

Widening the cracks in Israel's war machine

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Israelis' waning trust in Netanyahu and the direction of the war, along with shifts in global public opinion and accountability, offer leverage to exploit.

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Graffiti of a police officer revealing a pristine beach behind the separation wall in the Palestinian village of Abu Dis, near Jerusalem in the occupied West Bank, March 6, 2006. (Melanie Fidler/Flash90)

It takes a certain kind of audacity or disconnectedness, or perhaps both, to try and write something hopeful for 2025. A sober and realistic assessment of the political forces in Israel-Palestine, the wider region, and the world as a whole does not elicit much optimism that the ongoing catastrophe of the past 15 months — particularly what Palestinians are enduring in Gaza — may soon come to an end.

Israel's far-right government enjoys a solid majority in the Knesset and appears to be committed to carrying out the second and third clauses in Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich's "[Decisive Plan](#)" in Gaza: the expulsion of the Palestinians or their elimination by the sword if they refuse to leave. (The first clause, to allow Palestinians to live quietly and peacefully under conditions of apartheid, is by now considered too humane and liberal by this government and its supporters.)

The army is incapable of rescuing the hostages or dealing a decisive final blow to Hamas, so it resorts to what it knows best: ethnic cleansing, which, [by all indications](#), will only intensify and could potentially lead to premeditated annihilation. This is especially true if the military adopts Israeli lawmakers' [recent call](#) to destroy Gaza's food and water sources, just as it [adopted the "Generals' Plan"](#) to starve and ethnically cleanse [Gaza's northernmost cities](#).

Palestinian society is fragmented and battered. If, in the months following October 7, there were Palestinians who believed that Hamas' attack had demonstrated the possibility of a military victory over Israel, the total and systematic decimation of the Gaza Strip — along with Hezbollah's retreat and the [collapse of Assad's regime](#) and the "Axis of Resistance" in general — has dispelled that illusion. Hamas cannot acknowledge its war crimes on October 7, nor can it admit that its bloodlust brought disaster upon Gaza. Moreover, it is incapable of finding a way to end the war, remove the Israeli military from the Strip, and begin reconstruction efforts.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, meanwhile, is unable to make diplomatic advances toward the establishment of a Palestinian state in the face of the current Israeli government, and it's hard to see how the Palestinians can formulate a new and effective strategy for national liberation in

the current conditions.

The past year has also been sobering for liberals who believed naively that the United States would save Israel from itself, and rescue us from the futile wars our government keeps waging. On the contrary, the past 15 months have made clear that [the United States is the cornerstone](#) upon which Israel's wars are built. There would be no destruction in Gaza [without the Biden administration's support](#), and the Trump administration threatens [to make matters even worse](#). Meanwhile, Europe faces its own looming dark cloud: a Christian far right that views Israel as carrying the burden of the white man's struggle against the "barbaric" East.



Former President Donald J. Trump delivers remarks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to unveil details of the Trump administration's Middle East Peace Plan, Jan. 28, 2020. (Shealah Craighead/Wikimedia Commons)

In times like these, it can help to take inspiration from the famous lyrics of Leonard Cohen: "Ring the bells that still can ring," [he sang](#). "There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in." In other words, our task is to identify the cracks in what has often seemed for more than a year to be an impenetrable machine of death and destruction. No less important — and perhaps more challenging — is to figure out how to widen these cracks so that light can enter and drive out the darkness, as we [sang recently](#) during Hanukkah.

Netanyahu and the military

And the cracks are certainly there, even within Israel. The first, which has already grown significantly, is the Israeli public's trust in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his coalition partners. In hindsight, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly which aspect of the judicial overhaul that Justice Minister Yariv Levin began unveiling in early 2023 not only sparked fierce opposition on and scale not seen in Israel before but also created a sense among a significant portion of the country's Jewish population — likely the majority, according to polls — that their very way of life was at risk.

In light of everything that has transpired since October 7, [the abolition of the "reasonableness standard,"](#) which stripped power away from the High Court, now seems like a minor issue. Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets every week for nearly a year, facing the threat of arrest and police brutality, to try to prevent it and other laws from passing. "Democracy or rebellion," they chanted as they set fires on Tel Aviv's main highway. They even [dared to challenge the holy of holies](#) in Jewish-Israeli society: military reserve duty.

True, the vast majority of them did not fully acknowledge the direct link between the subjugation of Palestinians in the occupied territories and within Israel on the one hand, and the suppression of democracy for Jews on the other (though some [certainly did](#)). However, it seems that many understood the connection between the corruption, racism, and messianism of the current coalition and the threat it poses to democracy.

After October 7, though, protestors who vowed to refuse subsequent army service in protest of the judicial overhaul flocked to reserve duty. Those refusing to participate in war crimes in Gaza could

be [counted on two hands](#). Still, the chasm that burst open in 2023 between the far-right government and the urban middle class has not healed. If anything, it has deepened.

Polls repeatedly show that a majority of Israelis believe [Netanyahu is obstructing a deal](#) to release hostages and end the war due to his own political considerations; this recognition is a direct result of the aforementioned fracture, born out of the protests against the judicial coup and even earlier.

Israelis protest calling for the release of hostages in Gaza outside the Defense Ministry Headquarters in Tel Aviv, September 7, 2024. (Erik Marmor/Flash90)

In what is perhaps a surprising twist, the [ceasefire in Lebanon](#), the [so-called “victory” over Hezbollah](#), and the [collapse of the Assad regime](#) have not boosted [public support](#) for the government. Even the [widespread euphoria over Gaza’s destruction](#) has not been enough to mend the chasm between Netanyahu and his government and large swaths of the middle class — and here, too, another crack is emerging.

Even figures deeply rooted in the security establishment, such as former Defense Minister and IDF Chief of Staff Moshe (“Bogie”) Ya’alon, are calling the Israeli army’s systematic depopulation and flattening of northern Gaza [by its name: ethnic cleansing](#) (Ya’alon has not walked back this statement, despite significant pressure). Likewise, recent investigative reports by Haaretz’s Yaniv Kubovich about a [senior commander](#) who turned his division into a [militia of slaughter and destruction](#) would not have come to light had other soldiers within the division not felt discomfort about their actions.

Similarly, the fact that The New York Times managed to [interview 100 soldiers](#) and officers who [corroborated investigations](#) published months earlier in +972 Magazine and Local Call — regarding the monstrous levels of “collateral damage” permitted against Palestinian civilians and the flawed statistical justifications the military uses for its attacks — may stem from the same sense of unease. At Local Call, and alongside colleagues at Haaretz, we can take pride in helping to open this crack. It proves that we must persist.

The unresolved issue of the hostages has also eroded Israeli society’s habitual sanctification of war. Before October 7, abandoning prisoners and hostages was considered sacrilegious, as it contradicted the cohesion of Jewish society during wartime. Now, senior right-wing figures, from [Amichai Eliyahu](#) to [Bezalel Smotrich](#) and [Itamar Ben Gvir](#), openly declare that other things are more important: firing the attorney general, expelling Palestinians from Gaza, or “destroying Hamas.”

These divisions have driven individual hostage family leaders like Einav Zangauker to [sharpen the equation](#): it’s either the hostages or [settlements in Gaza](#). A majority of Israelis, [according to polls](#), understand that this is the choice in front of them and choose the former.

International pressure

Abroad, too, the cracks are growing. Even the imminent return of President-elect Trump to the White House cannot paper over the fractures in international support for Israel, which have only widened since the war began. The issuance by the International Criminal Court of [arrest warrants](#) for Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant represents [an important step toward accountability](#).

Notably, Netanyahu has not yet tested these warrants; he has [avoided traveling](#) to any state that is a signatory to the ICC’s Rome Statute since the warrants were issued, nor has any leader of such a state visited him in Israel. Meanwhile, vacationing Israeli soldiers who previously filmed themselves

committing war crimes in Gaza are having to be [smuggled back home](#) due to fear of arrest in countries around the world.

An activist at a Palestine solidarity demonstration in Oslo, Norway, holds a sign reading "Boycott Israel," April 28, 2024. (Ryan Rodrick Beiler/Activestills)

And there could be more accountability on the way: in the [ongoing proceedings at the International Court of Justice](#) surrounding the question of whether Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, the final word has yet to be spoken. An ICJ ruling theoretically has even greater enforcement power than the ICC, given that all nations, including the United States and Israel, are members, and the UN Security Council serves as its executive arm.

It's true that most governments around the world, wary of the looming threat of American retaliation should they dare to oppose Israel, have not yet severed relations. In the West, as mentioned, there are also powerful parties and movements — mainly of the neo-fascist, evangelical, or authoritarian variety — that view Israel as a model to emulate. However, in the arena of public opinion, numerous polls show that [growing numbers in the West](#), and certainly in the Global South, support the Palestinian cause. The [proliferation of student encampments](#) at universities across the United States and beyond last year only further demonstrated the winds of public opinion among youth.

It is worth remembering that the sanctions movement against apartheid in South Africa began on campuses and within civil society. Only after it gained momentum did [Western governments adopt it](#) — which could very well be the case with Israel.

No less importantly, while Hamas has suffered military blows and the Strip has been ravaged, the Palestinians of Gaza, despite facing [inhuman hardships](#), are still holding on. The same is true in the West Bank and inside Israel. The appetite among Palestinians for military action against Israel has diminished significantly, at least in the foreseeable future, but they are not going anywhere.

Despite the delusions of grandeur held by Smotrich and his associates — or, more accurately, their oscillation between euphoria and frustration — Israel is not truly close to "settling the conflict." If, by some chance, a ceasefire and hostage deal is reached that would halt the war, even temporarily, the sense of despair among Israel's fascist right may resemble the aftermath of the 2005 "disengagement" from Gaza: a feeling that a golden opportunity to [empty Gaza of Palestinians](#) was squandered.

The need for political imagination

The Israeli army's obliteration of Gaza is paralyzing. The combination of grief and rage at the scenes of mass killing, starvation, and now the freezing to death of infants, along with the inability to stop Israel's war machine which daily [devours another neighborhood and another hospital](#), creates a sense that words are meaningless, that political action is pointless, and that it verges on being immoral to discuss any political horizon at such a time.

But perhaps, even unconsciously, this is precisely Netanyahu and his allies' intention in prolonging the endless war: to render the discussion of alternatives meaningless. Yet the refusal to abandon political discourse, the refusal to give up on an alternative horizon, is itself an act of resistance to the war machine. This is our moral obligation to the victims who have already fallen, to those who will yet fall, and to the survivors of this carnage.

Palestinians sit in front of the ruins of the Jaffa Mosque in the city of Deir Al-Balah after it was destroyed by Israeli aircraft, central Gaza, December 28, 2024. (Ali Hassan/Flash90)

Any action that envisions a future of national and civic equality in this land — one free of supremacy, occupation, military bombardment, and siege — carries political significance today. This is especially true if such actions are [joint between Jews and Palestinians](#), but even if they occur in parallel they remain vital.

Many Israeli Jews — though it is difficult to quantify quite how many, as their voices are completely marginalized from the mainstream media — feel deep moral revulsion at what Israel is doing in Gaza, or at the very least sense that Israel is heading in an extremely dark direction. Yet they see no way to halt the decline and instead choose despair or emigration. Palestinian citizens of Israel undoubtedly oppose this war of destruction but are understandably afraid to speak out as a result of [harsh repression](#) since October 7. In this context, presenting a vision of a future where both Palestinians and Jews can imagine realizing their personal and national aspirations is crucial.

As my friend [Ameer Fakhoury](#) says, engaging with history is not only about exploring the past; it is about serving the present. Similarly, engaging with an imagined future must serve the present by importing inspiration, political energy, and oxygen — not as an escape from the catastrophic and unjust realities surrounding us, but as an act of political imagination that can further widen the cracks in the machinery of destruction, and let in a little more light.

At the beginning of December, we witnessed how a regime of repression that had instilled fear in Syria for 50 years collapsed within 10 days. In hindsight, everyone now speaks of Assad's downfall as inevitable — he had lost the people, lost the army, the state he built had crumbled, and his allies had abandoned him. But in real time, few noticed the cracks, and even fewer believed those cracks could so easily bring down a regime.

This doesn't mean that, thanks to the cracks in Israel's right-wing government, 2025 will necessarily be a year of opportunity and hope, erasing the darkness of 2024. But identifying and leveraging those cracks is essential for such a transformation to take place.

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P.S.

- +972 Magazine. January 8, 2025:
<https://www.972mag.com/cracks-israel-war-machine/>

A version of this article first appeared in Hebrew on Local Call. Read it [here](#).

- Meron Rapoport's article on +972 Magazine:
<https://www.972mag.com/writer/meron-rapoport/>
- Meron Rapoport is an editor at Local Call.

Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war. The world is reeling from Israel's unprecedented onslaught on Gaza, inflicting mass devastation and death upon besieged Palestinians, as well as the atrocious attack and kidnappings by Hamas in Israel on October 7. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing this violence.

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed has reached extreme

levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to intensify their attacks on Palestinians. The most far-right government in Israel's history is ramping up its policing of dissent, using the cover of war to silence Palestinian citizens and left-wing Jews who object to its policies.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 14 years covering: Israeli society's growing racism and militarism, entrenched occupation and apartheid, and a normalized siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment - but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

Can we count on your [support](#)? +972 Magazine is a leading media voice of this movement, a desperately needed platform where Palestinian and Israeli journalists, activists, and thinkers can report on and analyze what is happening, guided by humanism, equality, and justice. Join us.

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