

## In the realm of research... Israel plays a significant role in the region.



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In light of the settlement in Gaza and the events in Syria

Numerous developments at international and regional levels pave the way for significant transformations expected in the Middle East in the near future. The current ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip, which is anticipated to become permanent, the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria and the emergence of a new administration there, along with the return of U.S. President Trump—whose strategy contrasts with that of his predecessor in addressing various issues confronting the United States and its allies, especially in the Middle East—all indicate that the region is poised for major events ahead.

It is noteworthy that Israel is a common factor in three key issues affecting the region: the Palestinian issue, which is experiencing ongoing developments in the Gaza Strip; the normalization issue, particularly with Saudi Arabia; and the situation in Syria following Assad's downfall. Israel aims to gain significant advantages from each of these events to offset the October 7 disaster along with the accompanying political, military, and intelligence shortcomings, as well as major societal crises, the severe consequences of which will become evident for the Zionist entity in the near future.

The Future of the Situation in Palestine

The agreement signed between the resistance and Israel includes terms similar to those of the accord that Netanyahu deliberately sabotaged in May 2024.

Israeli military researchers and analysts clearly understood that their country could not achieve its objectives

through military action and needed to pursue an alternative approach. This perspective was voiced promptly after the agreement was signed by Ofer Shelah, a senior researcher at the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies.

He emphasized his belief that the prisoner release agreement must be approved, regardless of the cost or the resulting psychological pain and suppressed anger about its contents. He thought that Israel, in his view, was unable to eliminate Hamas, having never been suited to do so. Moreover, the use of force, especially increased force, no longer benefited Israel but instead catered to its own motives and interests.

The only correct course of action for Israel is to provide an alternative to Hamas in Gaza, rather than continue the war, especially since the army has exhausted its missions and objectives there, and its strikes have not changed the political reality. In fact, Hamas has regained strength as a result of this strategy. Moreover, future Hamas leaders will be released from prison and will continue their activities, even if they are deported far from Palestine.

It has become clear that Netanyahu was compelled to accept the ceasefire agreement in Gaza, and it is likely that this agreement will persist until the end for several reasons, including the Israeli army's reluctance to carry out military operations in the Gaza Strip as they did before the agreement. However, the army's subservience to the political leadership may compel it to resume fighting if the government decides to do so.

The second consideration relates to the desire of most Israelis to proceed with finalizing the agreement and ending the war. The third, and most significant, consideration concerns the US president's wish to enforce a total ceasefire to focus on more pressing American interests. This is also due to Trump's personality, which is driven by his desire for glory and self-importance, compelling him to seek a permanent solution to the issue at the expense of the Palestinians. Another factor related to this consideration is the US president's intent to take practical steps toward normalizing relations between Riyadh and Tel Aviv. These steps cannot be realized unless the war in the Gaza Strip completely ends.

#### Normalization with Saudi Arabia

The ceasefire agreement in Gaza and the prospect of a permanent ceasefire do not seem detached from the ongoing discussions in Israel regarding normalization with Saudi Arabia. Over time, statements and articles about normalizing relations between Riyadh and Tel Aviv have multiplied, making the agreement a crucial step to pave the way for this risky move in the history of the Arab-Palestinian conflict.

Haaretz journalist Haim Levinson discussed the clear connection between the ceasefire and the prisoner exchange agreement in Gaza and the potential Saudi-Israeli normalization. He noted that Netanyahu and his government partners—who are insisting on resuming the war—are making statements that are not aligned with the reality of the situation. Levinson argues that the real agreement does not pertain to releasing prisoners but is instead about a historic deal with Saudi Arabia, which is a top priority for U.S. President Trump.

In this context, it was not surprising that Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid spoke on January 23, 2025, about the 'historic opportunity' to strengthen Israel's position in the region, the potential of any regional agreement with Saudi Arabia, and the unprecedented achievements it could bring to Israel in all areas.

#### The Role of Israel in Syria

The geographical situation and the realities imposed by Israel on the ground in Syria provide an opportunity for it to become a significant player in this arena. The fall of the Assad regime and the rise of a new Islamist administration

in Damascus present several challenges and opportunities, which are of interest to Israeli analysts who have discussed these points.

Some believe that the changes in Syria offer more opportunities than threats, and that they also provide Israel the chance to influence Syria's future to its advantage.

They depend on the fact that the revolutionary forces in Syria are not united, and that Israel will likely remain outside these forces' calculations for an extended period, as they are focused on consolidating control over Syria and governing the country. This implies that the more Syria can overcome its current instability, and the more the various Syrian forces can unite and rebuild state institutions, the more concerning this situation will be for Israel, as the new Syrian government will then be able to address Israeli violations.

Another challenge is the pivotal role Turkey plays in shaping Syria's future. President Erdoğan aims to position Turkey as a regional power by enhancing its influence in Syria through support for military operations, bolstering its army, and aiding Syria's economic recovery.

The third challenge relates to Trump's return to the White House, which raises concerns about American interest in Syria. This is especially relevant considering that Trump aimed to withdraw US forces from Syria during his first term but ultimately retreated due to pressure from his advisors. Consequently, any swift withdrawal of US forces, as he previously aimed for, could result in the collapse of the Kurdish-controlled region in favor of the new Turkish backed regime.

On the other hand, the Israeli vision presents greater opportunities. These include the potential for Israel to directly influence the Syrian situation by retaining control over the newly occupied areas of Syria, and conditionally making its exit from them—which does not seem likely in the near future. Additionally, Israel continues to bomb locations identified by the Israeli military as housing weapons that could pose a future threat to Israel, indicating that it aims for a demilitarized Syria.