

# War on Gaza: Why Israel is more divided than ever

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**The state's obsession with pursuing 'total victory' since 7 October has led to an attack on civil rights across Israel**

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*Relatives and supporters of Israeli hostages at a protest in Tel Aviv, on 23 March 2024 (AFP)*

An end to the [war in Gaza](#), which has killed tens of thousands of [Palestinians](#) and left a profoundly altered [Israel](#) facing allegations of genocide, is nowhere on the horizon. Seven months in, Israel is a battered society, more torn and divided than at any other time in its history.

This was certainly clear during the country's springtime ritual, which began with Memorial Day, a tribute to fallen soldiers, and segued into the day Israel marked its 76<sup>th</sup> anniversary, on 13 May, in what has traditionally been a symbolically powerful expression of united Jewish-Israeli fidelity to the Zionist national narrative.

This year, no traces of that unity remained.

The rift emerged with painful clarity on the eve of Independence Day, with Channel 12 broadcasting a split screen. On one side was the official torch-lighting ceremony - this time filmed in advance, without an audience, as in the best enlightened dictatorships.

On the other side, we saw a ceremonial "dousing of the beacons" organised by the families of the 7 October hostages, in a desperate act of defiance against the state and its continuing abandonment of their loved ones.

A different duality emerged on Independence Day itself, as throngs of Palestinian and Jewish activists participated in [protests](#), including the annual March of Return, to mark 76 years of the [Nakba](#).

At the same time, [thousands](#) of Jews joined their own "Gaza March" in Sderot to celebrate independence against a backdrop of billowing smoke from the besieged territory, apparently glad to see Gaza going up in flames as they plotted how to build on its ruins.

## **Fighting for justice**

The Palestinian [March of Return](#) organised on Nakba Day was truncated this year to just a few hundred metres - and, unlike in previous years, it did not end up on the site of displaced villages.

Even those few hundred metres, however, sufficed as a powerful demonstration of a proud Palestinian identity - very much present, conscious and remembering, to perpetuate the demand for justice in a country where this is fundamentally absent.

Justice for displaced people; justice for Gaza; justice for political prisoners. Justice, and a fight against oblivion.

One can only imagine the effects of this display of sovereign agency on the small children carried on their parents' shoulders in the march.

Young children were also visible in videos from the right-wing march in Sderot, where banners read: "Marching for independence on the way to Gaza". Did these marching parents explain to their children how Jewish youths destroyed [aid convoys](#) intended to rescue other children who were starving to death such a short distance away?

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When citizens put their civil rights above nationalist dictates, they became enemies

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While Palestinian children wandered among bookstalls at a Nakba Day gathering near Shefa-Amr (Shefaram) to learn about their own history, what did the Jewish children in Sderot learn as they celebrated with family picnics punctuated by the sound of explosions over Gaza, almost close enough to touch?

When Palestinian children at protests saw Jewish activists come out to show solidarity, receiving them with honour and appreciation, what did the Jewish children in Sderot learn about Palestinian children, whose catastrophe their parents had come to celebrate?

## **Fascism expanding**

In another generation or two, both groups of children will be the adults shaping the shared civil spaces in this country. Such spaces are continually shrinking; the notion of shared citizenship has very little meaning in today's Israel.

Nationalism and discrimination are surging, and fascism is expanding with dizzying rapidity. Jewish Israelis have never given serious attention to the full meaning of citizenship, because their rights were protected by their national affiliation. But what has been happening since 7 October proves how our weakening civil status is also endangering us, Jewish Israelis.

The government's abandoning of the Israeli hostages is a particularly unfortunate expression of this danger. When nationalistic interests are on the line, the state's duties towards its citizens are pushed aside and lose meaning.

The same applies for the hostages and the [thousands of people](#) in Israel displaced from their homes during this war. With the state consumed with the goal of "total victory" for the sake of the nation,

the citizens' needs and rights become meaningless, not to mention a nuisance.

If they stand up for their rights, then so does "the enemy". It is enough to see how violently police treat the families of the hostages when they [demand their release](#) in a less polite way, and urge the state to realise its responsibility for the lives of the citizens it continues to neglect.

When they put their civil rights above nationalist dictates, they became enemies.

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**P.S.**

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*The views expressed in this article belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy of Middle East Eye.*