**Headline:** Bomb with Everything You Have: Israel Sets the Tone for the Genocide of the Palestinians

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**[Article Body:]**

On 5 March 2025, Lieutenant General Herzi Halevi stepped down as chief of the general staff of the Israeli military. He had held that post since 16 January 2023 and therefore led the military during its war against the Palestinians. Several appreciations of Halevi appeared in the aftermath of his departure from this important post. In one of these long articles, in the hugely influential *Yedioth Ahronoth*, one of Israel’s most well-known journalists – Nahum Barnea – [profiled](https://www.ynet.co.il/yedioth/article/yokra14303894) Halevi. In this profile, Barnea described the cabinet meeting forty-eight hours after the Hamas attack on the Israeli border posts. Halevi presented the military operations that had taken place during these two days. He said that the Air Force had attacked 1,500 targets in this short time. Halevi is not a dove. This was a ferocious attack on a largely civilian area.

Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ‘erupted in anger’, wrote Barnea. He began to yell and bang on the table, around which sat his cabinet. ‘Why not 5,000?’, Netanyahu scolded Halevi. ‘We don’t have 5,000 approved targets’, responded the military man. ‘I’m not interested in targets,’ said Netanyahu. ‘Take down houses. Bomb with everything you have.’

Netanyahu’s statement on 9 October 2023 set the tone of the entire war. But Netanyahu was not alone in this attitude. Those Israelis who fashion themselves to be more liberal than him, and to be less ferocious, are equally committed to the bloodbath.

In June 2024, the members of National Unity (Benny Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot) [resigned](https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2024/06/09/benny-gantz-and-gadi-eisenkot-leave-israels-war-cabinet) from Netanyahu’s cabinet. They [argued](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/eisenkot-also-resigns-says-war-cabinet-was-paralyzed-by-outside-considerations/) that Netanyahu was not able to focus on the war because he brought ‘outside considerations and politics’ into the discussions. Eisenkot, a former chief of staff of the military who has said he supports a two-state solution, nonetheless has pushed for more ruthless military action against the Palestinians in Gaza.

It was widely reported when Itamar Ben-Gvir’s far-right Otzma Yehudit members of cabinet [resigned](https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-01-18/ty-article/.premium/far-right-ben-gvir-resigns-from-netanyahu-government-over-hostage-deal/00000194-7a85-d6ab-adff-ffdf681e0000) in January 2025 because of the ceasefire. They did not want any stoppage to the war.

So, neither the more liberal National Unity nor the far-right Otzma Yehudit wanted the bombing to cease.

**Preparations to Break the Ceasefire**

A ceasefire deal had been prepared on 31 May 2024, but the Israelis refused to sign it. They did, however, accept the ceasefire on 15 January 2025. It went into effect four days later. During the ceasefire, the Palestinian factions and Israel swapped political prisoners according to the timetable established during the negotiations. Ramadan began on 28 February. The first phase of the ceasefire was set to expire on 1 March, but Israel demanded that it be extended so that all Israeli prisoners could be released; Hamas argued instead that it wanted to move to the second phase of the ceasefire, which would have allowed greater humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. On 2 March, Israel stopped the entry of humanitarian aid, and on 9 March cut off electricity to Gaza. Life inside Gaza became even more intolerable because the hope of the ceasefire had now been crushed. Palestinians waited for the Israelis to act.

Was the Israeli action really about the political prisoners that Hamas had not yet released? On 14 March, Hamas agreed to release Edan Alexander (a dual US-Israeli citizen) and the bodies of dual nationals. Israel and the United States refused to accept this offer. Other issues seem to have been at play, not the prisoner exchange.

On 16 March, Gadi Eisenkot and other members of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) sent a letter to Netanyahu and his Defence minister Israel Katz. They [argued](https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-846312) that the ceasefire has allowed Hamas and Islamic Jihad to regroup. Hamas, they said, now has 25,000 armed fighters, while Islamic Jihad has 5,000 fighters. And, they said, that these groups had used the ceasefire to plan another 7 October style attack. These lawmakers argued that Netanyahu’s war policy and the ceasefire show a ‘failure to achieve the war’s objectives’ and ‘damage… national security interests’.

On 17 March, the Israeli cabinet held an emergency meeting to discuss intelligence claims that Hamas was planning another attack. The next day, Katz went to the Otef Israel Forum – made up of Israeli residents who live along the edge of Gaza – and [told](https://www.mako.co.il/news-military/2025_q1/Article-adf06bb9905a591027.htm) them that ‘there are constant preparations being made by Hamas for an invasion’ that is ‘similar to 7 October’. ‘We must strike them and completely finish the job’, Katz said at the forum. It was clear that the entire Israeli political class – from Netanyahu’s cabinet to his opposition – had begun to generate fear about another Hamas attack.

Hamas [responded](https://qudspress.com/186380/) immediately that the allegations of an attack ‘are baseless and merely a flimsy pretext to justify its return to war’. Hamas said that it had ‘adhered to the agreement’ and that it was Netanyahu – ‘seeking a way out of his internal crises’ – who wanted to ‘reignite the war’.

The Israeli bombardment began on 18 March with the massacre of 400 Palestinian civilians (including 174 children).

On 22 March, the Israelis [destroyed](https://qudspress.com/187333/) the Turkish Friendship Hospital located on al-Hurriya Street in the central Gaza region. It was the only real cancer hospital in Gaza and had provided treatment for 13,000 cancer patients who still remain in the area. When Israel had occupied the region with its soldiers, it had converted the hospital into a military barracks. When it withdrew on 19 January 2025, medical personnel hastily tried to recover the hospital for the cancer patients. Now it is destroyed.

**Israeli Options**

Major General Tamir Heyman heads the Institute for National Security Studies, a major think tank in Israel. In an important [column](https://www.mako.co.il/news-n12_magazine/2025_q1/Article-96dc1cccd22b591026.htm?pId=173113802), widely circulated, Heyman argues that the Israelis have two goals: rescue the prisoners and destroy Hamas. To do so, he proposes three scenarios:

First, Israeli soldiers enter Gaza and hold it under military rule, seeking out and destroying Hamas, and finding the prisoners. Second, Israel imposes an even harsher siege on Gaza and weakens Hamas (but it might not get its prisoners). Third, a ‘Hezbollah model’, where Israel recognises that Hamas ‘cannot be wiped off the face of the earth’ but the link between Hamas and the Palestinian people can be eroded by the creation of an alternative political force in Gaza.

All three options share one element: pain for the Palestinians. Across the Israeli political spectrum, apart from a small section of dissidents, this is the general orientation.