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The War With No Off Switch

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The War With No Off Switch

Israel has a written procedure for the end of a war, and no event left that starts it.

ENDING a war in Israel is mostly paperwork. Emergency call-up orders lapse and a few hundred thousand reservists go back to their jobs. The Home Front Command takes the country off its special footing and the schools return to the ordinary timetable. The money the Finance Ministry added to the defense budget stops getting renewed and drops out of the following year's baseline. The directorate that stood up the evacuated communities finishes its work and closes the file. None of it happens at a ceremony. It is a sequence of administrative acts, each one written down, each one assigned to somebody, and each one waiting on the same thing.

What they wait on is a finding — a determination that the war has reached the state the instrument was written to detect. The Reserve Service Law of 2008 is the clearest case because it is the largest. Under section 8 the Defense Minister may call reservists up when he is convinced that state security requires it, and the soldier then serves for as long as the order remains in force. Read the section for what ends it and you come up empty. There is no release order in the law. Every clause that limits duration is a clock running against inaction, renewable by the same two people who started it.

The order has been renewed over and over for three years now. On 8 December 2025, three weeks after the Security Council endorsed the plan that stopped the fighting in Gaza, the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee voted eight to seven to extend the order for 280,000 reservists until 1 January ([Channel 14](#)). Israel Katz, the defense minister, wrote in his request that he was convinced state security required it, and the committee's chairman said Katz had told them it was necessary for the country's national security ([Jerusalem Post](#)). Three weeks earlier the Treasury and the Defense Ministry had announced they were ending the practice in January and moving reservists onto a regular order. January came. The committee kept renewing section 8 by name, in near-identical votes, straight through 2026. On 30 September, with the Knesset dissolved for the election, ministers carried it to 30 November by telephone vote. Defense officials maintained, the [Jerusalem Post](#) reported, that the security situation and the army's needs did not currently allow the military to end Order 8 reserve call-ups ([Jerusalem Post](#)).

Nothing in the procedure has failed and nobody has refused to sign anything. The instruments are doing what they were built to do, which is wait for a determination that a war has ended.

Ben-Gurion's generation organized Israeli security around three ideas — deterrence, early warning, and hachra'a, decisive resolution, the short war that finishes — and the third of them was never only a war aim. It was the switch. The rest of the machinery is still wired to it, and it has been taken out of service without anybody standing up to say so.

Executive Summary

Israel has lost the category of war's-end, and the cost that matters is domestic. The state is full of instruments that wait on a finding nobody is required to make, and every one of them is still wired to it.

The doctrine Israeli strategy has run on since the 1950s is usually summarized as three ideas — deterrence, early warning, and hachra'a, decisive resolution, the war that ends because somebody wins it. The third of those did double duty. It was a war aim, and it was also the input a whole class of domestic instruments were designed to detect. It has stopped being available, and nothing downstream was told.

The Reserve Service Law names no act that terminates an emergency call-up, so the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee renews the order by name instead, in near-identical votes, several of them eight to seven, and has done for three years. The latest renewal runs to 30 November. The defense budget has no retirement mechanism written into it anywhere. A wartime addition that survives three Knesset readings becomes permanent baseline with nothing in law marking it as temporary, and the commitments signed on the strength of it bind the governments that come after. Civil-defense posture runs on a declaration that lapses within days unless somebody renews it, and in July 2026 the Defense Ministry asked for a renewal while stating that no Home Front Command directives were active for civilians at all. In October it said so again, in the request that carries the declaration through election day. The evacuation of the Gaza envelope was authorized on a plan that gave itself twenty-one days. The families went home on a different finding, that there was no security impediment to living in a given kibbutz, and the state made that one, community by community, while the war went on. The north went home on a date, 1 March 2025.

Each of these is working as written.

Israel is carrying the running costs of a war footing on money nobody voted as permanent, and holding a reserve army under an order nobody has to end. It can tell a family that Be'eri is safe to live in. It has no finding at all for whether the war Be'eri is living next to is over. A government campaigning into 27 October has to tell its own voters what the end of each war would look like, in a vocabulary that describes a category the last three years took away.

The choice in front of Israel is between reacquiring the ability to finish a war and rebuilding its instruments for a condition that does not finish. It is making that choice now, and no list we read has said which way.

ISRAEL WAS BORN INTO AN ARMISTICE AND BUILT A STATE TO GET OUT OF ONE

Israel's first arrangement with the four countries that had just invaded it was an armistice. Article II of the [Israel-Syria agreement](#), signed 20 July 1949, says nothing in it "shall in any way prejudice the rights, claims and positions of either Party hereto in the ultimate peaceful settlement of the Palestine question, the provisions of this Agreement being dictated exclusively by military, and not by political, considerations." [Jordan's Article II](#) runs the

same sentence but drops “and not by political,” so it ends on “military considerations.” *Egypt’s version* sits at Article IV: the provisions “are dictated exclusively by military considerations and are valid only for the period of the Armistice.” Every preamble names what the document was for, the transition “from the present truce to permanent peace in Palestine” (*Lebanon–Israel*), and every final article keeps it in force until that arrives.

The *Egypt–Israel Treaty of Peace*, signed 26 March 1979, changes the category in its first article: “The state of war between the Parties will be terminated and peace will be established between them upon the exchange of instruments of ratification of this Treaty.” Article III commits both governments to apply between them the UN Charter and “the principles of international law governing relations among states in times of peace” — the whole distance from a military-considerations clause, in a line. *Jordan’s treaty*, 26 October 1994, establishes peace in Article 1’s first sentence, three months after the Washington Declaration ended the belligerency. Israel has never signed one with Syria or with Lebanon. Begin did it with Sadat. Rabin did it with Hussein. Both times the change sits in the treaty’s first article.

THE THIRD PILLAR WAS REMOVED AND NOTHING DOWNSTREAM WAS TOLD

Hachra’a, decisive resolution, is satisfied when an enemy’s capability to fight is destroyed — both the ability and the will. Tamir Hayman, a major general who ran IDF Military Intelligence and now runs the Institute for National Security Studies, *draws the line precisely*: victory is achieving the political leadership’s war objectives and coming out of the war safer than you went into it, and *hachra’a* is the destruction of the enemy’s military capability. Two different findings, and the second is the harder one. It also has two near-twins that English writing confuses constantly, one consonant apart in transliteration: *harta’a* is deterrence, *hatra’a* is early warning, and *hachra’a* is the one that finishes. Hayman puts Hamas at roughly a tenth of its prewar rocket stocks and around seventeen thousand fighters, and says that without dismantling what is left the achievement is temporary. Substantial damage, and by his own definition not yet *hachra’a*. The word names a finding, and the political echelon sets it as an objective and would have to say it was reached.

Israel’s Ministry of Defense archive dates Ben-Gurion’s major security review to *18 October 1953* and describes what he put to the expanded cabinet: national unity, getting new immigrants into military service, ending the ethnic division inside the ranks. Yaakov Amidror, who ran the National Security Council, writes about the October 1953 presentation, *calls it* “a personal, multi-year situation report,” and never attributes the three pillars to it. A comparative history of the doctrine *says outright* that the three-pillars framing is its own authors’ reconstruction. Shay Shabtai, in a peer-reviewed strategy journal, puts Ben-Gurion’s 1953 thinking in a different document called *Army and State* and gives it *five principles* instead of three, quoting the line Ben-Gurion did say: “Since we are inferior in numbers – we must be superior in quality.” The triad is still the standard shorthand in Israeli and Western

strategic writing — Yagil Henkin states it that way, and so does nearly everyone else — and very likely a faithful account of how the doctrine ran. It is also an assumed citation nobody can produce. Nobody ever had to amend it, because there was nothing to amend. The first time the IDF wrote its doctrine down in public and put a date on it, what it did was add.

The Meridor Committee, formally the Committee for the Formulation of Israel's National Security Doctrine, chaired by Dan Meridor under Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, worked from 2003 to 2006 and recommended a fourth pillar: defense, meaning active interception, because what had changed was enemy fire reaching the home front. It took nine years to arrive in a document. In August 2015 Gadi Eisenkot published the IDF Strategy, the first time the army had ever put a formal strategy out in the open, and Michael Herzog, reading it that month, wrote that the new environment had “compelled the IDF to redefine deterrence and the two other traditional pillars of its military strategy (early warning and military decision), and to add a fourth pillar: defense.” Meridor's second recommendation ran the other way: developing “alternatives to decisive victory” — “exit mechanisms that do not rely on decisive victory but rather create a basis for temporary arrangements.” INSS's account of the October 7 failure says Israel ran that model through the Gaza rounds from 2008 onward with no strategic assessment of what it would cost, and that the military leadership never raised a red flag with the political echelon about the deterrence failures it produced.

The emergency call-up order under section 8 of the Reserve Service Law, the money the Finance Ministry adds on top of the defense baseline, the special home front situation declared under the Civil Defense Law, the plan that moved the Gaza envelope communities out and was written to move them back — each one asks whoever signs it to look at a war and find that it has reached a state. None of them says hachra'a, and none of them has to. The state each one was written to detect is the state hachra'a was the name for, and everyone who drafted them assumed somebody would eventually name it. Take the name out of service and the paperwork underneath does not fail. It does not stop, either. It waits, on a cycle, for a finding nobody is now positioned to make. What Israel is running is a permanent armistice. An armistice stops the shooting and settles nothing, and that is what Jerusalem has been administering at home since October 2023 — a call-up order renewed every few months, a wartime addition carried forward, a civil-defense declaration written to lapse within days and renewed before it does. The armistice is the form the war takes.

We went through Knesset committee protocols, National Security Council material, cabinet decisions, and every on-record statement we could find from the chiefs of staff, the defense minister, and the prime minister since October 2023, in Hebrew and English, for a sentence in which an Israeli official retires the third pillar. Nobody has said it. The opposite runs everywhere. Eyal Zamir, the serving chief of staff, told reservists at the Nahshonim base that “nowhere is the IDF offering anything short of a decisive victory.” The two closest approaches sit outside policy. Amidror says Israel can never

reach a “conquest of Berlin” moment — an end so total the fighting stops for good. And Netanyahu, asked on Channel 14 on 30 June 2026 whether the victory pledge still stood, [answered](#): “It never ends. Do you want to live in the Middle East or in the world? You have to be very strong.” He was describing a permanent armistice and calling it victory, which makes him the one senior figure whose language has moved at all. The last time an Israeli body examined a gap of this kind, the Winograd Commission found in January 2008 that the country had gone to war before deciding which option it meant to use, and with no exit strategy ([Winograd Commission, final report](#)). Nothing comparable has been done on decisive resolution since.

MABAM — *ha-Ma’aracha Bein ha-Milchamot*, the campaign between the wars — is Israel’s name for what it does outside declared wartime, and it was codified in Eisenkot’s 2015 strategy, the document that added the fourth pillar ([IDF Strategy, Belfer Center translation](#)). Eran Ortal, a senior IDF strategist and the doctrine’s most serious in-house theorist, [gave it a figure in 2021](#) that stuck: MABAM is the fly on the elephant’s back, whispering in the elephant’s ear, “Look at all the dust we are kicking up.” The elephant is Israel’s demonstrated capacity to decide a war. Ortal wrote it against colleagues who wanted money moved out of war-fighting and into MABAM. Without a credible threat of decisive war behind them, he argued, routine strikes run into the enemy’s veto, which is the rocket arsenal answering back. He was arguing about budgets. The argument reaches further than he aimed it. A campaign between the wars assumes wars on both sides of it. The fly has been kicking up dust ever since, and nobody has checked lately whether the elephant is still under it.

NOBODY CAN SIGN THE RELEASE ORDER

Under the [Reserve Service Law](#), an emergency call-up has to reach the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee within forty-eight hours of being issued. Its validity lapses fourteen days out if the committee or the Knesset has not approved it by then. The urgent version, which the Defense Minister may issue on the Prime Minister’s consent before the cabinet has met, lapses after seven days unless the government signs it off. The law’s separate special-situation call-up caps at twenty-five days at a stretch and lapses after seven without the committee. Even the ordinary peacetime ceiling runs on renewal. The minister raises it by order with the committee’s approval, the order stands for up to three years, and it can be renewed for three years more. Every number in the statute tells somebody when to come back and ask again. The verb ,שחרר to release or discharge, turns up once across these sections, and it is doing unrelated work, counting rest days against a service period that already had an end date on it. The release order was never written.

Two committee votes failed in May 2025, the second of them [seven against to four in favor](#) on the eighteenth. Two days later the committee passed an extension that ran nine days, to 29 May. That August the margin was [eight to seven](#), extending an order due to expire on the twenty-fifth. The ground was the expanding Gaza City operation. By the spring of 2026 the ceiling

stood at 400,000 reservists callable. In July the committee brought it down to 240,000 and ran it through 30 September, against a wartime peak of roughly 300,000 actually activated. On 30 September ministers took it down again, to 200,000, and carried it to 30 November by telephone vote. The ministry's figures put Order 8 duty from January through August at NIS 26.7 billion, about a thousand shekels a reservist a day, and the two extra months at another 6.6 billion. Its legal opinion said the order raises "extremely significant difficulties regarding equality," because "with one hand the government increases the burden on reservists, and with the other it does not act to enforce the conscription obligation on draft evaders" (*Jerusalem Post*). It found no legal bar, and the extension went through. The permission keeps moving. The finding underneath it has read the same since October 2023, because the statute gives the minister one sentence to say and the committee one question to answer.

Eyal Zamir told the committee on Sunday 10 May 2026 that the military had met all the war goals the political echelon set it, "and even beyond," and stressed that further operations remained ahead. Zamir also laid out what the army was carrying — Iran, Lebanon, Gaza, Judea and Samaria, the Syrian border, and the Houthi threat — and gave the committee his reason for it. "We were surprised in 1973, we were surprised in 2023, and we will not allow ourselves to be surprised again." The committee then extended the emergency call-up to 31 May, ceiling unchanged. Nothing on the agenda required anyone in that room to set the first statement beside the second. The committee votes on how long an order runs. That is the only question it has ever been handed.

On 13 November 2025 the Treasury and the Defense Ministry agreed to retire Tzav 8, the emergency call-up order. From January 2026 reservists would be summoned under a regular order, under an amendment to the Reserve Service Law, with annual service capped somewhere around sixty to seventy days. The change was to ride in the Economic Arrangements Law with the budget. Smotrich put his name to it: "Reservists and their families have borne the weight of two demanding years of repeated call-ups." The amendment did not pass. What arrived instead, announced on 9 February 2026, was a cut in routine reserve duty from seventy-two days a year to fifty-five, forty-two of them for operations. It was carried by a temporary government directive, a stopgap in place of amending the law. The cut came out of a December 2025 agreement between Katz and Smotrich, reached inside state budget negotiations. The Finance Ministry's stated reason for it was inefficiency and extensive waste of funds. So the only partial stand-down this war has produced was settled in a budget negotiation, and the reason on the record for it is money.

On 27 August senior officers told Walla that from the start of September the first thing to go would be reserve strength in Northern and Southern Command, with Judea and Samaria spared, unless the Finance Ministry moved money it had agreed to move. By Walla's account the Treasury had committed to NIS 15 billion and then backed off. The sum behind it is a 40 billion shekel settlement from early July: 15 billion to move without conditions, and up to

25 billion more if a joint Treasury and Defense review of actual spending in October and November found it was needed. By mid-September the chief of staff had said plainly that “the coffers are empty,” and because a transfer that size during an election takes opposition votes, Netanyahu and Smotrich sent the head of the Planning Directorate, a major general in uniform, to ask Yair Lapid for them (Ynet). The Knesset Finance Committee released about 15 billion on 23 September, money the cabinet had approved two months earlier and the Knesset had been sitting on since 2 August. It moved by agreement between coalition and opposition, as the law requires inside the ninety days before an election, and there was still no agreement on the other 25 (Ynet). All of it happened inside an order that was already running, the section 8 authorization, then at 240,000 and valid through 30 September. A man sent home for want of a transfer goes home under a call-up that stays in force behind him. For most of September, how many reservists Israel could afford to keep on the line turned on a payment between two ministries.

The State Comptroller’s material runs to reservist compensation and workplace rights, and his home front work runs to readiness, a beat his office has been on since 2011. The IDF’s Personnel Directorate puts out guidance on how the days get spent. The Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee sees the order more often than anyone. It votes on an extension request, and an extension request is a question about a date. Between them they have generated years of public material about reserve service without once asking whether the mobilization should end. Renewing the order takes a minister, a cabinet, a committee, and a deadline. Ending it is nobody’s job.

THE DEFENSE BUDGET HAS NO RETIREMENT YEAR

In the August talks the Finance Ministry’s legal adviser, Dudi Koppel, reminded both ministries that a government wanting to spend more on defense in the years ahead needs a vote on a budgetary source (Calcalist, 26 August). That is the condition, and it governs putting money in. Nothing in the Budget Foundations Law, in the 2026 budget it amended, or in the reporting around either names a condition that takes money back out. Nothing expires. Nothing asks anybody to determine that the war the money was added for has ended. A wartime addition that clears three Knesset readings is an ordinary budget line by the time it lands, and Israeli law has nothing in it that tells a shekel added in 2026 apart from a shekel that was in the budget before October 2023.

Israel tracks its forward commitments through what the Treasury calls the numerator, a rolling three-year view of what the government has already promised, refreshed about twice a year, and the funding-source rule hangs off it. In August the Defense Ministry was reported booking part of an NIS 85 billion force-buildup tranche into 2030 and 2031 instead of 2027 through 2029, which is when the money actually goes out. Push a commitment past the years the numerator is looking at and the requirement to name a source never comes up. Calcalist called it a way to distort the deficit figures. The tranche had no identified source at all, because the June update already had 2027 over the legal spending ceiling before a shekel of it was added.

Defense ran at an average of **NIS 67.3 billion** a year before the war. The budget the Knesset passed on 30 March 2026 put it at 143, against an establishment ask of 177 (**Ynetnews**). At the time that gap read as the Treasury holding a line. By late August the Finance Ministry and the Defense Ministry had settled in principle on **adding roughly 40 billion more**, taking this year to about 184. Underneath the annual argument sit the commitments the numerator already carries forward (**CTech**). They bind whoever wins on 27 October, and the government after that one.

The Commission for Evaluating the Security Budget and Force Buildup — the Nagel Committee, after its chair, Prof. Jacob Nagel — was set up in August 2024 and **delivered its final report on 31 December** that year. It recommended NIS 133 billion in additional defense spending across ten years, taking the average annual budget from NIS 67.3 billion to 96.6. Netanyahu accepted the interim recommendations and instructed that they be implemented immediately. By late August 2026 the settlement in principle put this year at 184. The average the commission set for a decade was overtaken in the second year of it.

Reopening the 2026 budget for an addition of that size takes **three readings in the Knesset**, and the Knesset dissolved itself on 17 July and has been in election recess since. The army told the Treasury at the end of August that it would start cutting reserve strength in Northern and Southern Command in September if the money did not come (**Walla**). A budget dispute produced that threat, and nothing in it turns on the state of the war. What moved instead was a transfer. The Finance Committee released about 15 billion on 23 September by agreement with the opposition, and the other 25 was still unsettled (**Ynet**). The other 25 was conditional from the start. Under the July settlement it moves only if a joint review of actual spending finds it's needed (**Calcalist**). The permission to sign sits in the decade plan instead. The settlement headed to the cabinet in August was to carry commitment authority, letting the Defense Ministry order weapons against the multi-year addition from 2027 and for ten to fifteen years after (**Calcalist**). A contract for a delivery in 2032 doesn't much care what happens to the war before then. Every step in that chain has a form and somebody's signature on it. None of the forms has a box for whether the war is over.

In March the cabinet paid for part of the addition with a 3 percent across-the-board cut to the ministries' procurement budgets, about 1.7 billion shekels against a rise of roughly 30 billion for Defense (**Israel National News**, **Calcalist**). The budget set the deficit ceiling at 4.9 percent of GDP — the figure that came out of second and third reading, and the one that binds. The Bank of Israel forecast 5.3 on the day the budget passed (**Globes**), and in June the OECD came to 5.3 too (**Ynetnews**). Moody's holds Israel at Baa1, stable, and puts Israeli defense spending at roughly 6 percent of GDP a year (**Ynetnews**). A ratings agency has put a number on how much of this is permanent. Nobody in Jerusalem has had to.

On 14 October ministers approved a billion shekels for classified, urgent defense procurement in a quick telephone poll, much of it moved out of the five-year development plan for Arab society, and Smotrich told the investment houses' conference that day that another 2.6 billion was coming (Walla). That one was put to ministers for Sunday the 18th as a cut of about 5 percent to every ministry's development and procurement budget — 285 million from Education, 225 million from National Security, 150 million from Health, and 140 million from Welfare. Treasury professionals had asked to take it out of the coalition-agreement funds instead, and were turned down (Ynet). None of it is a vote on the wartime addition. It is the wartime addition being paid for out of every other ministry's building and equipment budget, the week before an election.

THE HOME FRONT COMMAND RUNS A COLOR SCALE, AND NO FINDING MOVES IT

Under section 9 of the Civil Defense Law of 1951, the government may declare a *matzav meyuchad ba'oref* (מצב מיוחד באורף), (מצב מיוחד a special home front situation, over the whole country or a specified area, on a finding of high probability of attack on the civilian population. If the government has not moved, the Defense Minister may declare it himself. Then the law starts taking it back. A minister's declaration dies in forty-eight hours unless the government extends it, and a government declaration dies in five days unless the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee approves it. Declaring it takes a finding about the world, and somebody has to sign it. To end it, somebody just has to decide to. Section (10)9 lets the government cancel at any time and attaches no finding to the cancellation, so nothing can tell anybody the answer is now no.

The declaration Israel is living under was made on 28 February 2026 (Israel Democracy Institute), the day Operation Roaring Lion opened. The Defense Minister declared it nationwide, the government picked it up the next day and carried it to 12 March, and the committee approved. On 11 March Israel Katz proposed extending it to 26 March. It went to 14 April, then in two-week steps to 19 May, then through the summer, and on 12 July the government carried it to 28 July. It kept going through the autumn, and on 15 October the Defense Minister asked ministers to carry it to 3 November, a week after the election (N12), which they approved by telephone vote (Maariv). Two to four weeks at a time, for eight months. It has a predecessor. The declaration of 7 October 2023 went nationwide by that evening and was still being extended in June 2025, narrowed by then to the areas near the Gaza border.

On 27 October 2025, a few weeks after the 20-point plan stopped the fighting in Gaza, Katz accepted the army's recommendation not to extend the 2023 declaration in the south, and for the first time since 7 October there was no special home front situation anywhere in Israel (JDN). Nobody found that the war was over. The army stopped asking, the law let it lapse, and four months later Roaring Lion put it back over the whole country. It switched off the way section 9 is built to, with a minister declining to renew and no finding on anybody's signature.

Home Front Command runs a color scale underneath the declaration and assigns it zone by zone, and the colors are what an Israeli actually lives on. In late March, yellow meant school and work only where a standard protected space could be reached inside the warning time, with gatherings capped at 50 outdoors and 100 indoors. Orange meant no school at all, gatherings of 50 at most, and workplaces open only where a protected space could be reached (Walla, 30 March). By mid-June green meant full activity with gatherings capped at 5,000 (JDN). The caps change with each directive. After 28 February the schools shut nationally for **more than a month**, reopening after Pesach. The colors move on Home Front Command's own assessment, published as an announcement, so in late March the Gaza envelope sat at yellow while Tel Aviv sat at orange, under one national declaration. Coming back down is an announcement too, and nothing about the declaration underneath has to change for a zone to go all the way to green.

We looked for a Home Front Command document on how any of this works across years instead of weeks, and logged the searches so the negative can be broken: **מסמך מפקד בית המוקד המצביא על המערכת, המפרט את הכללים, המפרט את המערכת, המפרט את המערכת, המפרט את המערכת**, **המפרט את המערכת** the Hebrew for a multi-year civil-defense framework, run again for an admission that none exists, and run in English. Nothing with a title or a date on it came back. Home Front Command, under Shai Klapper, now counts a protracted campaign among the five basic assumptions it plans on, and spells that out as keeping the economy running and its own forces fit over time (Ynet). None of the five touches a gathering cap. No tier definition, no gathering cap, and no renewal cadence has been rewritten to match a war that does not stop. Nobody has counted the movement either. Searches for a tally of how many times a region has changed color since October 2023 turn up the announcements and no total. The archive that would answer it is Home Front Command's own.

Yuli Edelstein chaired the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, so every extension passed through him. On **20 November 2023**, in the war's second month, he said he found it "difficult to see how I can continue to approve the 'special situation' in the home front without receiving clear answers, and without understanding who is responsible for managing the entire economic-civil aspect of the war." He had asked Netanyahu to put the National Security Council in charge of the civilian side, and when nothing came back he said so in public. The approvals continued. They continued at the same cadence for the better part of three more years, and no declaration has lapsed for want of an answer to his question. The State Comptroller **measured the civilian side** on 6 January 2026. A third of Israel's residents have no adequate protection against missile attack — about three million people, 33.6 percent, with no mamad, no public shelter, and nothing else meeting the standard. Nearly 500,000 children were in schools with no standard protection as of March 2024, and in nearly 40 percent of the schools surveyed the staff could not get every pupil to a protected space inside the warning time. The Comptroller found that again in **Report 9561** on the education system.

The Defense Ministry's 26 July request asked the committee for another sixteen days, to 11 August, on the ground that "security officials continue to assess that there is a high probability of an attack against the civilian population." It also said no Home Front Command directives were then in effect for civilians at all. So the declaration stood, the guidance under it was empty, and the renewal went through. For as long as it stands, Home Front Command can order the public into shelters, close the schools, and cap a gathering by publishing a sentence, on authority the declaration has already handed over. The ministry's verb is *continue*.

The October request to ministers said that "given the uncertainty, mainly regarding the Iranian and Lebanese arenas," security officials assessed that "there is still a high probability that an attack on the civilian population will occur." The legal opinion attached to it called carrying the declaration through election day for the 26th Knesset "not a trivial matter," then noted that as of that day no Home Front Command directives to the civilian population were in force, and found "no legal impediment" (N12). The request did say when it should end: if the operational echelon's view of the circumstances changed materially, the declaration would have to be cancelled or narrowed. That puts the off switch with the people asking for the extension. Section 9 asks for a finding, and what the government has been renewing for eight months is the continuation of one.

THE RETURN POLICY IS CONDITIONED ON A DETERMINATION

The cabinet approved the national plan for supporting evacuated residents by telephone vote on the night of Thursday, 12 October 2023. The decision says how long it was written to run. The Interior Ministry would put up to 6.5 million shekels a day into it, for up to twenty-one days of fighting. A family got 1,000 shekels a head, to a ceiling of 5,000 a household. At this stage, Ynet reported from the decision, the program would run for 21 days, and toward the end of that period the need to keep it going would be examined (Ynet). Anything past those twenty-one days took a separate government decision.

The government signed off on the southern evacuation on 12 October, the northern border on 18 to 20 October, the Ashkelon-area communities on 19 October, and Sderot on 23 October (INSS). The families were already gone. By 1 November roughly 253,000 Israelis had left their homes — about 94,000 taken in by other communities, 88,000 into hotels, and 70,000 who arranged something themselves. The southern rings come to somewhere between 70,000 and 90,000, depending on which of them you count — 15,800 from inside four kilometers of the Gaza border, 31,000 out of Sderot, 17,500 from the three-to-four-kilometer ring, and 24,000 from Ashkelon-area communities with no adequate protected space to reach. The north ran around 60,000.

Evacuees were later told they could stay in hotel accommodation until 7 July 2024, under nine months from the night of the telephone vote. Ashkelon's communities are the exception in the record. Their residents were permitted home in November 2023, a few weeks after they left.

Twelve days after the attack the government stood up Minhelet Tekuma (מנהלת טקומא), (מנהלת the directorate charged with rebuilding the Gaza envelope (Government Decision 980). It covers about forty-seven communities within seven kilometers of the Gaza fence, across Eshkol, Hof Ashkelon, Sdot Negev, and Sha'ar HaNegev, plus the city of Sderot (Tekuma Directorate). The money came in pieces first. A decision of 22 October 2023 put up 100 million shekels. One of 12 November authorized a total commitment of 900 million, part of it reallocated out of an unrelated decision from the previous May, along with sixteen staff positions moved over from other ministries (obudget). The founding decision set the directorate up for five years, and the strategic plan the government approved in April 2024 runs 2024 to 2028, with the end year in its title (Calcalist). Then in 2025 five billion shekels of Tekuma's development money could not be released, because nobody had fixed the region's borders (Calcalist). The director's post sat empty for half a year, a delay the State Comptroller attributed to political considerations. Aviad Friedman got the job in February 2025. The Tekuma Law had cleared only its first Knesset reading by the time the Comptroller wrote, its second and third held up in part over an added 1.3 billion shekel plan for communities outside the Tekuma region (Calcalist).

The north's rehabilitation body opened in May 2024 as Tenufa LaTzafon, Momentum for the North. It was an implementation headquarters in the Prime Minister's Office, with money behind it, set up to oversee and coordinate the ministries doing the work (Government Decision 1786). It stayed one for eighteen months. Government Decision 3556 of 4 December 2025 turned it into a directorate, gave it twenty-nine more posts, and put it under the head of Tekuma, sharing Tekuma's finance, legal, and personnel services (Government Decision 3556). When the government finally approved a plan for the north, on 2 June 2026, Calcalist ran it under the words "after almost three years" (Calcalist). When the State Comptroller reported on 10 June 2025, 54 percent of the roughly 60,000 northern evacuees told him there was a high chance they would not go back to their old homes. In the south the figure was 13 (Times of Israel). His report also put primary responsibility on the Prime Minister and his office for failing to formulate a plan for reconstruction and to prepare residents to return. It called the ongoing delay in producing a government policy for the border communities "a fundamental deficiency in the government's treatment of the residents."

The finding about going home lives outside the 12 October decision, and it exists. Israel calls it the security impediment, *ha-menia ha-bitchonit*. On Sunday 29 June 2025 the government, on the Defense Ministry's recommendation, lifted it from twelve envelope communities as of 1 July — Be'eri, Kfar Aza, Nir Oz, Sufa, Netiv HaAsara, Nir Yitzhak, Kerem Shalom, Ein HaShlosa, Nirim, Nahal Oz, Kissufim, and Holit (Maariv). Where the houses were not ready, a second impediment, the rehabilitation one, stayed until they were. State funding for temporary housing stopped for families cleared to go back (TPS). In May 2026 the Tekuma Directorate counted more than 92 percent of the region's residents home and 3,000 new ones with them, with Be'eri, Kfar Aza, and Holit coming back through 2027 and Nir Oz by the end of it (JNS). The

north was sent home on a date. The return set for 1 March 2025 also ended the grants (INSS), and by September 2025 Tnufa North counted 87 percent back, with at least ten communities bigger than they were before the war (JNS).

The security impediment is a finding about a piece of ground, made community by community. The Families' Headquarters for the Return of the Abductees saw what it implied the day it was made: "If there is no security obstacle to returning to live in the Gaza Envelope, then there is certainly no obstacle to ending the fighting in Gaza." The procedure gives nobody the job of answering that. A family in Nirim has been told by its government that it is safe to live there. IDF troops are still inside the Strip on the other side of the fence (Jerusalem Post), and no instrument the state owns can tell that family whether the war next door is over.

THE CHARGE IS THAT ISRAEL WANTS THIS. HERE IS THE DATED RECORD.

"He is dragging the war out because its end would necessitate elections and a change in government." Yair Golan said that on 22 March 2026. He leads the Democrats, he was deputy chief of staff of the IDF, and he also called it "an endless war for two and a half years." Gadi Eisenkot, who ran the army as chief of staff and now leads Yashar, wrote a version of it in May 2025, in an open letter to David Zini, Netanyahu's pick to run the Shin Bet. The prime minister, he wrote, had undermined the hostage aim and what the army had won on the battlefield "by waging a continuous, unfocused war, with outdated goals" (Times of Israel). Both are former senior IDF commanders who now lead lists in this election, and both said it under their own names. The other two versions of the charge are that the war is cover for taking territory and that Israel's defense economy needs it. We went looking for a specific person, dated and on the record, saying either one, and found institutions instead — a think tank, a UN rapporteur, and an NGO report.

Maj.-Gen. (res.) Nitzan Alon coordinated hostage and missing-persons affairs for the IDF until October 2025, and on 1 July 2026 he described what the cabinet had been choosing between. "When the alternative of partial deals was put on the table before the cabinet," he said, "the choice was a partial agreement to allow for continuing the war." He also said that "about 40 hostages who were taken alive were killed and murdered." An open letter signed by some 950 Israeli Air Force veterans and reservists in April 2025 put it in blunter language: the war "principally serves political and personal interests, and not security interests." The air force dismissed the active reservists among the signers, about a tenth of them (JTA, JNS). Alon signed nothing and joined nobody. He held that portfolio for the army, and he says an Israeli cabinet took the option that kept the war running.

The charge itself says the state wants the condition, and the test of that is what Israel has accepted, signed, and refused. Israel accepted Trump's 20-point plan, endorsed by the Security Council as Resolution 2803 on 17 November 2025, which internationalizes Gaza's administration and puts Hamas's weapons permanently beyond use (UN Security Council). Israel signed the trilateral framework with Lebanon and the United States on 26

June 2026, in which the two neighbors affirm each other's right to exist in peace as sovereign states, and which ties the IDF's gradual redeployment out of Lebanon to the verified disarmament of Lebanon's non-state armed groups, which means Hezbollah. On 9 August 2026 Netanyahu rejected the Board of Peace's 15-point roadmap, a separate document Hamas accepted and Israel was never a party to. "Israel rejects the 15-point document. I have heard people saying, 'You didn't say that.' So here I am saying it again." The rejection belongs in the record too, and he said what it was about. The IDF would make no withdrawal until Hamas was truly disarmed.

Nabih Berri, the speaker of Lebanon's parliament, **said the framework "will not pass"** and called it a set of dictates ten times worse than the 1983 May 17 Agreement. Naim Qassem, who leads Hezbollah, **called it** "Israeli diktats written with Israeli ink" on 15 August 2026. On 11 August Mohsen Rezaei set Iran's price for reopening Hormuz — an end to the fighting across the region, Lebanon and Gaza included, and the release of its frozen funds (**Reuters**). Hamas has handed over the weapons of Gaza's police force and nothing beyond it, heavy weapons held back and **full disarmament conditioned** on an Israeli withdrawal and eventually on a pathway to Palestinian statehood.

Israeli exports hit a record \$169 billion last year (**Jerusalem Post**), and the TA-125, the Tel Aviv exchange's main index, had risen about 11 percent since January by late June (**Il Sole 24 Ore**). Both are real. So is the bill. The war has cost roughly NIS 280 billion since October 2023, about NIS 100 billion of it reserve pay (**Ynetnews**). Amir Yaron, the Bank of Israel governor, said on 1 September that the defense establishment has to get more efficient "because there are no free lunches" (**Globes**), and that even then whatever government forms will face budget gaps. "I assume taxes will need to be raised" (**Jerusalem Post**). In August the army told the Finance Ministry it would start cutting reserve strength in Northern and Southern Command in September unless the money came (**Walla**), and in October the government was trimming every civilian ministry's equipment budget to pay for munitions (**Ynet**). The army and the Finance Ministry are still arguing over the cash to keep fighting it.

Alon's account sits beside that record, and the decision he describes is one that comes around again in a war with no defined finish. Nothing required anyone in that cabinet room to set the choice against a finding that the war had ended, because nobody now makes that finding. Every extension gets taken one at a time, on its own merits, by people the procedure never hands the question to. Golan's charge is about motive, and a document can't settle that. What the documents settle is what Israel accepted, signed, and refused, and on which dates, and that record is above. A prime minister who wanted this finished tomorrow would reach for the same instruments and find the same blank.

A GOVERNMENT STILL HAS TO SAY WHAT WINNING LOOKS LIKE, AND THERE IS NO WORD FOR THIS

In December 2023 Netanyahu was promising that Israel **would soon achieve total victory over the forces of evil**, and by April 2024 the country was about

one step away. Both lines come from Haaretz. The words are his. Asked on Channel 14 on 30 June 2026 whether the pledge against Iran and its proxies still stood, he answered: “It never ends.” Nothing we could find has him using the phrase since. What he did on 18 October, nine days before the vote, was put an end condition on one of the three wars. Presenting his security doctrine, he said of Iran, “Like cancer, this will not end as long as that regime remains in place,” and that his plan is “to bring about the downfall of the regime,” the directive he has given every security agency (Ynet).

These polls are not current. Every one of them was published before 23 October, and nothing can be learned from them about how people will vote, or about public opinion, on the day you read this.

A Channel 12 poll of 503 Israelis on 3 August had 62 percent saying they did not expect total victory in Gaza, and 72 percent not believing Hamas would ever agree to disarm.

Israel Katz put the goal at Mount Herzl on Memorial Day 2025 as “a clear victory without compromise”. It sets no condition anybody could test. By August 2026 he was telling Channel 14 he wanted an IDF that “strives for decisive victory,” though he said it about who should run Central Command (Israel National News). His Hebrew word was hachra’a (Arutz Sheva), the doctrinal term, a finding about what an enemy can still do, and one somebody has to make. Smotrich told students at the Sderot yeshiva in August that Israel must “conquer it completely, establish a military government there, establish Jewish settlement there,” and the Jerusalem Post reported it as a call on Netanyahu to order the IDF’s complete takeover of the Strip (Jerusalem Post). Ben-Gvir says “there will be Jewish settlement throughout Gaza,” and on 19 July the two of them were among the ministers at a rally of thousands near the Gaza border, organized by the Nachala movement, to ask for Nisanit, Dugit, and Elei Sinai back (CNN, Ynetnews). Theirs is the one Gaza victory on offer that anybody could certify. It says nothing about what Hamas has to be doing, or not doing, on the day it is met. Eisenkot has never made the promise in anything we found. What he offers on Gaza is a sequence — the spirit of the Trump deal, in which partial disarmament earns partial rebuilding.

We read the campaign coverage for Likud, Yashar, Beyachad, which is Bennett’s joint list with Yesh Atid (Times of Israel), the Democrats, and Blue and White until Gantz took it out of the race on 19 October, eight days before the vote (Ynet), looking for one sentence naming a state of affairs that, once reached, would mean the Gaza war, the confrontation in south Lebanon, or the war with Iran was over. That is coverage of the platforms and not the platform documents, which is a step removed, and it is also how platforms reach voters. The bar was low. Any condition at all, however hard, so long as a person could tell when it had been met. For Gaza, beyond Smotrich’s and Ben-Gvir’s conquest and settlement, none of the campaigns we read has published one. Eisenkot’s Gaza position is a ladder, partial disarmament earning partial rebuilding a rung at a time, with no top rung on it. For south Lebanon, Lapid listed eliminating Hezbollah’s military capabilities among

his war aims in March ([Maariv](#)), and Eisenkot said in April that the government should turn the army's gains into an agreement ending in Hezbollah's complete disarmament and the Lebanese government taking full responsibility ([Jerusalem Post](#)). Bennett said in May that Dahiye "must tremble until security returns to the north" ([Times of Israel](#)). Netanyahu's government signed its own in June, the framework above, which ties the IDF's redeployment to verified disarmament. Each of those is a finding somebody would have to make. For Iran there are now three conditions, and they match. Bennett's is the fall of the regime in Tehran and, until that arrives, keeping it away from a weapon ([Jerusalem Post](#)). Lapid's, from that March statement, is the regime toppled and its nuclear and missile programs destroyed, because the war "cannot end with us having swapped one Khamenei for another." Since 18 October Netanyahu's is the fall of the regime too. You could tell when that had been met. All three also set the end of Israel's war by an event inside Iran, and none of them says what happens to a reserve order or a wartime addition in the years before it comes. Golan, who leads the Democrats, told Bloomberg in September that "we must end the open wars" and that "an economic blockade of Iran is the right way" ([Bloomberg](#)). It sets no condition anybody could test. Lapid's line since, in the coverage we read, is that Netanyahu cannot win ([Times of Israel](#)). Gantz ran on a [broad government](#) and quit eight days out, and on 21 October every Blue and White candidate resigned, so a Blue and White ballot now counts as invalid ([JDN](#)). Likud's campaign, in the coverage we read, is about seat arithmetic ([i24NEWS](#)). Nine of the eleven polls below put Netanyahu's bloc at 48 to 53 seats and the bloc around Eisenkot at 50 to 55, with the Arab parties at 13 to 15. Channel 14's two had the right at 61 and then 62, and the bloc it calls the left at 46 and then 44. Yashar led Likud in every poll but Channel 14's, which had Likud ahead by seven and then by ten.

Poll	Published	Netanyahu bloc	Eisenkot bloc	Arab parties	Yashar / Likud / Beyachad
Kan News	11 Oct	53	50	13	22 / 20 / 12
Channel 13 (HaMadad)	14 Oct	51	50	15	20 / 18 / 12
Israel Hayom (Kantar)	fieldwork 14–15 Oct	50	52	—	24 / 21 / 12
Maariv (Lazar)	16 Oct	51	51	14	21 / 18 / 13
Kan News	18 Oct	51	52	13	23 / 21 / 12
Channel 14 (NEXT DATA)	18 Oct	61	46	13	22 / 29 / 10

Poll	Published	Netanyahu bloc	Eisenkot bloc	Arab parties	Yashar / Likud / Beyachad
Channel 12 (Midgam)	19 Oct	51	55	14	24 / 21 / 14
Channel 13 (HaMadad)	19 Oct	50	51	15	20 / 17 / 14
Walla (Lazar)	20 Oct	48	54	14	23 / 19 / 14
Channel 12 (Midgam)	21 Oct	51	55	14	23 / 19 / 15
Channel 14 (NEXT DATA)	21 Oct	62	44	14	20 / 30 / 10

Blocs as each outlet reports them. Where the Reservists list of Hendel and Zelicha cleared the threshold it took 4 seats and sits in neither bloc. Maariv printed party figures only, and its blocs here are our sum of them. Israel Hayom did not print an Arab-party total. Channel 13's 19 October poll was taken before Gantz withdrew. Channel 12's 21 October bloc of 51 counts Ofer Winter's four seats. Channel 14 also published on 19 and 20 October, with the right at 62 both times.

In Kan's poll of 18 October, 34 percent put the economy and the cost of living first and 32 percent security, and the camps split on it: 45 percent of coalition voters chose security, and 41 percent of opposition voters the economy ([Kan News](#)). Channel 13 asked whether people would trust that a decision to go to war before the election had been made on the merits. Forty-seven percent said they would not and called it a political move, 33 percent said they would, and 20 percent said it depended ([Channel 13](#)). Israel votes on 27 October on who conducts three wars. What ending one would take is not on the ballot, because nobody has put it there.

The Finance Ministry, the Defense Ministry, and the National Security Council have been negotiating a force-building plan for 2027 to 2036. It is [valued at NIS 350 billion](#), and [NIS 50 billion of that is meant to come out of the defense establishment's own efficiencies](#). Ten years. It opens the year after the government elected on 27 October is sworn in. On 18 October Netanyahu put a bigger number on it. He said he means to put about 450 billion shekels into defense over the coming decade, against the roughly 350 reported earlier, because the IDF "definitely needs to grow." Eisenkot called the doctrine "two hollow pages, full of slogans" ([Ynet](#)). Nothing described of either figure names a state of any war at which any part of it stops. The army has already said which way it reads the decade. "We understand that we are not going back to Oct. 6, so we are building the reserve force differently," Brig.

Gen. Benny Ben Ari, its chief reserve officer, said in an interview published on 6 October ([Ynet](#)). Beside the plan sits the proposal to lengthen compulsory service, [from the 32 months men now serve toward 36](#), which officials said in March would be looked at again after Pesach. Amir Yaron cut the benchmark rate a quarter point to 3.25 percent on 1 September and then said where the money for any of it comes from. Taxes will have to rise, he assumes, and he [pointed at the fifth to eighth deciles](#), where Israel's burden is comparatively low. He said it eight weeks before the vote.

South Korea has run on the 1953 armistice for seventy-three years without a peace treaty. The country it built around that is settled in a way Israel's is not. Conscription stands at eighteen months for the army and marines ([Korea Times](#)). Defense spending was 2.32 percent of GDP in 2025, against a stated aim of 3.6 ([Stars and Stripes](#)). Every August the government rehearses how it would run in a war, nationwide. Ulchi Freedom Shield opened on 17 August this year with about 18,000 South Korean troops ([UPI](#)), and its civil-defense drill sends people into some 17,000 designated shelters for twenty minutes ([Korea Times](#)). Seoul finished the argument about what shape the country should be. Israel is still having it, in pieces — a ten-year plan in a negotiating room, a service term floated and put off until after a holiday, a budget addition paid out in pieces by a Knesset that dissolved itself in July. Nobody has called it one argument.

[Security Council Resolution 2803](#), adopted 17 November 2025, gives effect to the Gaza plan on benchmarks tied to demilitarization, with the Board of Peace reporting to the Council every six months. It authorizes the Board and the stabilization force through 31 December 2027, and it names no day by which the IDF is out of Gaza, which waits on demilitarization milestones the resolution leaves to the IDF, the stabilization force, the guarantors, and Washington to agree. So there are two things that could be put to voters before 27 October. The first is that Israel means to get the ending back. That means naming the finding that releases an emergency call-up order, retires a wartime addition from the baseline, lifts a special home front situation, and tells the families back in the envelope whether the war beside them is over. It means saying which enemy has to be in what state on the day somebody makes it. The second is that Israel is building for a condition with no finish. That means telling voters the wartime addition is the baseline now, that the tax rise pays for it, that the service term goes up, and that the ten-year plan is the shape of the country for the next decade.

No list we read has put either of those to voters whole. Netanyahu's 18 October doctrine sets out a decade of extra spending, and Bennett, Lapid, and Netanyahu all end the Iran war when the regime falls. None of them, and no other list we read, says how the money gets raised or how long the men serve. The second one is being carried out anyway, in a negotiating room between three ministries, on a schedule that runs past the next two Knessets.

The committee still meets, the Finance Ministry still has a line it could stop renewing, and the directorate in the envelope still has an end year of its own. What none of them has is the finding that starts the sequence, and nobody

has been asked to produce one — not by a court, and not by an electorate that was never given the words to ask. Israelis wrote these instruments, for a condition Israelis named and a war Israelis expected to finish. They are Israel's to rewrite. The first line of that rewrite is a sentence somebody has to be willing to sign.

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