

# Position Paper

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## The Weakness of Israeli Opposition to the War on Gaza

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## Introduction

On August 8, 2025, the Israeli Security Cabinet approved Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's proposal to prepare for the occupation of Gaza City and of Gaza's central region refugee camps despite the army's opposition. Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir proposed alternative plans that do not abandon the expansion and continuation of the war but instead implement it gradually by besieging Gaza City and launching localized military incursions. Despite the fact that Hamas agreed, on August 18, 2025, to a modified proposal for a ceasefire and an exchange deal—to which Israel had previously agreed—the Israeli government and army continue to prepare to expand the war by approving military plans<sup>1</sup> and by ordering the mobilization of thousands of reservists.<sup>2</sup> So far, it is unclear whether the Israeli decision to occupy Gaza City will actually be implemented, or whether it is a ruse to pressure Hamas to accept Israeli conditions on the hostage and prisoner exchange deal and the putative ceasefire.

To be sure, this decision comes as opposition to the war has increased in Israeli society in recent weeks and accusations have mounted that the Israeli government is committing war crimes and genocide in the Gaza Strip.

This paper deals with the government's decision to expand the war and the calls to end it among different sectors of society. Indeed, there is a rift between those who support a project that seeks to prolong the war for ideological reasons as well as political and personal interest, especially on the part of Netanyahu, and groups that oppose the war for various other reasons.

The opposition's voices are divided into three main categories. The first and most prominent are those who call for an end to the genocidal war and starvation out of concerns over the negative impact on Israel's national interests and reputation. This category includes academic, business, artistic, and cultural groups, as well as former military, security, and political leaders. Second is the families of the hostages who are ready to end the war and to reach an exchange deal that ensures the safe return of those still alive and the recovery of the remains of those who have died. The third group, which is smaller and less influential, consists of human rights organizations and is led by B'Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights. It also includes a limited number of political figures and activists who publicly accuse Israel of war crimes, genocide, and starving Gaza's population; they demand an end to the war on moral and humanitarian grounds, in compliance with international law.

The paper argues that the absence of a unified project that calls for an end to the war on clear and comprehensive grounds weakens the opposition. What is needed is a political alternative that unifies groups with different motives for opposing war and occupation. The current division makes it easier for Netanyahu and his ruling coalition to continue the war, even though there no longer is a consensus in Israeli society that it is an existential conflict or a "war of no choice" imposed on Israel.

## **The Government's Decision to Expand the War: Objectives of the Governing Coalition**

After a ten-hour overnight meeting on August 7-8, 2025, the Israeli government approved Netanyahu's proposal to occupy Gaza City and expand military operations in the Strip. The statement issued after the session confirmed that the Security Cabinet "approved, by a majority vote, the five principles for ending the war": disarming Hamas, returning all prisoners alive and dead, establishing a demilitarized zone, Israeli security control over the Strip, and installing civilian rule without Hamas or the Palestinian Authority.<sup>3</sup> The government's decision came despite opposition from Chief of Staff Zamir, who proposed instead besieging Gaza City and conducting localized incursions rather than occupying the entire territory. Notably, the military does not oppose the continuation of the war per se, but rather has operational concerns.

According to Haaretz journalist Amos Harel, the government's decision came after the war has stalled without any military progress or achievement,<sup>4</sup> with continued killing, destruction, and starvation. Talks between Israel and Hamas have stopped, and the Israeli delegation was withdrawn from Qatar while the battles inside the Strip have reached a stalemate and the humanitarian crisis has worsened.

Prime Minister Netanyahu's proposal is, in effect, an exercise of "running away forward" by expanding the war and occupying Gaza City. The decision reflects the coalition government's ideological convictions, which involve the project of the religious extreme right to eliminate any possibility of establishing an independent Palestinian political entity in the Gaza Strip or the occupied West Bank, to cut off lifelines, to expel the population from Gaza, and to resettle and annex areas of the West Bank. The decision also reflects a desire to avenge the attacks of October 7, 2023, to reshape the strategic architecture in the region as Netanyahu and his government profess, and to serve Netanyahu's political interests by preserving the governing right-wing coalition.

Many sectors of society voiced their rejection of the government's decision, accusing Netanyahu of sacrificing hostages in order to advance his own interests. This opposition added to the chorus of voices calling for an end to the war on the Gaza Strip. Among those voices are those, however few, who accuse Israel of committing war crimes and genocide in Gaza.<sup>5</sup>

## **The Military Institution**

The army opposed the Security Cabinet's plan to fully occupy all areas of the Gaza Strip. Chief of Staff Zamir instead proposed continuing military action by surrounding Gaza City and carrying out intensive raids and field incursions deep into the territory to wear down Hamas. According to the Israeli media, the Israeli Army is concerned that the plan will force it to become a civil and military governor responsible for managing the lives of some 2.2 million Palestinians who live without any infrastructure or basic necessities.

The army's opposition also stems from concerns about the fate of the hostages and from its own fatigue, in light of a continued decline in the response of reservists to calls for service and fear of expected losses. The occupation of Gaza City will require the recruitment of about 200,000 soldiers, even as the army suffers from attrition and from some soldiers' rejection of duty, which according to right-wing journalist Akiva Novick has reached about 40 percent of the military. As Novick observed, "In some units, the response rate to a recall is only 60-70 percent. Many soldiers...are no longer serving... not necessarily for ideological reasons, but for purely life reasons: work, marital life, and the sense among the reservists that someone is manipulating them to satisfy political partners".<sup>6</sup>

Harel writes that Zamir believes that "... the army is facing a serious problem of attrition in combat units. The army will find it difficult to provide the forces required for the operation, when it is experiencing a sharp decline in reservist service and falling morale among regular troops".<sup>7</sup>

Channel 12 military analyst Nir Davori explained that the army's field assessments show gaps between the number of fighters required for a full occupation and those currently available, in addition to gaps in equipment readiness. According to the data that has emerged so far, there is a gap of about 10,000 soldiers—7,000 fighters and 3,000 combat support personnel.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the army's opposition, the military announced that it would implement whatever decision the government takes. Indeed, the Chief of Staff has already approved the plan in principle.<sup>9</sup>

## **The Hostage Families' Position**

The families of the hostages are concerned about their loved ones' fate and have repeatedly demanded a ceasefire and an exchange deal between Israel and Hamas. Following the government's decision to prepare for the occupation of Gaza City and central Gaza's refugee camps —where the Israeli army believes the hostages are being held— the Missing Families and Hostages Forum announced that "The government of Israel [has] sentenced the living hostages to death; it sentenced the bodies of dead hostages to disappear".<sup>10</sup>

The statement also said,

If you occupy parts of Gaza Strip and kill the hostages, we will come after you in the streets and election campaigns— any time, any place. We will remind the people of Israel day and night that you had the opportunity to make a prisoner exchange deal, and you decided to kill them. Your hands will be stained with their blood [...] There is no public support for this approach— most of the nation wants to end the war and bring everyone home. Netanyahu should have put

forward a comprehensive, feasible, and realistic agreement to end the war, but he chose to kill them and imposed an endless war on us [...] What leaked from that session proves that this is not a political-security cabinet, but a cabinet of death.<sup>11</sup>

On August 10, 2025, during a press conference held in front of the headquarters of the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv, the families called for a day of protest and a general strike in the country's business enterprises on August 17.<sup>12</sup> That day witnessed numerous demonstrations, street closures, and a partial and voluntary labor strike.

The families of the hostages are ready to call on the government to reach an agreement for the exchange of hostages, but they do not demand an end to the war for moral and humanitarian reasons. They do not address the ongoing killing, destruction, and starvation of Palestinians but only care about the exchange of the hostages.

## **Opposing the War on the Basis of Interests**

In recent weeks, various groups have begun to call for an end to the war on the Gaza Strip, even though they had supported it since day one and had rarely objected to the government's policies. These calls come from academic circles and institutions, security-military groups, artists and intellectuals, and former political leaders in opinion pieces published in the media and on social media. Former political leaders are the most prominent and representative. They speak out of fear for Israel's diplomatic, economic, and military interests, considerations that are generally acceptable to the Israeli consensus—albeit critical of government policy.

In July 2025, the presidents of five Israeli universities wrote to Prime Minister Netanyahu demanding a solution to the "horrific problem of hunger prevailing in Gaza, which inflicts great harm on innocent civilians, including children and infants".<sup>13</sup> The university presidents called on the prime minister to direct the army and other security forces to strengthen efforts to solve this problem, "regardless of the grave responsibility that falls on Hamas and other parties". They wrote,

It is with shock that we are following, together with growing segments of the Israeli population, scenes from the Gaza Strip, including those of infants dying of hunger and disease every day... The liberation of the captives and the reduction of harm to our soldiers are lofty goals, but as a people who were victims of the horrific Holocaust in Europe, we also have a special responsibility to act with all means at our disposal to prevent and avoid brutal and indiscriminate harm to innocent men, women, and children.

The Commanders for Israel's Security also published a letter signed by some 600 former officers and security officials calling on US President Donald Trump to stop the war.<sup>14</sup> On its Facebook page, the group almost daily calls for an end to the war and for the creation of an alternative regime to Hamas in the Gaza Strip. They are concerned for

Israel's interests and future, and they see no clear political results from this war which, if continued, will lead to heavy political losses for Israel, and which has exhausted itself.

Scores of artists and creative professionals signed a petition calling for an end to the war.<sup>15</sup> They wrote,

We, the women and men of culture and art in Israel, find ourselves, against our will and values, complicit as Israeli citizens in bearing responsibility for the horrific events in the Gaza Strip, in particular the killing of children and innocent civilians, the starvation, the displacement of the population, and the senseless destruction of cities. We call on everyone involved in the formulation and implementation of this policy: Stop! Do not give illegal orders, and do not obey them! Do not commit war crimes! Do not abandon the principles of human ethics and the values of Judaism!

What unites all these groups calling for an end to the war and starvation is the growing concern over international consequences and damage to Israel's interests, including those of some of these groups, such as by the growing unofficial boycott of Israeli academic institutions, the demand to remove Israel from Horizon Europe (the scientific research program of the European Union), prohibitions on Israelis' participation in international art and film festivals, among other difficulties.<sup>16</sup>

## **Opposition for Moral, Humanitarian, and International Law Reasons**

In late July 2025, two Israeli human rights organizations issued important reports accusing Israel of committing war crimes and genocide in Gaza and calling for an end to the war.

The first report, from the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (B'Tselem), documents the war crimes and genocide committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip according to the strict framework of international law.<sup>17</sup> The report explains that the team of academics and activists who prepared it "proceeded from the definition of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide to understand the events, with an emphasis on the need to prove the intention to destroy the Palestinian people in whole or in part".

The report provides data documenting the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip resulting from Israeli military operations since October 7, 2023. It noted that as of mid-July 2025, the Palestinian death toll was estimated at 58,000, the vast majority of whom were civilians. The number of people injured during the same period exceeded 138,000. The report reveals that Gaza's critical infrastructure, including medical facilities and water, electricity, and sewage systems, has been almost completely damaged or destroyed.<sup>18</sup>

The report also details patterns of Israeli military practices that collectively meet the criteria for genocide.<sup>19</sup>

Taken together, these abuses paint a clear picture of a coordinated and widespread campaign of violence aimed at destroying Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip. To be sure, the acts mentioned constitute serious international crimes, all of which fall within the definition of genocide when they are accompanied by a clear destructive intent.

The second report, from Physicians for Human Rights, was titled "Genocide in Gaza" and documents Israel's systematic and ongoing attack on the health system. This attack is a deliberate destruction of the viability of the Gaza Strip, amounting to genocide.<sup>20</sup> The report notes that on October 13, 2023, the Israeli army ordered the evacuation of 22 hospitals in Gaza City and the northern Gaza Strip, marking the beginning of an unprecedented attack. Over the course of 22 months, Israel has systematically targeted Gaza's health infrastructure, bombing 33 of Gaza's 36 hospitals and clinics, and blocking access to fuel and water. In addition, more than 1,800 medical personnel have been killed or detained.<sup>21</sup>

These reports demonstrate that Israel is committing war crimes. They call for an immediate halt to the war of extermination and for addressing its repercussions as soon as possible. The significance of these reports is that they are published by two Israeli organizations that are outside mainstream public opinion in Israel and that have enjoyed high credibility for decades. Israel cannot accuse them of antisemitism—as it does in response to criticism from foreign countries—or of supporting Hamas. But these voices are still the weakest and rarest inside Israel and are being attacked and castigated.

## Conclusion

The growing opposition to the war on Gaza has accompanied shifts in Israeli public opinion in favor of ending the war and releasing hostages through an exchange agreement with Hamas. Opinion polls have been conducted for several months, most notably the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University<sup>22</sup> and the Israel Democracy Institute.<sup>23</sup>

The opposition to the war came after it became clear to a large segment of Israeli society that the motives for the continuation and expansion of the war, and the occupation of Gaza City and the central region's camps, stem from ideological and political considerations and the personal interests of Netanyahu and the governing coalition. In fact, continuing and expanding the war poses a danger to the lives of the hostages. What is also becoming increasingly clear is that the genocidal war serves the project of the extreme religious right to which reoccupy the entire Gaza Strip, expel the population, and possibly rebuild settlements there, in addition to annexing the West Bank. Yet theirs is a project for which there is no consensus in Israeli society.



Moreover, the shift in traditionally friendly and supportive European countries' positions on the war and starvation, proposals to impose sanctions on Israel, and promises to recognize a Palestinian state have become a concern for some parts of Israeli society. Some academic, business, and artistic elites have already begun to pay the price of European sanctions and boycotts. Artists and intellectuals are being disinvited from international conferences and exhibitions while some Israeli goods are being boycotted. All of this has affected the positions of many Israeli groups and institutions. This, however, does not negate the existence of voices such as B'Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights that oppose the war, the genocide, and starvation on moral grounds.

Although Israeli society regarded the war as a legitimate and justified act of existential defense following the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, the consensus for unconditionally supporting the war has declined. Whereas criticism of and opposition to the war had been considered a betrayal or support for the enemy, the erosion of the pro-war consensus is giving such voices space and legitimacy.

This paper concludes that these voices remain in the minority. This situation is caused by concern for Israel's interests and fears of damaging its international reputation. These voices are still not organized into a single framework or project that opposes the government's policies and proposes an alternative. Indeed, it is hard to imagine cooperation between the families of the hostages or security groups and institutions such as B'Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights that they consider radical. Thus, opposition to the war remains fragmented and weak and consequently can have no serious impact on decision-making in the Netanyahu government.

## Endnotes

1. Yaniv Kubovich and Bar Peleg, "Minister of Defense approves plan to occupy Gaza City", [Haaretz](#), August 10, 2025, (Hebrew).
2. Yoav Zeitoun, "Contrary to estimates, starting today I will issue tens of thousands of recall orders", [Ynet](#), August 20, 2025, (Hebrew).
3. Arab48, "The Israeli cabinet approves the occupation of Gaza City", [Arab48](#), August 10, 2025, (Arabic); Jonathan Lis, et. al., "The cabinet approves Netanyahu proposal", [Haaretz](#), August 8, 2025, (Hebrew).
4. Amos Harel, "The prime minister's plans to completely occupy the Gaza Strip puts Israel on a perpetual war path", [Haaretz](#), August 8, 2025, (Hebrew).
5. See, for example, [Haaretz](#) editorial a day before the cabinet's decision. "Israel must not execute its plan in the Gaza Strip", [Haaretz](#), August 7, 2025, (Hebrew).
6. Akiva Novick, "In reality, desertion is taking place", [Haaretz](#), August 10, 2025, (Hebrew).
7. Harel, "The prime minister's plan", op. cit.
8. Nir Davori, "IDF estimates: Shortage of 10,000 soldiers", [Mako12](#), August 12, 2025, (Hebrew).
9. Avi Ashkenazi, "After agreeing to the attack on Gaza: next step for Chief of State Zamir", [Maariv](#), August 13, 2025, (Hebrew).
10. Bar Peleg and Noa Shpigel, "The Families Forum: The cabinet's decision is an abandonment of the hostages", [Haaretz](#), August 8, 2025, (Hebrew).
11. Ibid.
12. Roy Rubinstein and Alexandra Lukash, "Families of the Hostages and the Dead declare: We will close the state down", [Ynet](#), August 10, 2025, (Hebrew); Rabi` Sawa`id, "Families of Israeli prisoners call for general strike", [Arab48](#), August 10, 2025, (Arabic).
13. Noam Daviv, "Five university presidents to Netanyahu, solve the hunger problem in Gaza", [Israel Hayom](#), July 28, 2025, (Hebrew).
14. Commanders for Israel's Security, [Facebook](#), (Hebrew).
15. Raz Shachnik, "Dozens of artists and cultural figures signed a petition", [Ynet](#), August 2, 2025, (Hebrew).
16. For more on the academic boycott, see Meirav Arlosoroff, "Isolated: Israel's boycott has become a reality", [The Marker](#), August 8, 2025, (Hebrew). For information on the unofficial boycott of the economy and hi-tech sector specifically, see Omri Zerachovitz and Ruti Levy, "Don't say we work with Israel", [The Marker](#), June 30, 2025, (Hebrew).

17. "Our Genocide", [B'Tselem](#), July 28, 2025, (Hebrew).

18. The report's authors indicate that nearly all residents of the Gaza Strip —half of whom are children— suffer physical and psychological trauma of varying severity as a result of their experiences. The report warns that the death toll is likely to rise due to ongoing factors such as the ongoing military operations, Israel's deliberate blockade and starvation policy against the population, and the denial of humanitarian aid, including food and medicine. These figures also serve as statistical evidence of the deliberate intent to wreak widespread havoc on Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip.

19. These practices include indiscriminate and intensive aerial bombardment; starvation and siege as weapons of war; forced displacement and attempts at ethnic cleansing; the bombing of evacuation corridors which has transformed so-called "safe zones" into killing fields for those fleeing, as documented by international organizations; the systematic destruction of hospitals and civilian infrastructure; and the targeting of medical and relief personnel and journalists.

20. "Genocide in Gaza", [Physicians for Human Rights](#), July 28, 2025, (Hebrew).

21. The report adds that the Israeli offensive destroyed or damaged 92 percent of homes, leaving more than half a million children without a stable educational environment. Essential health services such as kidney dialysis, maternity care, cancer treatment, and the management of chronic diseases such as diabetes were also destroyed or disrupted. Dozens of deaths due to malnutrition are recorded daily, with 92 percent of children between the ages of six months and two years suffering from malnutrition.

22. Mora Deitch, et. al., "Iron Swords Survey", [Institute for National Security Studies](#), August 3, 2025, (Hebrew).

23. Tamar Hermann, et. al., "Jewish Voice Index", [Israel Democracy Institute](#), August 6, 2025, (Hebrew).



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