bombing and siege, an Egyptian foreign ministry spokesperson said in November

Israel maintains that it is working to respond to the needs on the ground in Gaza, saying that it is at war with Hamas and not the people of Gaza Last month, it told the International Court of Justice that there is no limit on the amount of food, water, shelter or medical supplies that can be brought into Gaza

Heres why aid is slow to get into Gaza

Limited entry points

Before the war started, Israel restricted all access to and from Gaza by sea and air and had land crossings under tight control It had two functional crossings with the enclave Erez, which was for the movement of people, and Kerem Shalom, for goods

Gaza also has one crossing with Egypt, at Rafah, which is run by Egyptian authorities While Israel has no direct control over this crossing, it monitors all activity in southern Gaza Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry previously told CNN that the Rafah crossing has been repeatedly bombed, causing disruptions in aid

Movement through all three crossings was already heavily restricted before the war, as Israel imposed a blockade of the territory with Egypt 17 years ago After the current war began, Erez and Kerem Shalom were shut for several weeks On October 21, Rafah began allowing aid to trickle in

In midDecember, Israel began conducting security checks on aid for Gaza at its own crossings before it was sent to Rafah It said at the time that the move would double the volume of aid delivered through Rafah, but aid workers have said the additional inspection points were insufficient, according to the UN Egypt criticized the measures as unreasonable, saying it hinders the flow of aid Following pressure from the US, Israel began allowing aid trucks to pass through Kerem Shalom in late December

Aid delivery through Egypt is also hampered by the fact that the Rafah crossing is designed as an entry point for people, not goods, making it difficult for large convoys to pass through

Long inspections, rejected items

The war has prompted Israel to conduct more stringent checks on aid as it seeks to prevent the entry of what it calls dualuse equipment, products it says are intended for civilian use but liable to serve military needs for the strengthening of Hamas

Trucks carrying aid must pass through three layers of inspection before they can enter the enclave, Griffiths, the UN undersecretarygeneral, has said

The long queues for inspection have led to bottlenecks at the Rafah crossing, the UNs World Food Programme WFP said last month, adding that among items deemed dual use by Israel are power generators, crutches, field hospital kits, inflatable water tanks, wooden boxes of childrens toys and, perhaps most depressingly, 600 oxygen tanks

The list of rejected items is only growing, Griffiths said

Protesters blocking trucks

Israeli protesters have more than once blocked trucks carrying humanitarian aid for Gaza via Israeli crossings They have demanded that the aid only be delivered in exchange for the release of the hostages The protesters are with the Tsav 9 movement, a grouping of families of hostages, fallen soldiers, demobilized reservists, and displaced Israeli civilians

Israel says more than 100 hostages are still held captive in Gaza

Some of the protests have caused aid disruptions lasting days, UNRWA said

Following the protests, Israel declared Kerem Shalom and the Nitzana crossing with Egypt military zones, a move that led to some arrests, according to Israeli media

Disruptions were renewed this week as hundreds of Israeli protesters returned to Kerem Shalom Tuesday

Risk of bombardment

Once relief enters Gaza, Israeli bombardment, damage to roads from airstrikes, communications blackouts and mass displacement impede distribution within the enclave

It becomes very difficult to make phone calls to coordinate, to organize the delivery of humanitarian assistance, Touma, the UNRWA spokesperson, said In the wake of the war, Israel cut electricity to Gaza and service providers said airstrikes destroyed vital communications network infrastructure The territory has since experienced multiple communication blackouts, leaving Palestinians unable to contact each other or the outside world

Humanitarian workers cannot move safely across the strip UN trucks carrying aid have repeatedly come under Israeli fire, according to UNRWA On February 5, an UNRWA truck waiting to take aid into northern Gaza was hit by Israeli naval gunfire, the agency said, adding that no one was injured The IDF told CNN that it is looking into the incident

It is extremely difficult to deliver humanitarian assistance under fire, Touma said on Monday We fear for workers lives because no place is safe in Gaza

In recent days, Israel has pressed its military offensive further into central, southern and in neighborhoods across northern Gaza where UN agencies have struggled to reach displaced civilians facing starvation, dehydration and deadly disease

On Friday, the World Food Programme said it had been unable to reach northern Gaza City for the third time in a week, as a fullscale famine looms Touma says Israeli authorities must approve humanitarian convoys waiting to enter the north at the Wadi Gaza checkpoint that separates the north and south of the strip Beyond that, she said, there are around 300,000 people living in desperate conditions

When aid does enter the shelters housing displaced Palestinians, Touma told CNN, aid workers are sometimes unable to regulate distribution due to overcrowding

Then you have overwhelming needs on the ground that are way, way beyond the capacity of humanitarian agencies because not much aid is coming in, Touma said, adding that Gazans are absolutely tired, fatigued, desperate and so quite often what happens is that people come to the humanitarian convoys, and they help themselves to the convoys

The suspension of funding by a growing number of Western countries for a United Nations agency for Palestinians has raised questions about the fate of the 59 million refugees it serves

The United States and at least 13 of its allies have pulled funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees UNRWA, following allegations by Israel that some of its staff were involved in Hamas October 7 attack, which killed 1,200 and saw more than 250 others taken hostage

Israel subsequently launched a war on the militant group that killed more than 26,000 people in Gaza, according to the Hamascontrolled health ministry there, and displaced the vast majority of the enclaves 23 million inhabitants, who are in need of humanitarian aid

While details remain scant, Israel alleges that 13 of UNRWAs 13,000 Gaza staffers were associated with Hamas October 7 attack and took part in varying capacities, ranging from involvement in kidnapping hostages to being told to set up an operations room, according to a summary of the intelligence shared with CNN by an Israeli official The summary does not provide evidence to support its claims

UNRWA fired several employees after the allegations and launched an investigation, promising that anyone involved in the October 7 attacks will be held accountable including through criminal prosecution if found to be responsible

But beyond the allegations of recent days, Israel has longstanding issues with UNRWA, accusing it of aiding Hamas and calling for it to be entirely dismantled

What does UNRWA do

UNRWA was founded by the United Nations a year after the 1948 ArabIsraeli war, which marked the creation of Israel and the displacement of more than 700,000 Palestinians from their homes in an event known by Palestinians as the Nakba catastrophe

The agency provides a wide range of aid and services to Palestinian refugees and their descendants It is a major source of employment for the refugees, who make up most of its more than 30,000 employees across the Middle East, and has representative offices in New York, Geneva and Brussels Over 13,000 of its employees are stationed in the Gaza Strip

UNRWA is unique in that it is the only UN agency dedicated to a specific group of refugees in specific areas While its purpose is to support Palestinian refugees, UNRWA does not have a mandate to resettle them, a mandate that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR does have The UNHCR does not, however, have a mandate over Palestine refugees within UNRWAs areas of operation

Last year, the agency had a budget of 16 billion, most of which is earmarked for education and healthcare, followed by other services such as infrastructure and refugee camp improvement

Since the Gaza war, UNRWA has issued a flash appeal for 481 million in additional funding for critical humanitarian needs

What is likely to happen if UNRWAs operations stop

UNRWA is the primary humanitarian aid group in Gaza Some 2 million Gazans rely on the agency for aid, with 1 million people using UNRWA shelters for food and healthcare amid the fighting in the enclave

The agency has provided Gazans with everything from food and healthcare to education and psychological support for decades

Along with the Palestinian Red Crescent, UNRWA handles almost all distribution of UN aid coming into the territory The agency has 11 food distribution centers for 1 million people in Gaza

The UN has warned that current funding is insufficient and that UNRWA may run out of funds by February

Leo Cans, head of mission Palestine for Médecins Sans Frontières, also known as Doctors Without Borders, told CNN Sunday that the situation could deteriorate, as the aid coming in to Gaza is already insufficient

If you stop these trucks, people will die of hunger and very quickly,

The repercussions of UNRWA halting its operations could however be felt far beyond Gaza Millions more Palestinian refugees live in neighboring countries like Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, and rely on aid from the agency

For Palestinians on the ground in Gaza, prospects of life without UNRWA look grim At one UNRWA school shelter in Deir al Balah, Gazans said they were worried about the suffering to come if UNRWAs aid is suspended

UNRWA is the one who helps the refugees and the displaced, Um Mohammad Al Khabbaz, a Palestinian woman at the shelter, told CNN on Monday Whats left for the people if they stop the aid

Alaa Khdeir, a university professor, called the move an oppressive decision towards the Palestinian people

This will mean more starvation, poverty, and deprivation, which ultimately means death, added Khdeir This is not just an issue this is a crime It wipes out the people

UN SecretaryGeneral António Guterres on Sunday appealed to the countries that suspended funding to UNRWA, urging them to reconsider their decisions

I strongly appeal to the governments that have suspended their contributions to, at least, guarantee the continuity of UNRWAs operations, he said The dire needs of the desperate populations they UNRWA staff serve must be met

It is unclear which organizations could replace UNRWA should the agency be forced to halt its operations Yuval Shany, a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalems faculty of law, said that even if UNRWA is forced out of Gaza, Israel likely wants a phasedout exit to avoid a worsened humanitarian shock on the ground

The reason why Israel for all the years, despite its many criticisms of UNRWA didnt push hard for dismantling UNRWA, and in fact even cooperated with UNRWA on many occasions, is because UNRWA does provide essential humanitarian services, Shany told CNN, adding that with the current situation in Gaza, it may not be realistic to fully pull UNRWA out of the territory

Why does Israel oppose UNRWA

Israeli leaders have campaigned against UNRWA long before October 7, criticizing the organizations role in Gaza and elsewhere as well as its definition of which Palestinians are eligible for refugee status More recently, officials have sought to delegitimize the agency and have proposed dismantling it altogether

In 2018, the US, under the administration of President Donald Trump, ended all funding for the agency at Israels behest, with the State Department at the time describing the body as irredeemably flawed When Joe Biden became president in 2021, he reversed his predecessors decision and restored UNRWAs funding

The US has long been the biggest single donor to UNRWA

In 2017, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought to dissolve UNRWA and merge it with the main UN refugee agency, the UNHCR

More recently, Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz has suggested that Israel will seek to stop the UN agency from operating in postwar Gaza, saying it will not be a part of the day after

We have been warning for years, Katz said UNRWA perpetuates the refugee issue, obstructs peace, and serves as a civilian arm of Hamas in Gaza

UNRWA has repeatedly denied Israeli allegations that its aid is being diverted to Hamas, and that it teaches hatred in its schools, and has questioned the motivation of those who make such claims, through large advocacy campaigns It has condemned the October 7 attack as abhorrent

The threat to remove UNRWA from the besieged Gaza Strip has caused UN officials and those who rely on the agency to sound the alarm

Israel doesnt see UNRWA as something which is conducive to resolving the IsraeliPalestinian conflict, said Shany of the Hebrew University

Israel instead views the agency as a mechanism that perpetuates the IsraeliPalestinian conflict, he told CNN, And specifically perpetuates the conflict with regards to the right to return, by designating refugees and their descendants from 1948 as refugees

The right of return refers to the right of Palestinian refugees and their descendants to return to their ancestral homes in what is now Israel, which was recognized by the 1948 UN General Assembly Resolution 194 The fate of refugees is one of the most contentious issues in the IsraeliPalestinian conflict

Israel also sees UNRWA as biased against it, Shany said, adding that it is regarded by Israel as one of the more hostile UN agencies against it in international arenas

The agency defines Palestinian refugees as those who were dispossessed from their homes during Israels creation in 1948, as well as their descendants That amounts to 59 million people today Israel opposes their return, arguing that such a large influx of Palestinians would nullify its Jewish character

UNRWA perpetuates the narrative of the socalled right of return, whose goal is the elimination of Israel For these reasons, UNRWA should be shut down, Netanyahu said in 2018

Of Gazas more than 2 million people, 16 million are refugees, according to UNRWA

According to Israel, this UNRWA perpetuates a narrative that the people who live in Gaza would someday go back to Israel, and this motivates them to resist,

Just weeks before Hamas launched its October 7 attack on Israel, Saudi Arabia said it was inching closer to normalizing diplomatic ties with the Jewish state Despite three months of war that have left more than 23,000 Palestinians dead and the Arab world seething, Riyadh is signaling that a recognition of Israel could still be on the table

On another tour of shuttle diplomacy across the Middle East, including to Saudi Arabia and Israel, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken last week said that normalization talks continue to take place and there is a clear interest in the region in pursuing that

With regard to integration, to normalization, yes, we talked about that actually on every stop, including of course here in Saudi Arabia, Blinken told reporters in Saudi Arabia before heading to Israel And I can tell you this Theres a clear interest here in pursuing that, he said This interest is there, its real, and it could be transformative

In an interview with the BBC on Tuesday, Saudi Arabias ambassador to the United Kingdom said absolutely theres interest in normalizing relations Theres been interest since 1982, Prince Khalid bin Bandar said

But experts say the price that Saudi Arabia would demand in exchange for normalization would be higher now than before the Gaza war, as Riyadh may feel compelled to extract more concessions from the United States and Israel

CNN has reached out to the Saudi foreign ministry for comment

The Saudi government is still open to normalization on condition that Israel takes concrete steps on the ground to create the foundations of a twostate solution, Ali Shihabi, a Saudi author and analyst, told CNN That would be, for example, completely removing the blockade from Gaza, fully empowering the PA Palestinian Authority in Gaza and the West Bank, withdrawal from key areas in the West Bank etc

The steps, Shihabi said, must be concrete and not empty promises that Israel could forget about after normalization like it did with other countries that normalized with Israel

While Blinken did not call for a ceasefire in Gaza, he added that Israels further integration into the Middle East would require that the conflict end in Gaza, as well as the paving of a practical pathway to a Palestinian state

The Palestinians seek an independent state in the occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Most Muslim and Arab countries have refused to recognize Israel until such a state is established

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli officials have repeatedly shot down the prospect of a Palestinian state Last month US President Joe Biden said the Israeli government doesnt want a twostate solution

In 2020, four Arab nations, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan, recognized Israel under a set of treaties known as the Abraham Accords, sidestepping the longstanding Arab demand for a Palestinian state Since then, the Biden administration has been working to bring Saudi Arabia, widely regarded as the leader of the Muslim world, to follow suit, a move that could have opened the door to other Muslim countries to recognize Israel

Seen as one of the architects of the accords, UAE ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba at the time stressed the viability of the twostate solution, indicating that it was not being abandoned for the sake of normalization

The treaty between the UAE and Israel immediately stops annexation of the West Bank and the potential of violent escalation It maintains the viability of a twostate solution as endorsed by the Arab League and international community, Otaiba said

While the establishment of a Palestinian state has been Riyadhs official stance for two decades, the demand had been absent from official rhetoric in recent years, before the October 7 attack

When asked about Saudi Arabias requirements for normalization with Israel, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman MBS in September told Fox News he hopes the deal will reach a place that will ease the life of the Palestinians, stopping short of calling for a state

At the time, official rhetoric was centered on stronger US security guarantees for Saudi Arabia, as well as US help with the kingdoms civilian nuclear program

The October 7 attack on Israel and the devastating war in Gaza that followed prompted Saudi Arabia to pause normalization talks with an Israeli government despised in an Arab world that sees it as responsible for the suffering of Palestinians

A poll conducted by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, from November 14 to December 6, found that 96 of the 1,000 Saudis surveyed said they believed Arab countries should immediately break all diplomatic, political, economic, and any other contacts with Israel, in protest against its military action in Gaza

Since the war, the US has suggested that sidestepping Palestinian rights, in order to integrate Israel in the region, may not be tenable Blinken said on Tuesday that it is clear to him from conversations across the region that a normalization deal is not in substitute for or at the expense of a political horizon for the Palestinians and ultimately a Palestinian state

Normalization talks seem once again to be prioritizing Palestinian rights

Given how inflamed Saudi public opinion is in light of the war in Gaza, Riyadh will now need much more meaningful Israeli concessions towards the Palestinians, possibly including the creation of a provisional Palestinian state, said Firas Maksad, senior fellow and director of outreach at the Middle East Institute in Washington, DC

While we still, going forward even after October 7, believe in normalization, it does not come at the cost of the Palestinian people, Prince Khalid, the Saudi ambassador, told the BBC, describing Palestinians as the key element in any normalization deal with Israel This is not a SaudiIsraeli peace plan, this is a PalestinianIsraeli peace plan

Asked whether Hamas would be part of any future Palestinian state, the ambassador did not rule out the prospect, saying it requires a lot of thought, a lot of work there is always room for change if you have optimism and hope

Riyadh is not in a hurry

Saudi Arabia can, however, afford to wait until conditions are right for a deal with Israel, Maksad told CNN

SaudiIsrael normalization has become one of the main US policy objectives in the Middle East Biden, who during his presidential campaign promised to turn Saudi Arabia into a pariah for the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey, put his differences with MBS aside over the past two years as Riyadh signaled its willingness to embrace Israel

For the Biden administration, brokering a normalization deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia would be a major foreign policy victory ahead of this years presidential elections

Congressional delegations, composed of both Democrats and Republicans, now visit this kingdom frequently, and relations with the Biden administration have rebounded after a bumpy start, Maksad said, adding that until Saudi Arabia sees the change it wants, it has the luxury of time

Riyadh is however wary of striking a deal with the current Israeli cabinet, the most rightwing government in Israels history, and one seen in the Arab world as responsible for the carnage in Gaza

Prince Khalid described the current Israeli attitude as one that is extreme, absolutist and uncompromising

The problem is not the occupied land, occupied by settlers It is that the settlers have now occupied the Israeli government, and by that I mean the extremist settlers, the extremist settler mentality which is absolutist, Prince Khalid told the BBC, adding that the main obstacle to finding a resolution to the conflict is now Israel

Already, there are some strains between Israel and the UAE, the main Arab party to the Abraham Accords The Gulf state, which held the rotating United Nations Security Council presidency twice over the past two years, introduced a draft resolution that was critical of Israel in December A significantly watereddown version eventually passed

Abu Dhabi is pressing for an end to the war and a return to the twostate solution as a pathway for peace The war in Gaza is a turning point moment for the UAE, Lana Nusseibeh, its ambassador to the UN told The Wall Street Journal last month

Without a twostate solution to the IsraeliPalestinian conflict, the UAE will not be as fully invested in the rebuild of Gaza, she said Thats not the trajectory we signed the Abraham Accords on, she said

Abu Dhabi has, however, indicated that it doesnt want the war to jeopardize relations with Israel

Anwar Gargash, the UAE presidents diplomatic adviser, told a conference in Dubai this month that in recognizing Israel, the UAE has taken a strategic decision, and strategic decisions are longterm

There is no doubt that any strategic decision will face multiple obstacles, and were facing a major obstacle that must be dealt with, Gargash said, according to Saudiowned Al Arabiya

Shihabi, the Saudi analyst, said that his countrys government is not interested in cosmetics, adding that a normalization deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel is the only card the US or anybody else has with Israel to encourage them to make concessions

The kingdom is aware of that and wants to try and push for a final settlement of this conflict

This remains one of the most important, and dangerous, fault lines in this volatile region Following the surprise Hamas attacks on Israel on October 7, this frontier largely calm since the 2006 IsraelLebanon war is even more charged with consequence

Any conflict erupting here could pour fuel on the raging fire of the current HamasIsrael war by drawing in the most powerful paramilitary group in the Middle East Iranbacked Hezbollah

Hezbollahs political stance has unambiguously supported the Palestinian militants It has sponsored rallies in support of Palestinian groups and has roundly condemned Israels largescale airstrikes on Gaza

More than 1,200 people have been killed in the Hamas attacks on Israel, while more than 1,500 people have been killed by Israeli strikes on Gaza since Saturday

But it is still unclear whether Hezbollah will actively participate in this conflict So far, it has adhered to its current rules of engagement and repeatedly stated that it will fire at Israel only when Lebanese territory, or its fighters, are fired upon It has broadly stuck to that, despite the spiraling wider tensions

Skirmishes here can instead be seen as the low rumble of titfortat exchanges since the start of the HamasIsrael war For days, Lebanonbased Palestinian militants have launched rockets into Israel, leading to Israeli attacks on Lebanese territory, including Hezbollah positions Hezbollah has fired back at Israeli border positions with precisionguided missiles

Three Hezbollah militants and three Israeli soldiers have been killed in the nearly weeklong exchange of fire here

Hezbollah has not intervened on behalf of the Palestinian militants so far The group has explicitly linked its attacks on Israel to Israels targeting of Lebanese territory, and the fighting remains limited to this border region

Still, the region remains on a knifes edge

Multiple reports have suggested that Western diplomats have sought to keep the Shia armed group out of the emerging conflict The USS Gerald R Ford, a nuclearpowered aircraft carrier, is now stationed in the eastern Mediterranean in what is seen by many analysts as a US attempt to deter that eventuality, which could herald a much more violent phase of this war

Unlike Hamas, Hezbollah is a regional power For years, it has participated in several conflicts in the Middle East, including in Iraq and Syria It is also believed to have materially supported and trained Houthi rebels in Yemen Its fighters are battlehardened from fighting on behalf of Syrian President Bashar alAssad against Syrias armed opposition groups, as well as against ISIS and the alQaeda affiliated Nusra front This has given them significant experience in urban warfare

Hezbollah also has a much more sophisticated arsenal than it had during its 2006 war with Israel, which ended up with no clear victor or vanquished At the time, many parts of Lebanon were devastated, but Hezbollah foiled Israels ultimate plan to dismantle the group, dealing a blow to Israels aura of invincibility Back then, Hezbollah fought mostly with inaccurate, Sovietera Katyusha rockets Nowadays, it has precision guided missiles

In addition to potentially bringing more sophisticated weaponry and fighters into the current conflict, Hezbollahs intervention could rope in other parties, too Hezbollah is part of a coalition of Iranbacked fighters who are still stationed in Syria Their participation could potentially open a third front on the SyriaIsrael border, this time alongside Irans elite Revolutionary Guards IRGC who are also present in Syria

Until the end of the HamasIsrael conflict, diplomats and observers of many stripes will continue to watch the tinderbox here very closely Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah has gone noticeably quiet since the start of the hostilities to the south, adding to the strange relatively tranquil yet incredibly tense atmosphere

Thursdays calm on the LebanonIsrael border interrupted occasionally by Israeli interceptions of rockets from Palestinian militants begs many questions Has the flareup here ground to a near halt Or is this the lull before a huge regional storm

At Tulane, a fight broke out after someone tried to burn an Israeli flag At Columbia University, posters of kidnapped Israelis were torn down At Harvard and Columbia, a socalled doxxing truck showed up on campus naming students whose organizations coauthored a statement saying Israel is entirely responsible for the deadly October 7 attacks by Hamas and all unfolding violence And at Cornell, classes were canceled Friday after death threats were posted toward Jewish students under the username hamas soldier on a Greek life website A few days after the postings, 21yearold Cornell student Patrick Dai was arrested and federally charged with making online threats He has not entered a plea

CNN visited the campuses of Cornell and the University of Pennsylvania, to hear from students about what its been like on campus

Malak Abuhashim, Cornell University

This has been an issue thats affected me my entire life, Malak Abuhashim said The Cornell chemical engineering student is Palestinian and said she reluctantly decided to lead the Cornell chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine because she felt like she had to

This was not the first time shed been personally affected by war in the region, even while in college She has family in Gaza Shed been on the phone with them and could hear explosions in the background, and said it was hard being so far from them

Ad Feedback

On October 7, when, like many people around the world, Abuhashim still didnt know the scale of the Hamas attacks in Israel, she was already really, really worried, she said I knew right away that whatever happened in Israel, Gaza would be punished 20,000 times more I knew that the consequences were going to be very severe I knew that the destruction was going to be horrible

She said an aunt was leaving northern Gaza along an evacuation route when an airstrike hit a bus only a few cars ahead of her in traffic CNN could not independently verify this incident Her family hasnt been able to contact other relatives We really arent sure who is alive, who isnt Shed seen a story about an Al Jazeera reporter whose family was killed in an explosion in Gaza She wondered If that had happened to her family, would she even know

College is a place to learn, but ignorance can still sting What really hurt the most was when students would try to deny my history or my past, Abuhashim said

For example, my grandparents village was ethnically cleansed And when I brought this up to a student, they tried to erase the history and be like, No, they left willingly Abuhashim thought it was absurd, the idea her grandparents would give up their livelihood to live in a refugee camp Thats what allows this type of hatred, this type of division between people where someones so convinced in this tunnel vision that theyre correct

The national chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine has drawn intense criticism for calling the Hamas attacks a historic win Abuhashim said she did not work with the national group or get talking points from it Her chapter of SJP was focused on supporting students on campus, whether pushing the administration to show them more support or protecting students from outside groups trying to dox them or post their identifying information online

She was upset when she saw the antisemitic threats made to her fellow Cornell students Those were very hateful things to say, she said As a Muslim, she thought it was very disrespectful to make them in the name of Allah She said, Antisemitism will never be accepted in our movement

Zoe Bernstein, Cornell University

Zoe Bernstein had never felt antisemitism on campus at Cornell, where shes a senior and president of Cornellians for Israel But the shock of the antisemitic online threats had amplified all of the feelings of despair, she said

She said she interpreted the hateful messages as being directed at all Jewish students on campus, and she said she feels a disconnect between the campus threats and what was happening in Israel

That was also true of antisemitic incidents around the world I think that does conflate antisemitism with antiZionism And I think that unfortunately, right now, it seems like theyre pretty inextricably linked, she said You can criticize any government in the world but you dont have to come attack civilians in other countries about it

Bernstein says she has family and friends in Israel, and she was disturbed by how quickly misinformation spread online Many students felt pressure to post something, she said

People think that their silence is kind of complacency on either side And I just dont know how much I agree with that, she said

When peers posted misinformation, others would swoop into the comments to correct them And then students have become embarrassed, students have become ashamed, students have become angry And its just amplifying tensions She wanted the campus to calm down so they could go back to focusing on their studies

Bernstein wore a gold Star of David necklace draped over a black turtleneck She wasnt scared to wear it, even with the threats I wear it with pride Im wearing it more now than I ever have before, she said Im so, so proud to be a Jew at this time, seeing the resiliency of my community, seeing the unity of my community It really has only strengthened me in my pride since October 7

Momodou Taal was shocked by the threats Taal, a secondyear PhD student at Cornell, grew up in London, but his family is from Gambia and Senegal He said he was a member of the colleges Coalition of Mutual Liberation that supported proPalestine rallies Our movement is antiracist And we have made it quite clear that were not going to stand for any antisemitism, Taal said

He was also worried about backlash from last weeks antisemitic online threats Given the climate were in, we are going to be demonized by those statements, even if it came from none of us

He was frustrated with being asked, again and again, if he condemned Hamas He doesnt represent Hamas and he has no control over Hamas, he said He felt like there was an implicit presumption in the question that he supports terrorism

I can say clearly categorically I abhor the killing of all civilians no matter where they are and who does it, Taal said I love life I dont love death Thats what I am as a human being Why is it the association because Im a Muslim and Im a Black person, I have to condemn a proscribed terrorist organization before having an opinion on genocide

I dont go around asking White people, Do you condemn the KKK Why is there an assumption that youd be supporting the KKK in the first place

He felt ignored and marginalized as a Muslim, especially a Black Muslim, on campus But even so, I feel encouraged because history is on my side The same people in the 80s that called Nelson Mandela a terrorist, and literally armed and backed apartheid, were on the wrong side of history, Taal said I feel like were on the right side of history

Talia, Cornell University

After Talia saw the threats, she and a friend spent the rest of the evening in their apartment, scared to leave A junior at Cornell, she kept pepper spray in her pocket, and reached for it when she heard a knock at the door It was just a friend coming to visit

For Talia, who did not want her last name published, the threats immediately recalled the experience of her parents Iranian Jews who fled their country fearing religious persecution Its absurd that I can even connect Iran in the 80s to Cornell in 2023, she said This isnt anything that we thought we would ever have to deal with in the United States

Cornells administration and police had been very supportive, she said But at the same time, it is such a helpless feeling to know that you cant stop someone from coming into your house and shooting you pointblank in the face, which was the exact threat And it only takes one person

Some students had decided to go to class via Zoom, she said There were people on Zooms in classes that I didnt even know were Jewish, she said But at the end of the day, a threat to Jews, it doesnt matter whether youre religious or youre cultural, it is a threat to all Jews

Sean, University of Pennsylvania

This is personal for me, Sean, a sophomore at Penn, said His father was born a Catholic in Northern Ireland during the CatholicProtestant sectarian strife known as the Troubles He said hed learned through his father what it was like to be discriminated against and to be called a terrorist for opposing an oppressive regime

Sean asked for his last name not to be used as he saw echoes of that in the backlash to proPalestinian protests on college campuses, with university donors withdrawing support, and CEOs saying they wouldnt hire students who signed controversial proPalestinian statements Even his dad had joked, Dont go on CNN, because it might make it impossible for Sean to get a job, he said

You see thousands of children dying, it doesnt take a terrorist to want to support them, Sean said It doesnt take someone with bad will to support life

There was controversy over a common chant at the proPalestine protests From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free Some Jewish students told CNN they heard it as a call for Jewish genocide in Israel, whose borders include the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea

Sean again looked at the experience of his dad, who was from Derry They have Free Derry on every wall to say they do not support the British government They say that they want their own homes back Is that terrorism To have your home taken from you and want it back No, thats just living life

Beni Romm, University of Pennsylvania

For Beni Romm, From the river to the sea had a different meaning Romm is a freshman at Penn, but he spent two years after high school studying in Israel at a yeshiva, a traditional Jewish educational institution The chant, he thought, meant one thing in the Middle East and another to Americans To Romm, It says that we dont want any Jewish state between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River we want only a Palestinian state

Calls for from the river to the sea although they can be construed as a calling for things other than Jewish genocide, touch a certain nerve in the Jewish conscience of existential threat, Romm said Those chants would never invite a conversation with Jewish students, he said

Romm had seen a proPalestinian protest while walking to a physics quiz, and initially just stopped to listen But after 45 minutes, I started being perturbed by what was being said Things like shame on the IDF, the IDF is committing genocide, he said He had friends his age in Israel who were serving in the IDF, the Israel Defense Forces This call of shame on the IDF, and even like shame on Israel which to me speaks to shame on Israel and Jews in general hits very personally, because these are my friends and my family And I dont believe that theyre committing genocide, as the allegations have it

At a later proPalestine rally, Romm and some friends set up a table nearby, and had a few good conversations with students who disagreed But he said hed been taken aback when, while having a conversation with a Black student, someone walked up and said, Are you being racist to him I hope youre not being racist, like youre being racist to everyone else on campus There were other incidents he felt were connected He said a friend from class had called him a fascist on social media A Jewish fraternity was hit with graffiti that said Jews R Nazis Romm thought the anger at Israel was now being directed at Jewish students

There is a connection between protests that say the Israeli government is a fascist government, Zionism is racist, and that Israel is perpetrating genocide and actions towards Jews on campus of calling us racist, or calling us fascist, or accusing us writ large of being Nazis and perpetrating genocide,

If Ramallah has a center, it is AlManara Square Six roads meet here, and pedestrians weave their way confidently across the tight roundabout, forcing cars to make way It is always busy

Demonstrators will rally here to protest, but when CNN visited on a Sunday morning, people were going about their business All the same, photos from the war in Gaza posted in the square and hung on banners and fences remind anyone who needs reminding of the horrors unfolding not far away

This destruction resembles the conscience of the world, reads one poster, under a picture of rescue workers clearing rubble

Another photograph shows ambulances outside a hospital with the text, Medical Heroes demand action Stop the Massacre in Gaza

At his office about a mile away, where desks and shelves groan under piles of paperwork, Khalil Shikaki is thinking about the conflict

Palestinians, he says, overwhelmingly support the Hamas decision to go to war with Israel

His research company, the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research PCPSR, has just published the findings of its latest survey into Palestinian attitudes

Seven hundred and fifty adults were interviewed face to face in the West Bank, and 481 were interviewed in Gaza, also in person The Gaza data collection was done during the recent truce, when it was safer for researchers to move about

The survey, which has a fourpoint margin of error rather than the usual threepoint, found that almost threequarters 72 of all respondents believe Hamass decision to launch its attack on Israel on October 7 was correct

Less than a quarter 22 said it was incorrect

But that doesnt mean support for atrocities, he adds No one should see this as support for any atrocities that might have been committed by Hamas on that day

Palestinians believe that diplomacy and negotiations are not an option available to them, that only violence and armed struggle is the means to end the siege and blockade over Gaza, and in general to end the Israeli occupation, Shikaki said

This important distinction is teased out by three of the polls data points Almost 80 of respondents told PCPSR researchers that killing women and children in their homes is a war crime

An even higher number 85 of respondents said they had not watched videos shown by international news outlets of acts committed by Hamas on October 7 a figure which may hint at why only 10 of those surveyed said they believed Hamas had committed war crimes that day

To a considerable extent, Palestinians, just like Israelis, are getting a skewed perspective from their media In addition to this bubble effect, Shikaki says, there might also be a desire to avoid other sources to maintain deniability Denial, as he says, is useful during periods of stress and pain

Polling in a war zone comes with difficulties even in the lulls Interviewing people in the center and south of the enclave was relatively straightforward as most were still at home, but surveying people from the north of Gaza was partially compromised because so many had been displaced to shelters

Separated territories, divergent attitudes

Gaza and the West Bank, what are now called the Palestinian territories, have been geographically separated since 1948 Recent decades have seen that separation take root between the two populations, not least because it has become harder and harder for Palestinians to move between the territories

Since 2005, when Israel moved its soldiers and settlers out of Gaza and essentially sealed off the territory with help from Egypt, the daytoday experiences of Palestinians in Gaza have diverged even further from those of Palestinians in the West Bank

Politically, the territories are split The Palestinian Authority under aging President Mahmoud Abbas has partial control over the West Bank, while Hamas controls what goes on inside Gaza or it did until Israel invaded

These differences are reflected across the attitudes surveyed, in particular, on the use of violence

In Gaza, support for armed struggle has risen only slightly from 50 in September 2022 a year before the current war to 56 in December 2023 In the West Bank, however, support has been rising dramatically from 35 in September 2022 to 54 in September 2023 a month before the war This month, polled support for armed struggle reached 68 in the West Bank

Shikaki says these divergences reflect the rise in attacks by violent Jewish settlers on Palestinians in the West Bank, which have drawn condemnation from the US and Europe, along with the pervasive sense that Israels current hardright government is not overly perturbed by that state of affairs

Hamas, unsurprisingly perhaps, finds growing support, especially among West Bank Palestinians Backing for the militant group as a political party has increased there nearly fourfold from 12 to 44 in the three months between September 2023 and December 2023

In besieged Gaza, by contrast, support has remained relatively stable with 38 support in September and 42 in December

Fatah, the secularnationalist party of Palestinian Authority PA President Abbas, which led the Palestine Liberation Organization to its historic agreements with Israel in the 1990s which created the PA but crucially did not get around to solving some of the conflicts most fundamental issues has seen its support fall across the territories from 26 three months ago to 17 now

Support for Abbas himself is even lower so low, in fact, that he is seen as almost entirely discredited

Out of denial, towards a reckoning

But Shikaki cautions that higher support for Hamas should not be overstated, at least not yet As more Palestinians come to terms with the atrocities committed by Hamas on October 7, so attitudes could change though that is unlikely to be the case so long as Gaza remains under massive attack

Important again is how many people have watched videos from October 7 and the differences between the territories In Gaza, 25 of those asked said they had viewed such videos and 16 of all respondents told researchers Hamas had committed war crimes In the West Bank, the corresponding numbers were just 7 and 1

Gaza is moving out of denial more quickly than the West Bank, Shikaki says, and that means a reckoning for Hamas Already, only 38 of Gazans want to see the militant group return to governance after the war

But it is not just greater awareness of events on a single day that matter It is also what happens when politics resumes when the war is over, and whether Palestinians see any sort of political horizon

At a time when people believe the only way to get Israel to end the occupation is by inflicting pain and suffering on Israelis, Palestinians see Hamas as the party most capable of delivering violence effectively, Shikaki says

On the other hand, if and when you give the Palestinians the option of negotiating a permanent end to Israeli occupation and the creation of a Palestinian state support for Hamas will probably decline to below where it was before the war, he says

Support for the twostate solution has remained largely stable across Gaza and the West Bank over the past three months, moving from 32 to 34, but historically, those figures are still low In the past, PCPSR polling has shown support for the existence of an independent Palestine sitting next to the state of Israel at between 70 and 80

US President Joe Biden has sought to convince both Israelis and the Palestinians that he sees negotiations as important, saying last month, I dont think the conflict ultimately ends until there is a twostate solution The problem is, Palestinians do not seem to believe him Nearly threequarters 70 of respondents said they do not regard US talk about Palestinian statehood as serious

Shikaki says it is obvious why this is so

Since you have all that power, people are not going to believe you if you say, well, I cant use leverage against Israel So, the conclusion is you are paying lip service to the twostate solution, but you have absolutely no intention of doing anything to make it a reality

A 48hour extension to the IsraelHamas truce will not pause the strategic dilemmas and political headaches wracking the Biden administration over the war

Although the two extra days of hostage releases, the release of Palestinian prisoners and humanitarian aid pouring into Gaza validate an intense diplomatic effort in which the US is deeply involved, the situation remains delicate and a resumption of fighting ultimately seems likely

The most urgent question facing the White House is Where are the Americans Despite hopes that at least three US citizens would be released during the original fourday pause, only orphaned 4yearold AmericanIsraeli girl Abigail Edan came out of Gaza, to the deep disappointment of US officials

And while Israel is signaling it is open to another extension, it is also warning that an eventual resumption of its offensive against Hamas will be more intense than before the truce That could cause more civilian casualties, like earlier in the war, which included bombing of civilian areas and sieges over Gaza hospitals Any domestic political relief Biden enjoys during the pause, amid deep divisions in his Democratic Party ahead of next years election, is therefore unlikely to last long after air strikes begin again

There are also growing indications that Bidens push for more than 14 billion in aid for Israel is running into even deeper uncertainty on Capitol Hill The package has been caught up in controversies over a larger Ukraine aid package and US southern border security in a way that is underscoring how ungovernable domestic politics are now severely hampering Washingtons capacity to work its will abroad Israeli defense officials visited Capitol Hill Monday evening to meet with a handful of Senate Democrats about the IsraelHamas war, according to a person familiar with the meeting The unclassified meeting gave Democrats the opportunity to ask questions about the war as many in their party have grown concerned about Israels offensive in Gaza The issue of placing conditions on Israel aid has become a hotbutton matter among Democrats, who expect to discuss it at lunch Tuesday

While the administrations stern warnings to its adversaries have so far helped contain the conflict, fears of regional escalation are not yet dimmed The dangers for US personnel were underscored when American officials said Sunday that two ballistic missiles were fired from Houthi rebelcontrolled Yemen toward a US warship in the Gulf of Aden

The missing Americans

US officials watched Hamas release of another 11 hostages on Monday the final day of the original truce deal especially carefully They had hoped two American women who were abducted during the Hamas terror attacks on October 7 would be freed But they did not emerge, leaving officials to pin their hopes on them being part of extended releases by Hamas over the next two days

Its difficult to ascertain how they go about making up these lists, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told CNNs Wolf Blitzer on Monday We certainly would hope in the next two days, in the next couple of installments, that we will see some Americans come out

Yehuda Beinin whose daughter Liat Beinin, 49, is one of the two America women with dual Israeli citizenship said that his family remained deeply worried for her and her husband Aviv Atzili, who is also believed to be a hostage We have no choice other than to remain hopeful, he told CNNs Erin Burnett

Among the grave problems facing the administration is that it is still not certain how many Americans are being held in Gaza and whether all of those who Washington suspects are captive are still alive We think the number is less than 10, probably in the neighborhood of, you know, about eight to nine, Kirby told reporters at a White House briefing But we dont necessarily have firm, solid information on each and every one of them

Another complication is that 40 hostages are believed not to be held by Hamas but by other Palestinian militant groups, including Islamic Jihad, according to a diplomatic source, although it cant be known for certain whether Americans are included among those

A senior administration official said Monday that the White House does not believe so far that Hamas purposefully held back two American women who the US had hoped would be freed as part of Hamas release of 50 hostages over the fourday truce

Hostage releases so far have concentrated on women and child captives and hopes are not high for the imminent release of young male hostages, who experts say will be viewed as a more valuable human currency by Hamas leaders as they seek to increase the price for hostage releases Currently, the ratio stands at three Palestinians freed from Israeli jails in return for one captive from the October 7 attacks Israel has also not released any males over the age of 18 years old The possibility of a resumption of fighting if truces are not indefinitely extended is also creating deep uncertainty about the eventual fate of all the male hostages Anxiety is especially acute for members of the Israeli armed forces who were captured

Rachel Goldbergs 23yearold son, Hersh, was severely wounded and kidnapped by Hamas during its attack on the Nova Music festival She told CNNs Jake Tapper on Monday that none of the released hostages had been able to provide any intelligence about his whereabouts or condition Were very, very worried We feel like the clock is ticking, time is ticking, Goldberg said Here is this extremely wounded young man, American civilian, and were worried like any parent would be

Security experts believe its likely that Hamas understands the potential increased leverage from holding onto US hostages That includes the possibility they could lead to stepped up American pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to extend a pause that has given Hamas fighters time to regroup after relentless Israeli strikes and to dig in for a resumed operation that is still expected to unfold

The return of lawmakers to Washington this week following the Thanksgiving break is likely to increase domestic heat on Biden to free Americans held captive in Gaza, especially from Republicans always looking to portray him as weak Apparently, Hamas is so contemptuous of President Biden and American power that they feel the imperative to release Filipinos and Thai hostages before they release American hostages, GOP Sen Tom Cotton of Arkansas said on Fox on Sunday

When fighting begins again

While hostage releases and aid shipments into Gaza guaranteed under the original deal have offered blessed humanitarian relief to Palestinians, no one believes the truce will be permanent US efforts to extend the pause are stepping up Officials announced Monday that Secretary of State Antony Blinken would head back to the region this week on a trip that includes stops in Dubai, the West Bank and Israel

If fighting starts again, Israeli operations are likely to target areas including densely populated southern Hamas strongholds and teeming refugee camps, raising the likelihood of large civilian casualties and a consequent international backlash against Israel Biden has already felt the political downside of such operations internationally from US allies and domestically from key young, progressive and Muslim American voters he needs to show up in large numbers in next years election, and even, according to a Washington Post report, among his own staff The likelihood therefore is that hell face a similar or even more intense political headache when the war begins again

Biden has been isolated on this issue from many American and foreign leaders and officials that he would normally regard as political friends That will raise the question of whether he will shift from his staunch refusal to call on Netanyahu to observe a permanent ceasefire a move that would hurt Israels bid to crush Hamas

Fears of escalation

Presidents rarely get credit for stopping disasters that dont happen But the Biden administration can claim vital success so far in ensuring that the conflict has not become a full regional war following its stern warnings to traditional adversaries and shows of military force including the dispatch of two aircraft carrier groups to waters near Israel

But while US foes like Iran have yet to dive into the conflict, and an escalation has so far been avoided, the administration must maintain constant vigilance

In one sign of the risks, two ballistic missiles fell within 10 nautical miles of the USS Mason, a guidedmissile destroyer in the Gulf of Aden that went to the aid of a tanker that came under attack from suspected Somali pirates, US officials said The missiles were fired from areas controlled by Houthi rebels in Yemen, a Shia group backed in the past by Iran Houthis have launched numerous attacks against US interests in the region, and Israel, since the October 7 Hamas assault The USS Mason did not attempt to shoot down the missiles and the Pentagon has not said if the vessel was specifically targeted

Mark Esper, who served as defense secretary in the Trump administration, warned against seeing the incident as a coincidence I dont think the administration response has been sufficient with regards to attacks by Iranian proxies in Iraq and Syria and elsewhere, Esper told CNN

He added I know they are concerned they fear that if they do too much it will escalate My argument is just the opposite If they dont do enough, the attacks will continue, and at some point Americans will be killed and thats when it will escalate

Former President Barack Obama said a way forward for the IsraeliPalestinian conflict is only possible if people acknowledge the complexity of the situation

If theres any chance of us being able to act constructively to do something, it will require an admission of complexity and maintaining what on the surface may seem contradictory ideas that what Hamas did was horrific, and theres no justification for it And that the occupation and whats happening to Palestinians is unbearable, Obama said in an interview on the podcast Pod Save America

The former presidents comments come as the Israeli military focuses its offensive against Hamas in Gaza City and northern parts of the enclave

Behind the scenes, American officials also believe there is limited time for Israel to try to accomplish its stated objective of taking out Hamas in its current operation before uproar over the humanitarian suffering and civilian casualties reaches a tipping point

Obama specifically criticized the discourse on social media and TikTok activism about the issue

If you want to solve the problem, then you have to take in the whole truth, and you then have to admit nobodys hands are clean that all of us are complicit to some degree, he said

Millions have turned to platforms like TikTok and Instagram in hopes of comprehending the brutal conflict in real time, but Obama said he would rather see people out there talking to people

Including people who you disagree with If you genuinely want to change this youve got to figure out how to speak to somebody on the other side and listen to them and understand what they are talking about and not dismiss it,

both sides have been accused of war crimes

The conflict is covered by a complex system of international law developed after World War II, which attempts to balance humanitarian concerns and the military requirements of states Delivering justice would be the work of many organizations over many years, but the process has already begun

So who will decide if war crimes have been committed, what will the criteria be, and will anyone ever be held to account

Which laws apply to the conflict

Conflicts are governed by two bodies of law The first, the law on the use of force, aims to prevent conflict by dictating the conditions under which states may resort to force

The second, called the law of armed conflict LOAC or international humanitarian law IHL, regulates the conduct of states during war and seeks to limit suffering once they have begun

Modern IHL is built around the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which have been ratified by almost all UN members The conventions have since been supplemented by Additional Protocols and by rulings at international tribunals

Israel, however, has not ratified the first and second additional protocols, which were introduced in 1977 to cover areas like collective punishments and the use of new weapons But since these provisions are considered a norm of customary international law, they are nonetheless binding on all states

Some dispute whether international law applies to nonstate actors like Hamas But the State of Palestine which is how the Palestinians are represented at the UN as a nonmember observer has acceded to the Geneva Conventions and its three additional protocols Given this, Hamas which governs a Palestinian territory must comply with their terms The State of Palestine is also a signatory to the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court ICC, meaning Hamas leaders are accountable for war crimes

Is there evidence of war crimes in the fighting between Hamas and Israel

Not all violations of international humanitarian law constitute a war crime A war crime is an especially grave violation of IHL A UN report said last month said it was collecting evidence of war crimes in the wake of Hamas indiscriminate massacre of civilians and its abduction of more than 200 hostages

The report said Israel may be committing the war crime of collective punishment, after officials ordered the complete siege of Gaza A number of prominent human rights groups concur with the UNs assessment

When he visited the Rafah Crossing from Egypt into Gaza, Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, called the October 7 attacks atrocities, saying they and the holding of hostages were war crimes

But he added the collective punishment by Israel of Palestinian civilians amounts also to a war crime, as does the unlawful forcible evacuation of civilians

Some have argued Israels actions in Gaza constitute genocide In an open letter, a group of UN experts said they remain convinced that the Palestinian people are at grave risk of genocide, although the crime is harder to prove under international law

Other experts warn that Israels response, which has involved the displacement of more than a million Gazans from the north of the strip, poses a danger of becoming ethnic cleansing However, ethnic cleansing still lacks a precise legal definition, and it is not recognized as an independent crime under international law

What does proportionality mean

Article 51 of the UN charter, which governs the use of force, gives states the right of selfdefense, provided the force they use is necessary and proportionate Proportionality is not about inflicting symmetrical harm It means the defending state cannot use more force than is needed to respond to a threat

Legal experts argue that Israel has considerable scope to respond to Hamas October 7 attack, and that its stated aim to destroy Hamas can be justified under international law

The incidents of October 7 alone triggered the right of Israel to resort to military force and to put an end to the fighting wing of Hamas, Michael Schmitt, a professor of international law at the University of Reading in the United Kingdom,

Hamas has shown no intention to relent Its founding charter mandates the killing of Jews and the destruction of the state of Israel In an interview shortly after October 7, Ghazi Hamad, a senior Hamas leader, told a Lebanese TV channel We will do this again and again He said the attack was just the first time, and there will be a second, a third, a fourth

While many consider Israels aim to destroy Hamas legitimate, others fear the force required to achieve this would be disproportionate

The mainstream view in international law is that the only legitimate aim of selfdefense is halting and repelling an ongoing armed attack, or perhaps preventing an imminent armed attack Typically, the total destruction of the enemy would not be necessary to achieve that goal, Adil Haque, a law professor at Rutgers University in the United States, told CNN

Some would argue that Hamass intent and capacity to launch future attacks makes it necessary to destroy it completely But I would argue that the total harm this path would inflict on civilians renders it disproportionate Israel has to settle for less than total victory

Israel must abide by a second type of proportionality under international humanitarian law Under IHL, all states must minimize civilian casualties Intentionally directing attacks against civilians is always illegal, but an attack that kills civilians incidentally can be legal if it achieves a military purpose, provided the harm caused to civilians is not excessive in relation to the military advantage anticipated

When deciding whether to strike a target, Schmitt said commanders consult lawyers to complete proportionality calculations Here, officials weigh expected civilian harm against expected military advantage The greater the military advantage, the greater harm to civilians can be considered proportionate

Schmitt, a former targeting officer and judge advocate in the US Air Force, said this calculation is the hardest decision a commander can make on the battlefield, because theres no brightline test

from the very beginning in preplanned attacks They would have a lot of intelligence and then therefore be able to have a fairly robust understanding of the military advantages that theyre seeking to achieve and, equally, also have a fairly robust understanding of the civilian harm that they may be causing, he said

The legality of a strike must be judged on the basis of information available at the time, rather than with hindsight This makes forming a judgment on a particular strike a fraught task, due to the lack of information about how the IDF assesses the threshold for civilian casualties

The sheer scale of Israels bombardment which has destroyed nearly half of Gazas housing could suggest Israels definition of military targets is at best loose and at worst potentially criminal

The amount of destruction is very, very significant, said Sari I think its important and entirely appropriate to ask questions, robust questions, as to whether Israel is in all of these cases complying with its obligations That is ultimately something for the IDF to answer

Can Israel target hospitals and refugee camps

Israels targeting of civilian areas like hospitals has caused unimaginable suffering and drawn fierce criticism After its strikes on the Jabalya refugee camp, which destroyed several buildings and, according to the Hamascontrolled Interior Ministry, killed hundreds, the UN said the attack could amount to a war crime, given the high number of civilian casualties and the scale of destruction

While none dispute the horror of such attacks, legal experts are divided over whether they necessarily violate IHL

It is entirely legitimate and completely understandable to abhor the catastrophic consequences inflicted upon the civilian population as a result of the attack on the Jabalia refugee camp, wrote Brian Cox, an adjunct law professor at Cornell University in the US, in a recent paper As unimaginably horrifying as those effects are, this reality alone does not render the attack illegal

Civilian buildings are protected under IHL, but protection is not unconditional They can lose their protection if they are used outside of their humanitarian function to commit acts harmful to the enemy, Cordula Droege, chief legal officer of the International Committee of the Red Cross, explained in a video Using buildings like hospitals to house combatants and weapons can turn civilian objects into legitimate military targets

Hamas has long been known to station military operations inside buildings like hospitals a practice known as human shielding Human shielding is a war crime but also a common military tactic during asymmetrical warfare

Its clear that Hamas is outgunned by the Israelis in a big way, Schmitt told CNN Unable to match the IDFs strike capabilities, it aims instead to deter it from striking at all The more civilians that can be put in harms way, the less likely is an attack to be proportionate and so the more likely it is to be unlawful Hamas tactic apparently is to make it as hard as possible for Israel to strike them without violating or at least without appearing to violate international law

Human shielding is a horrific practice, but there is military utility to it, said Schmitt, the law professor That is exactly why Hamas is encouraging people not to leave Gaza City And so it is possible for both sides to violate IHL in the same instance Hamas by using human shields, and Israel by launching a disproportionate strike The former violation does not excuse or permit the latter any strike must abide by the principle of proportionality

In response to the Jabalya strikes, the IDF said it achieved significant military advantages, damaging Hamas tunnels and killing dozens of its operatives, including Ibrahim Biari, a commander the IDF said was responsible for the October 7 attack But whether the civilian harm caused by the strike was greater than the IDF expected, or whether it decided ex ante that such a level of destruction was nonetheless proportionate, is not clear

Ultimately, however, the conflict may reach a point where such distinctions seem beside the point An act can be legally justified and morally abhorrent And even if the IDF can justify particular strikes under IHL, its actions may become constrained by public opinion Huge proPalestinian demonstrations have been held across the globe, causing even Israels staunchest allies to temper their support as its window of perceived legitimacy shrinks

Even if a targeted strike may be justifiable from a legal perspective, first impressions frame the narrative, noted a 2019 NATO report on Hamas use of human shields in Gaza Public opinion tends to be influenced more by images depicting the suffering of innocent civilians than by wellthoughtout legal arguments

Who will rule on whether war crimes have been committed

The ICC is an international court established to investigate individuals accused of committing the most serious crimes, such as war crimes It steps in when governments are unable or unwilling to investigate alleged crimes committed on their soil It opened in The Hague in 2002, but many of the worlds major powers including the US, China and Russia are not members

Israel is not a member of the ICC and rejects the courts jurisdiction That has not stopped the court from investigating its actions in the occupied Palestinian territories Fatou Bensouda, then the ICCs prosecutor, spent five years conducting a painstaking preliminary examination and concluded she was satisfied that war crimes have been or are being committed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip But no arrests were made, and Bensouda left office in 2021

While every government and military decisionmaker must ensure they abide by international law, it is the job of the ICC to prove they have failed to do so

Karim Khan, the current ICC prosecutor, said the acts committed by Hamas on October 7 are serious violations, if proven, of international humanitarian law But he stressed Israel has clear obligations in relation to its war with Hamas Not just moral obligations, but legal obligations Its there in the Geneva Conventions Its there in black and white

On the eastern edge of Gaza, dawn is still a few minutes away on the morning of October 7 A group of Hamas militants wait, some packed into a white pickup truck, others on motorbikes They run through a few final checks, making sure they are recording video and that their weapons are ready

An explosion in the distance appears to be the signal to move

As they race to the border, the men shout Allahu Akbar, a phrase that means God is great in Arabic

After three minutes of driving, they cross the first border fence that separates Gaza from Israel The fence is mangled, leaving a large opening through which they pass, though it is difficult to know if it is from the explosion heard moments earlier

Video from the attack provided to CNN by the Israel Defense Forces IDF offers a new window into a portion of the Hamas operation launched from Gazas eastern border The video comes from the bodycam of one of the terrorists who took part in the attack The IDF said it released the video to show the reality of what happened on October 7, a day that Israeli officials have compared to 911, when an estimated 1,200 people were killed and more than 200 others taken hostage in Hamas brutal assault inside Israel

The video marks the first time that Israel has publicly released footage of Hamas tunnels in Gaza it says were being used on the day of the attack Its unclear if the same person is using the camera in the underground clip, which shows a larger room that serves as a junction leading to a series of narrower tunnels Wires run along the shafts, although there is no apparent overhead lighting Instead, the only bright spot comes from a flashlight Some supplies rest on the floor, along with several blue barrels

At one point, the men underground point the flashlight down into a deep vertical shaft with a ladder running along one side There is writing in red spray paint on the concrete walls One sign reads, Whats hidden is far worse

The video of the attack is an unbroken recording of 100 minutes, starting before the assault and continuing until the camera stops CNN has geolocated the locations seen in the footage and confirmed they match other footage from the attack

As the group passes the first border fence, the gunman with the camera shouts repeatedly, Go right He appears to know where he is headed, indicating the depth of planning and coordination as Hamas launched a multipronged assault across the Gaza border

Less than two minutes later, the militants cross the second security fence They are in Israel and heading toward a kibbutz, racing along dirt roads between plowed fields among a group of motorbikes Many of the men have rifles like AK47s, while some carry rocketpropelled grenades slung across their backs

Seventeen minutes into the video, the pickup truck stops as the gunman opens fire for the first time across an open field with Israeli buildings visible in the distance It is unclear if he hits anything For a few minutes, the group pauses and appears to regroup One man urges everyone not to shoot into the air and waste fire

At one point, the group thanks God that they made it this far as they wonder where the Israeli soldiers are So far, their movement has been virtually unimpeded across Israeli territory

At a field near the Israeli town of Kissufim, the gunman with the bodycam exits the car and advances across a field with other militants The video shows him run past one man who readies a rocketpropelled grenade on his shoulder They cover each other as they advance, firing as they move

The video shows the gunman with the bodycam charging the last bit as he spots an Israeli soldier on the ground At point blank range, he opens fire repeatedly, killing the soldier

As other militants catch up, the gunman takes the Israeli soldiers Tavor rifle The gunman turns the bodycam on himself for a selfie video He cheers as others join the celebration

Moments later, he is more composed as he speaks to the camera, which appears to be mounted on his helmet He gives his name and says he is 24 years old He is a father, and he says he killed two Israeli soldiers He asks God for victory and welldeserved martyrdom

From here, the group advances on motorbikes, speeding along nearly empty Israeli roads

The gunman shouts with joy as he passes the bodies of Israelis sprawled across the street His wave of attack was not the first, other terrorists have reached this site before him As he rounds a corner on the motorbike, he comes to a bus stop that CNN has seen in one of the earliest videos to come out from the day of the attack

In that video, dashcam footage from an Israeli car escaping rocket fire at the nearby Nova music festival shows the car approaching a group of militants who open fire The bullets pierce the glass and shatter the windshield The car coasts down the road, the driver almost certainly killed in the hail of bullets The timestamp on the video shows that it is just after 740 in the morning

It also shows the moment when the gunman with the bodycam arrives at the scene, because the car with the dashcam is visible in his video

For 65 minutes after they crossed the Gaza fence, the gunman with the bodycam and the group traveling around him had nearly free reign in Israel, traveling along roads and across fields with impunity They have traveled nearly 10 miles, passing the towns of Ein HaShlosha and Kisufim

Now the group approaches a military base near the kibbutz of Reim The gunman closes the distance, firing from the weapon he took from the Israeli soldier as he approaches the gate

Someone from the base fires back

The man screams as he is hit, falling to the ground near the weapon The camera oscillates slightly back and forth as the breathing becomes quick and shallow

His part in the assault comes to an end But the terror of the October 7 attacks would rage on for hours to come

When Palestinians in north Gaza heeded the warnings issued in the Israeli militarys phone calls, text messages, and fliers advising them to head south, they thought they were fleeing to potential safety

The Israeli Defense Forces issued the guidance Friday, telling all civilians in north Gaza to evacuate to areas south of Wadi Gaza for your own safety and the safety of your families as the IDF continues to operate significantly in Gaza City and make extensive efforts to avoid harming civilians

However, some Palestinians who followed the evacuation warnings and fled their homes in search of safety suffered the very fate they were running from Israeli airstrikes killed them outside of the evacuation zone

The killings underscore the reality that evacuation zones and warning alerts from the Israeli military havent guaranteed safety for civilians in the densely populated Gaza Strip, where Palestinians have no safe place to escape Israeli bombs

In the early hours on Friday, Aaed AlAjrami and his nephew, Raji, received a phone call from an Israeli military official warning him to get everyone he knows and head southwards immediately, the nephew told CNN Despite following the instructions and successfully fleeing south of the evacuation zone, Aaeds family was killed by an Israeli airstrike the next day

An audio recording of the phone call obtained by CNN reveals the details of the brief conversation which included the IDFs instructions to flee south of the evacuation zone and no guidance on how to get there Raji said once they realized who was calling, they recorded the conversation so they could share it with other family members

All of you go to the South You and all your family members Gather all of your stuff with you and head there, the officer told them

Aaed wanted to know what road would be safe to take and what time they should leave

It doesnt matter which road, the officer replied Do it as fast as you can There is no time left

Aaed heeded the warning By sunrise on Friday, he headed south with his family and relatives to stay with friends in Deir Al Balah, a city roughly eight miles south of Wadi Gaza and outside the evacuation zone

The next day, an Israeli airstrike in the area destroyed parts of the building where Aaeds family sought refuge killing him and 12 other members of his family, including seven children

His nephew Raji, 32, was staying in a different building nearby when he heard the explosion and feared the worst He rushed to the scene after receiving a call telling him that his uncles family members were amongst the victims

The destruction was massive, Raji said We started digging people out who were hit by the explosion, some of them were still alive the gunpowder smell was very strong, the dust was everywhere

These people all thought that they were finally safe and that nothing would happen in the area, Raji said You can follow the orders so that you arent exposed to danger, but the danger will still reach you wherever you are

In response to CNNs query about the airstrikes in Deir Al Balah and other areas outside of the evacuation zone, an IDF statement said its operating to dismantle Hamas military and administrative capabilities

While an estimated 500,000 Palestinians have fled northern Gaza for the south since Friday, many others are unable to make the journey south of the evacuation zone and are stuck in northern Gaza

Yara Alhayek, 22, told CNN that her family living in the north had nowhere to seek refuge if they headed south We couldnt leave because there is no safe place to go to its really dangerous if we leave our house, its really dangerous if we stay in our house, so we have no idea what to do

Israel has defended its ongoing hammering of Gaza with airstrikes as targeting Hamas headquarters and assets which are hidden within civilian buildings, claiming that what may appear as a civilian building is actually a legitimate military target

Independent UN experts have condemned Israels indiscriminate attacks against Palestinian civilians Doctors Without Borders released an update Sunday night saying the strikes have also hit hospitals and ambulances and decried that the indiscriminate bombing campaign in which most casualties have been civilians

Israels military airstrikes have killed more than 2,800 and injured 11,000 since October 7, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said Monday, according to the official Palestinian press agency, WAFA

Israeli troops and military equipment have massed at the border with Gaza as Israel prepares to ramp up its response to the deadly October 7 attack by the Islamist militant group Hamas Warplanes continued to blast Gaza over the weekend, as civilians fled southward, following Israels evacuation instructions

Several United Nations agencies have also warned that mass evacuation under such siege conditions will lead to disaster, and that the most vulnerable Gazans, including the elderly and pregnant, may not be able to relocate at all

The order to evacuate 11 million people from northern Gaza defies the rules of war and basic humanity, wrote Martin Griffiths, head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in a statement late Friday Roads and homes have been reduced to rubble There is nowhere safe to go

Raji, who has taken in the wounded children that survived the attack, says he has to put on a strong face to support them despite being broken internally

I feel the injustice, these are innocent people, what did they do

Aliza Samuel walks carefully through debris left strewn across the ground, picking up a bracelet before coming across some small clay trinkets that had been handmade during the Nova Music Festival

People just dropped everything and left, Samuel says Hamas just tore everything apart

Nearly one month on from the massacre of festivalgoers in Reim in southern Israel by Hamas militants, the 24yearold has left her home for the first time since that day, to return with CNN to the place she witnessed the murders of four of her friends More than 260 bodies were found at the site in the aftermath of the assault on October 7, one of the deadliest of the Hamas attacks, which killed at least 1,400 people in Israel

I think its important for me to come back, she says No matter how painful it isthe world needs to know what happened here

But the terror of it all soon comes flooding back

I hear everything, she says I hear the screaming, I hear the bikes, and I hear the gunshots

Traumatized but trying to process her experience, she recalls the moment that she has played over and over in her mind

I saw one of my friends, she was begging for her life, she says She asked him to not kill her, to not kill her, to not kill her, and they didnt care, they were laughing

She explains how, shortly after the break of dawn, her four friends were forced to line up and kneel down in the dust of an arid field

From her hiding place behind the trees, she overheard the single final word her friends heard from their murderers

Enjoy, the Hamas militants said in English, as they laughed, before shooting the three men and one woman at pointblank range, she said

A few hours earlier, the friends had all been dancing and having fun together just a few hundred meters away at the festival, an event billed as a celebration of unity and love to mark the Jewish holiday Sukkot

But the group of thousands of young partygoers proved to be an easy target for the Hamas attackers who broke through Israels defenses, descending on the festival via paragliders and motorbikes, massacring festivalgoers and taking others as hostages

Israel subsequently announced a war against Hamas, the militant group that governs Gaza and launched the coordinated assault The Israel Defense Forces IDF began a massive aerial bombardment of Gaza, pounding the tiny strip of land with air strikes, artillery fire and helicopter gunships, followed by a ground offensive

The IDF says it is targeting the vast network of underground tunnels below Gaza that harbor the Hamas leadership along with their fighters and weaponry But the onslaught has also led to an immense toll on Palestinian civilians, with more than 9,100 people killed in Gaza since October 7 the majority of them women and children according to the latest figures released by the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah, drawn from sources in the Hamascontrolled enclave

People had nowhere to run

Walking back to her tent where she was sleeping when it all started, Samuel recalls the moment she was jolted awake soon after sunrise by the sound of Hamas rockets flying towards them from Gaza She said she immediately woke her friend, and they fled their tent to try to find a concrete shelter

Many of the other festival goers were asleep or still dancing, and either didnt hear the alarm, or ignored it, placing their trust in Israels Iron Dome missile defense system to protect them

But Samuel and her friend didnt want to take any chances, so they started running As they sought cover, they suddenly spotted Hamas fighters appearing in the skies above them on paragliders, shooting at people from the air as they came in to land

Panicking, the pair sprinted across the open farmland surrounding the festival site and dived into a ditch behind a line of large trees Samuel worked on trying to calm her friend down, clamping her hand over her mouth to stop her screaming, as they began to realize what was unfolding Others were also hiding behind the trees, trying not to breathe, she added

Hamas came from everywhere, she said The people had nowhere to run

I saw Hamas take a bunch of people and went to their commander, and asked if to kill them or to take them, she said And once they were dead, they didnt stop, they just kept shooting them, and you just saw the body just jump and jump from the bullets, after they were dead

Samuel said the Hamas attackers mostly spoke in Arabic, but occasionally they would speak some English In the parts she could understand, she overheard them express confusion and delight at how far they had made it into Israel and how many people they had been able to attack

After hiding in the ditch for hours, Samuel and her friend eventually saw army vehicles arrive and decided to make a run for it stepping through pools of blood to escape Finally, they found some Israeli soldiers who helped them get to safety

Later, she learned that another male friend at the festival was also found dead shot in the leg and then later beheaded at a nearby kibbutz

Complete carnage

Helping Samuel through this trauma is her cousin, Dr Shlomo Gensler, an ICU doctor who was a first responder on October 7

A rocket alarm sounds during the visit to the scene and everyone drops to the ground Samuel begins to panic, breathing rapidly and shaking Gensler quickly calms her down, assuring her that she is safe

Gensler, who is still treating patients who were injured that day, walks back through the area where he triaged injured patients during the Hamas attacks Leftover medical equipment and bullet casings still litter the ground where he worked that night

It was just complete carnage, and it was like nothing Ive ever seen before, Gensler said

After seeing the first dead body arrive, he said, we didnt realize what would be coming up after that, where it was just hundreds of bodies afterwards, and nonstop

Gensler witnessed houses and villages on fire nearby, along with seeing civilian cars that had been blown apart by shoulderpropelled grenade launchers, with bodies lying next to them

Knowing the victims were targeted for being Jewish due to Hamas ideology, and seeing the evidence of premeditated intent, made the scenario more emotional, he added

Still, his colleagues told CNN that the doctor treated around 300 people that night and saved dozens of lives He also treated some soldiers

There was one soldier who came here and he was shaking, Gensler said And I just held him in my arms And this is a big soldier crying in my armsand I said, youre going to be OK

Now, as Israel wages war across the border, Gensler is following the unfolding humanitarian disaster I really cry about the kids in Gaza that are suffering, he said, adding that they routinely used to treat sick Palestinian children from the strip at his hospital

But he still wants to remind the world about what happened on October 7 to honor the people that were slaughtered

For those who made it out alive, they are starting to deal with survivors guilt for their fallen friends

Im sorry that I couldnt be there for them and save them and I am sorry that God didnt save them, Samuel said

They were amazing people, she said Im gonna do everything I can to live my life in their name

Billionaire hedge fund CEO Bill Ackman and several other business leaders are demanding Harvard University release the names of students whose organizations signed on to a letter blaming solely Israel for the deadly attacks by Hamas

The CEOs want the students blacklisted But some of those students have since distanced themselves from the letter

One should not be able to hide behind a corporate shield when issuing statements supporting the actions of terrorists, Ackman said in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter

If the members support the letter, the names of the signatories should be made public so their views are publicly known, Ackman said The CEO of Pershing Square Capital Management said he wanted to ensure his company and others dont inadvertently hire any students belonging to Harvard groups that signed the letter

Following a backlash to the statement, some of the student groups have since withdrawn their endorsements

Multiple other business leaders, including the CEOs of shopping club FabFitFun, health tech startup EasyHealth and Dovehill Capital Management supported the call from Ackman to name the students

I would like to know so I know never to hire these people, Jonathan Neman, CEO of restaurant chain Sweetgreen, said on X

Neither Neman nor Ackman responded to requests for comment

Others warn that naming the students whose groups backed the statement could put the students in harms way and did not account for differences of opinion within the student groups

Larry Summers, the famed economist who on Monday drew attention to the morally unconscionable Harvard student statement, is now preaching caution

I yield to no one in my revulsion at the statement apparently made on behalf of 30 plus Harvard student group, Summers said in a Wednesday afternoon post on X But please everybody take a deep breath Many in these groups never saw the statement before it went out In some cases those approving did not understand exactly what they were approving

Summers, the former president of Harvard and US Treasury Secretary, added that probably some were naive and foolish

This is not a time where it is constructive to vilify individuals and I am sorry that is happening, Summers said

Harvard professor and legal scholar Laurence Tribe told CNN Wednesday he initially agreed with Ackman but on reflection decided not to join the push to publicize their names

Any number of the students who got caught up in this misguided campaign probably didnt even know there was a statement Others no doubt didnt focus on, much less understand, what they were signing, Tribe said in an email Naive and stupid as they may have been, I now think it would be an overreaction to penalize them permanently by publishing their names and implying that they actually endorsed what the terrorists did to innocent Israelis

Similarly, Medscom CEO Stephen Sullivan wrote that people should be angry at the administration and teachers but cautioned against putting college students names on a list, according to Forbes

Harvard University did not immediately respond to a request for comment But Harvard President Claudine Gay issued a statement Tuesday saying no student group not even 30 student groups speaks for Harvard University or its leadership

Harvard student groups statement

The controversy comes in response to a joint statement released by a coalition of Harvard student groups following the attacks by Hamas that have killed more than 1,000 Israelis and at least 14 American citizens

We, the undersigned student organizations, hold the Israeli regime entirely responsible for all unfolding violence, the statement from the Harvard Palestine Solidarity Groups said

The statement said millions of Palestinians in Gaza have been forced to live in an openair prison and called on Harvard to take action to stop the ongoing annihilation of Palestinians

A footnote at the bottom of the statement said the names of the original signing organizations have been concealed at this time

Jake Wurzak, the CEO of Dovehill Capital Management, said he believed the students who signed the letter should be named

Free Speech is paramount Words have meaning and students shouldnt be allowed to hide behind an institution, Wurzak said on X

Some students withdraw their signatures

According to the Harvard Crimson student newspaper, at least five of the original 34 signatories have withdrawn their endorsements as of Tuesday night

For example, the Harvard Undergraduate Nepali Student Association said on Instagram we regret that the decision to cosign the statement has been interpreted as a tacit support for the recent violent attacks in Israel

To ensure that our stance on the condemnation of violence by Hamas and support for a just peace remains clear, we retract our signatures from the statement, the Nepali student group said

Act on a Dream, a student group supporting immigrants, told the Crimson the group signed the statement as a result of miscommunication and a lack of due diligence in sharing the statement with the entirety of the board

Others responded to Ackman saying students werent aware of the letters content or that groups they belong to were signing the statement

Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO of the AntiDefamation League, told CNN on Wednesday he doesnt know about the wisdom of releasing the names of the students but called for them to take responsibility on their own

It is an outrageously offensive piece and anyone who signed it should either stand behind it and face the consequences in life or step up and apologize and explain themselves, Greenblatt said This is what we learn to do in elementary school Its hard for me to understand why its complicated for people at Harvard University

Reallife consequences for antiIsrael statement

Separately, there has been a backlash against a statement released by the president of the NYU Student Bar Association saying Israel bears full responsibility for this tremendous loss of life

That statement had immediate consequences, with law firm Winston Strawn promptly pulling a job offer to the NYU student who previously served as a summer associate at the firm

These comments are profoundly in conflict with Winston Strawns values as a firm Accordingly, the Firm has rescinded the law students offer of employment, the law firm said in a post on X Winston stands in solidarity with Israels right to exist in peace and condemns Hamas and the violence and destruction it has ignited in the strongest terms possible

Morally unconscionable

After criticism from Summers and others, Harvard President Claudine Gay said there should be no doubt that I condemn the terrorist atrocities perpetrated by Hamas

Such inhumanity is abhorrent, whatever ones individual views of the origins of longstanding conflicts in the region, Gay said

Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, dean for leadership studies at the Yale School of Management, told CNN on Wednesday that Jews have many centuries of being blamed as victims

Villains cannot be celebrated as heroes, Sonnenfeld said in an email Anyone who does so cannot hide as cowards behind the shields of association titles any more than Nazi stormtroopers were allowed anonymity Our society is founded on personal accountability

The AntiDefamation League, in response to a surge of antisemitism around the world following the attacks on Israel, called on CEOs on Wednesday to speak out against hate and sign a pledge to fight antisemitism

The ADL said signatories include Accenture, Adidas and the NBA

For companies that have Jewish employees, Jewish customers, Jewish investors, Jewish shareholders, or simply have a modicum of a conscience, this one should be easy,

Im a 40yearold Columbia University professor and last month I found myself crying in front of dozens of strangers on campus

I wasnt planning on crying The tears just came out when I spoke about the danger of antisemitism on US campuses in a video that has since gone viral Judging from the thousands of supportive messages Ive received, it seems that Jewish Americans around the country have been crying with me It was a cry of despair a howl, really that took on the purest form of human pain A cry that arose from the darkest, deepest and most primal of fears A cry that has been consuming me for weeks, urging me to speak up

Following the horrific massacre in Israel by Hamas terrorists on October 7, I felt an intense, relentless grief Grief for the thousands of civilians shot, murdered, mutilated, raped and beheaded Grief for the intentional killing of babies, some burned beyond recognition Grief for the confused children dragged at gun point by violent men into captivity in Gaza

Yet there was a deeper, darker grief A grief that seeped from a wound Id thought was healed A grief that comes from the trauma hiding at the bottom of every Jewish persons heart A grief that comes from seeing, once again, Jewish people targeted in their homes and communities

Soon, this darkest of griefs was joined by intense fear I feared not only for the future of innocent Israeli and Palestinian children, but for the future of my family here, in New York City

Having spent over 13 years building a closeknit community of likeminded liberals, I suddenly find myself abandoned Abandoned by the resounding silence of friends and neighbors who refuse to publicly denounce Hamas evil crimes against humanity Abandoned by colleagues who whitewash and excuse barbarities that included the raping of Israeli women and the execution of disabled Israeli children as a mere military response, who consider such horrors as awesome acts of resistance Abandoned by student organizations who have welcomed and celebrated the October 7 massacre with the chant from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free, code words for the eradication of Jews living in Israel

Abandoned by Columbia University my very own employer which, in the name of fostering different points of view has allowed such expressions to take place Its statement that we must avoid language that vilifies, threatens, or stereotypes entire groups of people rings hollow when it doesnt condemn the professors and students doing exactly that

This is happening not in Gaza Not in Israel Here, in the United States of America Here, at universities, which are supposed to provide safe spaces for everyone in the community Everyone, it seems, but Jews and Israelis

On the day following Hamas unspeakable massacre, I woke up to the most petrifying realization a parent can have the realization that right now, all across America, there are people who see my 7yearold son and 2yearold daughter, both dual citizens of Israel and the US, as legitimate targets of resistance

Were they older, I would have loved for my children to attend an incredible institution like Columbia But not now, not under this leadership I would be too worried for their safety The differences between the student organizations chant of from the river to the sea and the Nazi chant of Germany for Germans are mere semantics The antisemitic sentiment is the same

It is not just these chants that keep me up at night It is the antisemitic violence that inevitably follows when university leaders are willing to look the other way

There is the Israeli student who was physically attacked at my workplace, Columbia University, while hanging posters of the kidnapped babies in Gaza, the Jewish students here who have been spat on, cursed at and received death threats There are the online threats to rape Jewish women and throw them off a cliff and slit the throats of Jewish men on Cornell Universitys campus, my alma mater A suspect has been arrested and is being held in jail, with the university president saying the school would respond rapidly and forcefully to threats There are the student organizations who, in their support of Hamas actions, pounded on the doors of a library while frightened Jewish students locked the door and sheltered inside at Cooper Union in Manhattan There are the Jews supporting Israel who were punched and whacked at Tulane in New Orleans There is the UC Davis professor who threatened to attack Jewish journalists and their children, ending her social media post with emojis of a knife, a hatchet and three drops of blood The list goes on and on

These days, taking the subway to campus or strolling with my family through Central Park, I experience an acute and very specific anxiety Who among my colleagues, friends and neighbors sees my children as legitimate targets Who among my community sees the lives of my Jewish and Israeli students as expendable How can I ever feel safe myself at a campus whose leadership fails to condemn the rape of young women and other horrors perpetrated by Hamas on October 7

The horrific rise of antisemitism on US campuses is a wakeup call for action Contact every politician in your city and state Join your PTA Write an oped Call your alma mater File a lawsuit We must hold accountable the leaders of institutions who, in their silence, embolden those who wish to exterminate an entire people We must tell the heads of our universities that vacuous public relations stunts creating antisemitism task forces are meaningless when they refuse to condemn support for terror within the campus community We must send the world a clear message Our lives are just as valuable as anyone elses

At the same time, we Jews and Israelis can and must stand in unity with the Palestinian people and work toward peaceful coexistence Even in our darkest times, we must foster empathy for every person currently striving for safety and dignity One can support a free Palestine without being antisemitic or antiIsraeli One can fight for a sovereign Palestinian state and feel deep pain at the anguish of innocent Palestinian children while also publicly expressing a loathing of Hamas I know, because I do I know, because many students and faculty at Columbia have told me that they want to support the Palestinian people yet refuse to march in hatefilled protests that celebrate Hamas crimes

What we cannot do is accept the existence of internationally recognized terror organizations that explicitly call for our demise We cannot accept proterror student groups in the US that celebrate the atrocities committed by these organizations We can never accept torture and murder of civilians as a legitimate act of resistance

This fear that has engulfed me is not new, of course Every Jewish person carries it within them, regardless of whether they are Orthodox, Reform or a humanist atheist like myself This fear is as old as the existence of the Jewish people, as old as our persecution It is a fear that lurks in the dark basements of every Jewish mind, a basement whose door we usually dont allow ourselves to prop open It is a fear that Jewish children inherit from their parents and Jewish parents try to shield their child from

Last week, crying in front of complete strangers on Columbias campus, it was that exact fear that howled through my throat It was the fear of history repeating itself, the fear of the worlds apathy in the face of the largest Jewish death toll on a single day since the Holocaust I was encompassed by the darkness of that hidden basement, crying for the world to listen Never again is now

As we enter 2024 what lies ahead on the global stage may seem more uncertain than it has in years

To help you make sense of it, here are some key themes to watch

1 IsraelHamas war threatens to spill over

The new year begins with Israel pushing its offensive further into the Gaza Strip in response to Hamas October 7 attacks

International pressure is mounting on Israel to limit the duration and intensity of its war amid global outcry over Gazans being trapped in mortal danger, without critical supplies or access to healthcare, as disease spreads through crowded humanitarian camps Despite this, Israel has doubled down on its efforts and vowed its war on Hamas will rage for many months

The risk of a wider Middle East conflict is escalating

There are increasing crossborder exchanges between the Iranbacked, Islamist paramilitary group Hezbollah and the Israel Defense Forces IDF on the LebanonIsrael border

Proxy attacks by Iranbacked factions in Iraq like the recent strike on the US embassy in Baghdad are becoming bolder and more common And further attacks by Yemens Iranbacked Houthi rebels on global shipping routes through the Red Sea and Suez Canal could make energy prices soar

Theres also a risk of other extremist groups in the region being fueled by opportunism andor grievances It goes without saying that any formal normalization of ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia, a deal that appeared close before October 7, is now off the table

The United States early unequivocal support of Israeli attacks on Gaza has damaged the image it projects as a guarantor of human rights and international law a reputational hit from which Washington is unlikely to recover in the short term, despite a decisive shift in tone

Going into 2024, the US and its allies must strike a balance between retaliation for and deterrence of proxy attacks, while keeping their responses under a threshold that would trigger a wider conflict

Ongoing talks to reach a ceasefire agreement to halt the fighting between Hamas and Israel in Gaza by Ramadan appear to still be on track, even after more than 100 Palestinians were killed on Thursday as they tried to access food in Gaza City, according to officials familiar with the discussions

US officials on Friday said there are no indications that the discussions had been significantly derailed but much hinges on an expected Hamas response to what has been discussed in Paris and Doha in the past week between the other countries involved Qatar, Egypt, Israel and the US On Thursday, a Hamas official warned the negotiations could be impacted

CNN has reached out to several Hamas officials about the potential deal but has not gotten a response

In the immediate aftermath of the deaths of dozens of Palestinian civilians in Gaza on Thursday, US officials said the chaotic scenes injected added urgency into the hostage and ceasefire talks

On Friday afternoon, President Joe Biden called for an immediate ceasefire

Were trying to work out a deal between Israel and Hamas on the hostages being returned and an immediate ceasefire in Gaza for at least the next six weeks and to allow the surge of aid to the Gaza Strip, Biden said during a meeting with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni

A senior administration official said earlier Friday that the US is still racing to try to get a deal across the finish line by Ramadan now just about a week away which is when Israel has warned its forces would expand its military operations into Rafah in the absence of a deal

Biden had said earlier in the week that he hoped thered be a ceasefire in Gaza by Monday, but he offered a mixed assessment of that possibility later Friday, saying It looks like were still its not there yet I think well get there, but its not there yet And it may not get there now Asked whether a ceasefire deal may never be reached, he told reporters that hes still hoping for it Its not over til its over

The president said Thursday that the deaths at the aid site could make the ceasefire talks more difficult

Asked if he was worried the deaths would complicate negotiations, Biden responded Oh, I know it will

Biden spoke on Thursday with the leaders of Qatar and Egypt countries playing central mediating roles in negotiations

Technical teams have been working on the key components of a potential deal this week in Doha, officials familiar with the talks say On Tuesday, Qatari spokesman Majed alAnsari said disagreements remained over numbers, ratios and IDF troop movements

Its believed that Hamas will demand a higher ratio of Palestinian prisoners to be released by Israel if Hamas is to release female IDF soldier hostages, as demanded by Israel

CNN Foreign Affairs analyst Barak Ravid reported for Axios on Friday, that as part of a Hamas response Israel expects a list of the hostages who are alive and more details on the number of Palestinian prisoners they want released, before attending more talks

We are hopeful that the areas of divergence between the two sides can be bridged and we can reach at least a temporary cessation of hostilities to lead to a permanent ceasefire, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shukri said Friday, while warning that a failure to reach an agreement between Israel and Hamas before Ramadan will aggravate the Arab and Muslim world

Everybody has recognized the importance that we are successful in this before the beginning of Ramadan, he told the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in Turkey

If this conflict was to continue into Ramadan, I think it will have a very dire consequence in that emotions will be further inflamed, he added

Those involved in the discussions have said an agreement would likely be implemented in multiple phases and once an initial deal is made it could lead to a truce lasting for as long as six weeks with a group of Israeli hostages released including women, children, the elderly and sick hostages in exchange for a smaller number of Palestinian prisoners than Hamas had initially demanded

During a truce, negotiations would take place over more sensitive topics like the release of Israeli soldiers who are hostages, Palestinian prisoners serving longer sentences, the withdrawal of IDF forces and bringing a permanent end to the war alongside the socalled day after issues

As the conflict in the Middle East reverberates around the world, many in the West have fallen into the emotional traps of anger, fear and righteousness toward the perceived other side Exporting the conflict will not bring peace any more than it will bring victory, and the only way to reduce the flames is to learn to coexistMy work as an imam and focus on spiritual coexistence in Israel and Palestine has shown me that the best personal defense against destructive emotions is to find the other inside ourselves A complex identity is a natural antibody that inoculates against hate, and I myself identify as a Muslim, a Bedouin, a Palestinian and an Israeli

It is currently the month of Ramadan This year my coexistence organization, Abrahamic Reunion, has hosted our 20th annual coexistence Iftar meal, this time in Jerusalem It is especially meaningful to break my fast with my nonMuslim partners in the current context of the war Ramadan is a time when Muslims have to think about the other who is less fortunate than themselves Through fasting and charity, we are supposed to come out of the month with a renewed appreciation for our role in this world That is the essence of spiritual coexistence, in which your selfimage makes room for the humanity of others

Many people resent that I refuse to choose only one side of my identity they want me to be angry, empty and broken like them Members of my own Bedouin Muslim community have threatened and attacked my family and me for simply acknowledging the humanity of Jewish Israelis My house was shot at after I spoke out against denying the crimes of Hamas on October 7

This is not a recent phenomenon In 2008, after my wife was honored with lighting a torch at a celebration of Israels Independence Day, our familys car was bombed But these attacks have only ever strengthened my resolve to advocate for spiritual coexistence, and so I have spent years teaching Jewish Israelis about Islam and our need to recognize that both Muslims and Jews belong in this land

This has been my lifes mission My wife Sana and I cofounded the Abrahamic Reunion in the aftermath of the violence of the Second Intifada of the early 2000s, when terror attacks and military operations drove deep divisions between every sector of Israeli and Palestinian society Abrahamic Reunions dream is to reunite the children of Abraham in the Holy Land, and to that end we have had tens of thousands of Muslims, Christians, Jews, Israelis and Palestinians join our activities over the years

Spiritual coexistence means building bridges out of celebration, grief and the acknowledgment of God above us, no matter your faith And it is how we cultivate the other within ourselves Almost anyone who participates in experiences like these will find themselves more immune to the emotional pull of identitydriven hate, even amid a devastating and personal war such as this one

Abrahamic Reunion included participants from Gaza until Hamas made participation illegal in 2013 Before then, we would sit on a hill next to the border and talk through megaphones with Gazans on the other side of the fence Organizations that feel threatened by coexistence know that it is the greatest threat to their power

You can always coexist with other people, but not with every ideology, and on October 7, Hamas declared war against every element of my identity They murdered Muslims They kidnapped Bedouin from the desert They continue to oppress Palestinians in Gaza, stealing aid and using their homes and mosques to launch attacks They are committed to destroying Israel and every Israeli I am at war with Hamas because this is their path, but I will never be at war against the people of Gaza

My religion is Islam, and as the imam of the southern Israeli town of Tel Sheva, I provide spiritual and moral guidance to my community, as my father and grandfather did before me My ancestors are related to the Hashemite family, the traditional protectors of Islams holy sites

The Islam of my tradition has nothing in common with those who proclaimed Allahu Akbar while inflicting unspeakable violence upon innocent civilians on October 7 It is because I am a Muslim that I call to immediately release the remaining hostages seized from Israel, Bedouin Muslims among them, and to provide help to Palestinians in desperate need of humanitarian relief in Gaza

My ethnicity is Bedouin, and my people have called the Negev desert home for centuries, as nations and empires rose and fell around us Bedouin tribes are part of the Arab fabric of this land, and I trace my history, traditions and communal codes back to the sands of the Negev Despite being from a nomadic people, I am not at home anywhere else

The Bedouin community in Israel has long suffered from neglect and marginalization by the state, and our society today is riddled with both crime and a lack of respect for its elders My mission to deliver Tel Sheva back from the hands of criminals is connected to the need to return Islam from the broken souls of political extremists

My people are the Palestinian people, and I am inextricably connected to the souls in Gaza for whom the weight of this war is unbearable I feel their fear, hunger and suffering as my own, and I cry at the images of destruction and loss Members of my community have family in Gaza, and we pray for their safety every day

A solution to this conflict will only come from securing a path to Palestinian freedom, under a government that represents and cares for its people War will not turn that hope into a reality, and neither will leaving Gaza under the moral vacuum of Hamas

My nationality is Israeli An Israeli who loves the country he has built alongside his Jewish and Arab neighbors An Israeli whose wife was the first Bedouin woman honored with lighting a torch at Israels national Independence Day ceremony An Israeli who knows that his country must now fight for peace as hard as it fights for survival because the two are dependent on each other On October 7, Bedouin Muslims like myself saved the lives of our Jewish neighbors, and the Israel Defense Forces defended our homes the same way they did the homes of Jewish Israelis

My wife, may Allah have mercy on her, passed away last year Her final instruction to me was to look after our four beautiful children and continue the journey we started together I do so today because, beyond my identity as a Muslim, a Bedouin, a Palestinian and an Israeli, I am first and foremost a human being a father, a husband and a servant of God

Approaching my 80th birthday, I realize that as a Jew, Ive lived a honeymoon life Born at the tail end of World War II, I grew up with antisemitism by and large under control, as even vicious Jew haters were reticent to attack Jews To some extent, I believe, the worlds guilt over either its complicity or inactivity as 6 million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust silenced the enemies of our peopleThis doesnt mean antiSemitism was not a serious problem, especially in recent decades There were vicious antisemites and horrific antisemitic incidents that had to be condemned The likes of Louis Farrakhan and David Duke needed to be confronted head on Events like the 1991 murder of Yankel Rosenbaum, a Hasidic Lubavitch scholar stabbed to death by a Jewhating mob, brought fear into the hearts and souls of the Jewish community Still, antisemitism was not endemic

Eight decades after the Holocaust, however, the Shoah is in the rearview mirror For much of the world, it is a footnote in history Its memory no longer stymies antisemites, who were always hiding in the shadows and have now surfaced with fury

The holiday of Purim, celebrated by Jews around the world this weekend, commemorates a story in the Bibles Book of Esther when the whole of the Jewish community in ancient Persia was threatened with extinction by the Kings adviser Haman and his cohorts

The story touches upon dimensions of antisemitism that were pungent back then, and have remained powerful and threatening across thousands of years These forms of hatred of Jews past and present fall into three categories shaping the foundations of a nation people, ideology and land We have seen all of them in modern times

During the Holocaust the goal of the Third Reich was the genocide of the Jewish people that is, murdering Jews because they were Jews It was the same agenda that motivated Haman two millennia ago

During the Cold War, Soviet antisemitism came to the fore with a vengeance after the Second World War It was based on loathing Jewish faith and ideology Like Haman, the USSRs leaders saw our Jewish culture and religious practices as alien to their state Believing Judaism contrary to their Marxist view of the world, the Soviets didnt allow Jews to live a Jewish life Those who wished to emigrate were held as quasihostages behind the Iron Curtain

Today, antisemitism is often expressed by denying that Jews have the right to be sovereign in their own land Yet, without sovereignty, there can be no security Jews will forever be vulnerable to the next Haman to come along Throughout the millennia, as a stateless people, Jews were subject to persecution, discrimination and expulsion This is a historical reality that antiZionists conveniently ignore when they say they are not against Jews, just against Jews having their own state

They, and the world at large, also have no problem with having Muslim states, several of them explicitly defined as Islamic or Arab However, the concept of one tiny Jewish state, the only Westernstyle democracy in the Middle East, is constantly rejected and attacked

Statehood is built into Jewish consciousness Israel is more than just a place where Jews can be free and safe As Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the first Ashkenazic chief rabbi of prestate Israel said Israel is not external to Judaism but inherently part of Jewish consciousness To wit Jews across the religious denominations pray for the return to Zion in their daily liturgy And religious or not, the vast majority of Jews feel inextricably, soulfully bound to Israel and describe themselves as Zionists

So while antiZionists defend themselves by claiming they are not antiSemites, when antiZionists declare no Zionists allowed, they are actually saying, No Jews allowed The fact that so many antiIsrael demonstrations are targeting Jewish rather than Israeli institutions underscores this dynamic

The interfacing of antiZionism and antiSemitism was never more apparent than on October 7 The goal of Hamas, like their antecedent Haman, goes beyond destroying Israel its mission as articulated in the founding Hamas charter is to kill as many Jews as possible Jews worldwide felt personally attacked that day, understanding that if Hamas could, each and every Jew would have been murdered

This doesnt mean that every antiZionist is an antiSemite There are always exceptions to a rule But the exception doesnt void the rule Its one thing to disagree, even vehemently, with some core Israeli policies But antiZionism goes well beyond that to object to the very notion of Jewish selfdetermination, and thereby target 7 million Jews, half of the worlds Jewish population who are now living in Zion, and many thousands more who yearn to make aliya, or move home to Israel

Indeed, Zionism is a play on the Hebrew word tziunmetzuyan, meaning a stamp of excellence It is there in Israel that all Israelis living in a sovereign nation have the potential to do their humble share to make this world a better place

Purim is the story of a vulnerable, powerless Jewish people living in the diaspora threatened with physical and spiritual annihilation Its unwritten message is the necessity for Jews to be Zionist, to live in Zion, to have a homeland wherein it is in their power to protect themselves with strength, and what Israels army calls the purity of arms

According to the Book of Esther, the Jews in ancient Persia were ultimately saved by the grace of the king But the State of Israel, with the benevolence of God, allows Jews to save themselves

Former President Donald Trump said that Israel needs to finish what they started and get it over with fast, as he continued arguing Israel was losing the PR war because of the visuals coming out of Gaza

Youve got to get it over with, and you have to get back to normalcy And Im not sure that Im loving the way theyre doing it, because youve got to have victory You have to have a victory, and its taking a long time, Trump said in an interview with The Hugh Hewitt Show that aired Thursday

Trump defended comments he made recently in an interview with Israeli newspaper Israel Hayom, in which he said Israel needed to finish up its war with Hamas and that the country was losing a lot of support among the world One of the Israeli journalists who conducted the interview later wrote that Trumps comments shocked us deeply and argued both Trump and President Joe Biden were turning their rhetorical backs on Israel

What I said very plainly is get it over with, and lets get back to peace and stop killing people And thats a very simple statement Get it over with Theyve got to finish what they finish They have to get it done Get it over with, and get it over with fast, because we have to, you have to get back to normalcy and peace, Trump told The Hugh Hewitt Show

Trump noted, Theyve got to finish what they started, and theyve got to finish it fast, and we have to get on with life

Trump continued arguing Israel had an issue with its public messaging and said, Israel is absolutely losing the PR war

And the other thing is I hate, they put out tapes all the time Every night, theyre releasing tapes of a building falling down They shouldnt be releasing tapes like that Theyre doing, thats why theyre losing the PR war They, Israel is absolutely losing the PR war, Trump said

Trump has made several public comments critical of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu amid the nations war with Hamas Shortly after the October 7 attack by Hamas on Israel, Trump criticized Netanyahu and Israeli intelligence services for being caught unprepared by the attack and said they needed to straighten it out Trumps criticism of the US ally in the immediate aftermath of a terrorist attack on the nation sparked enormous backlash from both allies and adversaries

The former president has held personal animosity toward Netanyahu ever since the prime minister publicly acknowledged Joe Biden won the 2020 presidential election

Trump has not specified how he would approach the IsraelHamas war if reelected to the White House and how his policies would differ from Bidens Trump, who has been asked many times during his third presidential run about what actions he would take, only offers vague commentary while criticizing Biden and arguing the October 7 attack would not have happened if he were president

The Israeli military has been using artificial intelligence to help identify bombing targets in Gaza, according to an investigation by 972 Magazine and Local Call, citing six Israeli intelligence officials involved in the alleged program who also allege that human review of the suggested targets was cursory at best

The officials, quoted in an extensive investigation by the online publication jointly run by Palestinians and Israelis, said that the AIbased tool was called Lavender and was known to have a 10 error rate

When asked about 972 Magazines report, Israel Defence Forces IDF did not dispute the existence of the tool but denied AI was being used to identify suspected terrorists But in a lengthy statement it emphasized that information systems are merely tools for analysts in the target identification process, and that Israel tries to reduce harm to civilians to the extent feasible in the operational circumstances ruling at the time of the strike

The IDF said analysts must conduct independent examinations, in which they verify that the identified targets meet the relevant definitions in accordance with international law and additional restrictions stipulated in the IDF directives

However, one official told 972 that human personnel often served only as a rubber stamp for the machines decisions and typically devoted only around 20 seconds to each target ensuring they are male before authorizing a bombing

The investigation comes amid intensifying international scrutiny of Israels military campaign, after targeted air strikes killed several foreign aid workers delivering food in the Palestinian enclave Israels siege of Gaza has killed more than 32,916 people, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health, and has led to a spiraling humanitarian crisis where nearlythreequartersof the population in northern Gaza are suffering from catastrophic levels of hunger, according to a United Nationsbacked report

The investigations author, Yuval Abraham, previously toldCNN in Januaryof his work looking into how the Israeli military has been heavily relying on artificial intelligence to generate targets for such assassinations with very little human supervision

The Israeli military does not use an artificial intelligence system that identifies terrorist operatives or tries to predict whether a person is a terrorist, the IDF statement on Wednesday said But its analysts use a database whose purpose is to crossreference intelligence sources, in order to produce uptodate layers of information on the military operatives of terrorist organizations

Human officers are then responsible for verifying that the identified targets meet the relevant definitions in accordance with international law and additional restrictions stipulated in the IDF directives, according to the IDF statement, a process also described by 972

Night attacks

The magazine also reported that the Israeli army systematically attacked targets in their homes, usually at night when entire families were present

The result, as the sources testified, is that thousands of Palestinians most of them women and children or people who were not involved in the fighting were wiped out by Israeli airstrikes, especially during the first weeks of the war, because of the AI programs decisions, it wrote

The report, citing sources, said that when alleged junior militants were targeted, the army preferred to use socalled dumb bombs unguided missiles which can cause largescale damage

CNN reported in December that nearlyhalf of the 29,000airtosurface munitions dropped on Gaza last fall were dumb bombs, which can pose a greater threat to civilians, especially in densely populated territories like Gaza

According to the IDF statement, it does not carry out strikes where the expected collateral damage is excessive in relation to the military advantage and makes efforts to reduce harm to civilians to the extent feasible in the operational circumstances

It added that the IDF reviews targets before strikes and chooses the proper munitions in accordance with operational and humanitarian considerations, taking into account an assessment of the relevant structural and geographical features of the target, the targets environment, possible effects on nearby civilians, critical infrastructure in the vicinity, and more

Israeli officials have long argued that heavy munitions are necessary to eliminate Hamas, whose fighters killed more than 1,200 people in Israel and took hundreds of hostages on October 7, sparking the ongoing war

President Joe Biden offered one of his sharpest rebukes of Israels handling of the war in Gaza during an interview airing Tuesday, describing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahus approach to the conflict as a mistake and calling for a halt to the fighting

Well, I will tell you, I think what hes doing is a mistake I dont agree with his approach, Biden told Univision, in an interview taped just days after Israeli military strikes killed seven World Central Kitchen aid workers, sparking anger and frustration throughout the White House

I think its outrageous that those four, three vehicles were hit by drones and taken out on a highway where it wasnt like it was along the shore, it wasnt like there was a convoy moving there, he continued, according to a Univision transcript of the interview

It marked one of his most forceful critiques against how Netanyahus government is waging its war against Hamas The president added that hes calling for Israel to agree to a ceasefire and that there is no excuse for not sending in humanitarian aid

What Im calling for is for the Israelis to just call for a ceasefire, allow for the next six, eight weeks total access to all food and medicine going into the country Ive spoken with everyone from the Saudis to the Jordanians to the Egyptians Theyre prepared to move in Theyre prepared to move this food in And I think theres no excuse to not provide for the medical and the food needs of those people It should be done now, Biden said in the interview

The comments came in the lead up to CIA Director Bill Burns delivering a new proposal over the weekend to negotiators in Cairo as they work to secure a ceasefire and hostage deal Speaking Tuesday, US national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Hamas has not yet provided a response Sullivan said hed asked the prime minister of Qatar, which has acted as a mediator in the ongoing talks, to press the group for a quick response to a proposal that would secure the release of hostages

He does not yet have an answer from Hamas, Sullivan said I pressed him to try to secure an answer from them as soon as possible

He said the White House had seen comments from Hamas casting doubt on an agreement on the latest proposal

We have seen Israel take some steps forward in terms of what theyre putting on the table And, of course, weve seen the public statements from Hamas that have been, shall we say, less than encouraging, Sullivan told reporters at the White House

Elsewhere in the Univision interview, Biden called former President Donald Trump the biggest threat to democracy in the United States, citing his predecessors actions during the January 6, 2021, US Capitol riot and his calls to release from prison those involved in the attack

Asked what constitutes the primary threat to freedom and democracy at home, Biden answered bluntly Donald Trump

Donald Trump talks, uses phrases like youre gonna eviscerate the Constitution, hes going to be a dictator on day one The idea that he would sit in the office and Ill show you before you leave off the Oval Office and watch for hours the attack on the Capitol, and the destruction and the mayhem and people were killed, the police officers who died, and call them political heroes, to call them patriots, and say that if he gets elected hes going to free them all, because theyre being held illegally Biden said in the interview with Univision, which was taped at the White House last week

And think of the things he says, look at the way he talks about minority populations, Hispanics, talking about them being anyway Its just, I cant think of any other time in my lifetime, in history thats occurred, that youve had somebody that had this kind of attitude, Biden continued He says hes going to be a dictator on day one No one doesnt believe him

The rare sitdown interview is set to air on the Spanishlanguage network Tuesday evening Biden has sought to make issues of democracy central to his reelection campaign as he draws a contrast with Trump

Both Trump and Biden have used the events on January 6 to make their case to voters Trump has opened his rallies with a recording of January 6 prisoners singing the national anthem and calls the rioters people who love our country and hostages unfairly imprisoned for long periods of time

Biden has long argued Trumps return to the White House would amount to a grave threat to democracy, and images from January 6 opened the video announcing his reelection plans a year ago Hes also delivered several speeches on the topic, including on the third anniversary of the Capitol riot earlier this year

Preserving democracy was also a central theme of Bidens 2020 campaign, and his aides have said they expect it to be a main feature of his reelection effort

Trump has been indicted on felony charges for working to overturn the results of the 2020 election ahead of the January 6 riot He pleaded not guilty

In remarks at fundraisers, Biden has voiced outrage that Trump reportedly watched the January 6 attack on television from the dining room off the Oval Office, refusing aides entreaties to deliver a statement denouncing the violence

Hes similarly issued warnings about Trumps rhetoric heading into this years election, including comments last month about a bloodbath should Biden win a second term

Trump says if he loses again in November there will be a bloodbath What the hells wrong with this guy Biden asked at a fundraiser in late March