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Gaza Ceasefire at Last: How Israel's 'First Defeat' Will Shape the Country's Future



Youtube screenshot.

The headline in the Times of Israel says it all: “For the First Time, Israel Just Lost a War.”

Regardless of the reasoning behind this statement, which the article divides into fourteen points, it suggests a shattering and unprecedented event in the 76-year history of the State of Israel. The consequences of this realization will have far-reaching effects on Israelis, impacting both this generation and the next. These repercussions will penetrate all sectors of Israeli society, from the political elite to the collective identity of ordinary Israelis.

Interestingly, and tellingly, the article attributes Israel's defeat solely to the outcome of the Gaza war, confined to the geographical area of the Gaza Strip. Not a single point addresses the ongoing crisis within Israel itself. Nor does it explore the psychological impact of what is being labeled as Israel's first-ever defeat.

Unlike previous military campaigns in Gaza—on a much smaller scale compared to the current genocidal war—there is no significant strand of Israeli society claiming victory. The familiar rhetoric of “[mowing the lawn](#)”, which Israel often uses to describe its wars, is notably absent. Instead, there is a semi-consensus within Israel that the ceasefire deal was unequivocally bad, even disastrous for the country.

The word “bad” carries broad implications. For Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, it [represents](#) a “complete surrender”. For the equally extremist Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, it is a “[dangerous deal](#)” that compromises Israel’s “national security”.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog refrained from offering political specifics but [addressed](#) the deal in equally strong terms: “Let there be no illusions. This deal—when signed, approved and implemented—will bring with it deeply painful, challenging and harrowing moments.”

Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar, along with other Israeli officials, tried to justify the deal by framing Israel’s ultimate goal as the freeing of captives. “If we postpone the decision, who knows how many will remain alive?” he [said](#).

However, many in Israel, along with an increasing number of analysts, are now questioning the government’s narrative. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had previously rejected similar ceasefire agreements in May and July, impeding any possibility of negotiation.

In the time between those rejections and the eventual acceptance of the deal, tens of thousands of Palestinians have been killed or wounded. While these tragedies have been entirely disregarded or dismissed in Israel, many Israeli captives were also killed, mostly in Israeli military strikes.

Had Netanyahu accepted the deal earlier, many of these captives would likely still be alive. This fact will linger over whatever remains of Netanyahu’s political career, further defining his already controversial and corruption-riddled legacy.

Ultimately, Netanyahu has failed on multiple fronts. Initially, he wanted to prevent his right-wing, extremist coalition from collapsing, even at the expense of most Israelis. As early as May 2024, many [prioritized](#) the return of captives over the continuation of war. Netanyahu’s eventual concession was not driven by internal pressure, but by the stark realization that he could no longer win.

The political crisis that had been brewing in Israel reached a breaking point as Netanyahu’s administration scrambled to navigate the growing discontent. In an article published soon after the ceasefire announcement, Yedioth Ahronoth [declared](#) Netanyahu politically defeated, while his Chief of Staff, Herzi Halevi, was blamed for military failure.

In reality, Netanyahu has failed on both fronts. Military generals repeatedly urged him to end the war, believing Israel had achieved tactical victories in Gaza. During the war, Israel's political and social crises deepened.

Netanyahu, at the helm, resorted to his old tactics. Instead of demonstrating true leadership, he engaged in political manipulation, lied when it suited him, threatened those who refused to follow his rules and deflected personal responsibility. Meanwhile, the Israeli public became increasingly disillusioned with the war's direction and frustrated with Netanyahu and his coalition.

In the end, the entire Kafkaesque structure of Israeli governance collapsed. The failure to manage both the political crisis and the military strategy left Israel's leadership weakened and increasingly isolated from the public.

Of course, Netanyahu will not give up easily. He will likely attempt to satisfy Ben-Gvir by [insisting](#) that Israel retains the right to return to war at any time. He will likely enable Smotrich to expand illegal settlements in the West Bank and may try to redeem the military's reputation by escalating operations there.

These actions may buy Netanyahu some time, but they will not last. The majority of Israelis now seek new elections. While previous elections have ignored Palestinians, the next election will be almost entirely defined by the Gaza war and its aftermath.

Israel is now facing the reality of a political and military failure on a scale previously unimaginable. Netanyahu's handling of the situation will be remembered as a key moment in the country's history, and its consequences will continue to affect Israeli society for years to come.

Netanyahu's departure from the political stage seems inevitable—whether because of the war's outcome, the next elections or simply due to illness and old age. However, the material and psychological impacts of the Gaza war on Israeli society will remain, and they are likely to have irreversible consequences. These effects could potentially threaten the survival of Israel itself.

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