



## Israel's legal reforms continue to be of interest to the Palestinians, Hezbollah and Iran, who perceive the country as weakened

July 31, 2023

### Overview

- ▶ The Palestinians and Hezbollah continue to monitor and extensively report on the protests in Israel following the ongoing promotion of legal reforms in Israel and the reversal of the "reasonableness doctrine,"<sup>1</sup> which was passed July 24, 2023 and the protest and controversy accompanying the legislation and its approval.<sup>2</sup> In Iran and Arab world there has been a recent decline in interest in events in Israel. Special attention has been paid to the declarations of reserve soldiers, especially pilots, soldiers in special units and intelligence personnel, about no longer volunteering for reserve service. In Arab-Muslim perception, the events indicate that Israel is militarily weak, has lost its deterrence and the rift in Israeli society is widening, all giving them an opportunity to attack Israel.
- ▶ Some of the reports were based on Israeli media coverage. Arab-Muslim commentators and leaders predicted Israel's approaching end, with claims such as "the days of the Zionist entity are numbered," "Israel is on the brink of civil war," "Israeli society is crumbling from within," "the Israeli army has weakened and lost some of its deterrent power" and "the relationship between Israel and its main ally, the United States, have been damaged."
- ▶ Others related to the possibility that Israel was liable to take advantage of the situation vis-à-vis the Palestinians and toughen its policy towards them, or initiate military action against its opponents to unite the Israeli public and end the protests.
- ▶ There were also calls from the Palestinians to exploit the situation to expand the "resistance" [anti-Israel terrorism] and bring the "settlement project" to a halt. On the other hand, there was an exceptional call for the Palestinian public to learn from the Israeli public

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<sup>1</sup> The doctrine is used by the Israeli Supreme Court to review governmental decisions and can invalidate them. That is important because given Israel's political system, both the legislative and executive branches are in the hands of the ruling coalition, and a strong, independent judiciary is the only agency for checks and balances.

<sup>2</sup> For further information see the ITIC's March 13, 2023, report, "Protests in Israel and the rejection of the government's new legal reforms from the perspective of the Palestinians and Hezbollah."

and take to the streets to protest the ongoing violation of their rights by the corrupt Palestinian Authority leadership.

## Further Information

### Regarding the blow to Israel's military might

- ▶ **Dr. Saleh al-Naami, Doctor of Political Science, Gazan political commentator and researcher of Israeli issues**, wrote an article about the repeated warnings in Israel regarding possible damage to the IDF's operational competence because of the many reports about IDF officers and soldiers, especially in the Air Force, who announced they would no longer volunteer for reserve service until the legislation had been halted (Palestine Online, July 18, 2023). In a different article he wrote that the reserve forces make up 70% of the IDF's order of battle, and wondered about the extent of the potential damage to the IDF's operational capability (Salah al-Naami's Twitter account, July 20, 2023).
- ▶ A short video was published on the al-Manar website which had initially been distributed on the social networks in Israel (the al-Manar version had Arabic subtitles). The video simulated a situation in which an IDF ground force soldier requests air assistance and as a condition for providing it, a pilot asks if the soldier supports the planned legislation, (al-Manar, July 24, 2023). Another post on the al-Manar website, relying mainly on Israeli media reports, claimed the political dispute in Israel had seeped into the ranks of the army and affected the willingness to report for reserve service (al-Manar, July 25, 2023).



A scene from the video, with Arabic subtitles (al-Manar, July 24, 2023).

- ▶ During an interview, **Hassan Hejazi, al-Manar's commentator on Israeli affairs**, related to a letter sent to the IDF soldiers by Chief of Staff, Major General Herzi Halevi, in which he stated that without cohesion in the army Israel would not be able to survive. In addition, Hejazi also mentioned the reports in the Israeli media stating that ten thousand IDF reserve soldiers and

officers had announced they would no longer volunteer for reserve service if the bill to limit "reasonableness" was passed (al-Manar, July 23, 2023).

► After the elimination of the Supreme Court's "reasonableness" powers, an article in the Israeli daily newspaper Haaretz was quoted on the Hezbollah-affiliated al-Mayadeen website. The article reported an initial erosion of the IDF's operational capabilities, especially the Air Force, and claimed that in addition to the growing number of reserve officers and soldiers who announced they would no longer volunteer, refusal to serve could be expected from regular and career army officers and soldiers until the legislation is halted (al-Mayadeen, July 26, 2023).

► The Lebanese daily newspaper al-Akhbar quoted a reserve officer who called it "the most serious crisis since the establishment of the State." In addition, the paper emphasized that claims stating that 48 hours after the legislation had been passed the IDF would not be able to wage war were exaggerated. However it claimed that the situation of the IDF "is not normal" and that there were reports of "damages to its efficiency, cohesion and strength" (al-Akhbar, July 26, 2023).

► The Iranian state news agency IRNA published an article titled, "What will the future of the Zionist army be?" Israeli commentators as well as senior IDF officials were quoted regarding the reservists' announcements about no longer volunteering, as well as reports from the Israeli media claiming "the army is in crisis" (IRNA, July 26, 2023).

► However, several commentators warned against early hopes for a civil war in Israel and claimed the Israeli prime minister might initiate military action against the Palestinians and/or Iran and Hezbollah to unite the Israeli public. Al-Quds published an editorial titled, "The disputes within Israel will not lead to a civil war," claiming that as in the past, to deflect attention from an internal crisis, unite the people and stop the demonstrations, the right-wing government might take military action against each of its rivals, most likely in south Lebanon, in view of the growing tensions there in recent weeks (al-Quds, July 18, 2023). **Talal Oukal, a political commentator from Gaza and al-Ayam columnist**, wrote that to unite the Israeli public, Netanyahu might involve Israel in a military "adventure" with Iran or Hezbollah, meaning that the entire Middle East was on the brink of a broad, bloody explosion (al-Ayam, July 24, 2023).

## Regarding Israel's situation and status

► **Dr. Wa'el Mana'ma, political commentator and head of the journalism department at the Islamic University in Gaza**, claimed Israel was living its last days, carrying within itself what would destroy it, and suffering from decline and degeneration unknown since its establishment in 1948 (Palestine Online, July 3, 2023).

► According to **Dr. Saleh al-Naami**, Israel has been in a state of unprecedented internal unrest since the first reading of the anti-"reasonableness" law was approved. He claimed it would contribute to the spread of corruption in the corridors of government and strengthen nepotism (Salah al-Naami's Twitter account, July 11, 2023). **Adnan Abu Amer, a Gazan political commentator and researcher of Israeli affairs**, claimed the political crisis developing in Israel around the legal "reforms" was a clear danger to the continued growth of the high-tech sector, and apparently between 50% and 80% percent of new start-ups were not registered as Israeli companies, in addition to a significant decrease in foreign investments in high-tech during the first quarter of 2023 (Palestine Online, July 12, 2023).

► On July 24, 2023, according to the main article in the Iranian daily Kayhan, Israel was undergoing an unprecedented crisis that had weakened the IDF, the country's national strength, its regional status and its ties with the United States (Kayhan, July 24, 2023). On July 26, 2023, the paper claimed that "a civil war has begun in Israel which is expected to be long-term." The article elaborated on the clashes during the protests and quoted Israeli officials who spoke of "internal destruction" as well as commentators who claimed that "a military coup is not improbable" (Kayhan, July 26, 2023).

► Shortly after the "reasonableness" bill passed the first reading in the Knesset on July 24, 2023, key Palestinian and Hezbollah figures gave their opinions about the expected consequences:

◆ **Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah secretary general**, claimed "Today in particular is the worst day in the history of the Zionist entity, as several of its people say, and has set it on the path to collapse and decline" (Hezbollah's combat information channel on Telegram, July 24, 2023). **Muhammad Ra'ed, the leader of the Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese parliament**, claimed "The enemy is now in an unenviable situation and its worst by far... Therefore, it is the 'resistance's' responsibility to find 'equations' to deter the enemy and preserve the sovereignty of the people" (NNA, July 25, 2023). Al-

Manar also noted the drop in the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange and the devaluation of the shekel (al-Manar, July 24, 2023).

◆ **Dr. Saleh al-Naami** claimed that Israel had given the Palestinians a great gift, because the bill made it easier to prosecute Israel in international courts (Salah al-Naami's Twitter account, July 25, 2023). **Dr. Yusuf Rizqa, senior Hamas figure**, claimed senior Israeli political commentators agreed that far-reaching changes in Israeli society were inevitable and could lead to civil war (Palestine Online, July 25, 2023).



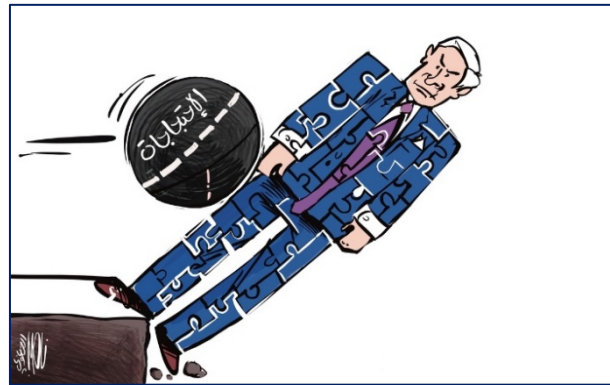
The Arabic reads, "Israel is burning" (Egyptian ghadnews website, July 25, 2023).

◆ On July 25, 2023, the Israeli media reported the presence of a Hezbollah squad, which led Hezbollah-affiliated journalist Hossein Mortada to post a picture to his Twitter account combining motifs related to the political-social crisis in Israel and the report from the border. The picture features the image of one of the activists recorded in the video flanked by a broken Star of David symbolizing the fracture in Israeli society, and in the background, the hashtag frequently seen on Hezbollah-affiliated channels, "#temporary\_entity." Mortada tweeted, "The hour is nigh" (Hossein Mortada's Twitter account, July 25, 2023).

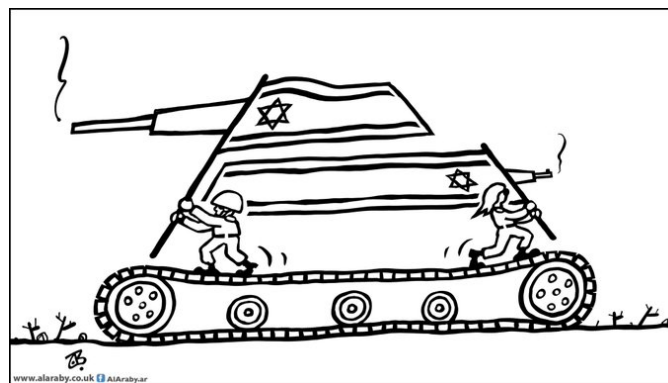


The picture posted by Hossein Mortada (Hossein Mortada's Twitter account, July 25, 2023).

◆ On July 26, 2023, the Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese daily newspaper al-Akhbar devoted its front page and several articles to the events in Israel with the headline, "Mourning in Israel – the Establishment of the Fascist State." According to the front-page article, "the atmosphere of mourning in the Israeli newspapers expresses the desire of the liberal colonialists in Israeli society to continue killing Palestinians in a manner consistent with international law." An editorial claimed that developments were leading to a point of no return, which was potentially very dangerous [for Israel], in light of "the regional and international transformations that help Israel's enemy." The al-Mayadeen website quoted the prophecy of Haaretz' Middle East affairs commentator, who said that "the day before yesterday the Israeli government officially approved the beginning of a civil war" (al-Mayadeen, July 26, 2023).



**Right: The Netanyahu coalition government as a bowling pin knocked over by a ball inscribed "The Protests" (al-Quds, July 9, 2023). Left: Netanyahu sinking under a tide of patriotism (al-Quds, July 13, 2023).**



**Cartoon by Jordanian cartoonist Imad Hajaj (Imad Hajaj's Twitter account, July 16, 2023).**

◆ After the Knesset passed the bill, **Tareq al-Hamid, the former editor-in-chief of the pro-Saudi daily al-Sharq al-Awsat**, wrote that "In the past we described Israel as the only democratic country in our region, but the situation has changed and today it can

be said that Israel has come to terms with the regional rules of the game and has become a Middle Eastern state par excellence, where democracy is distorted" (al-Sharq al-Awsat, July 26, 2023). **Lebanese-French political commentator Gilbert al-Ashkar**, in an article published on the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated news website Arab 21, claimed that "the social division in the world is growing wider with the re-emergence of the extreme right in its new guise, neo-fascism, which accepts the democratic rules of the game without weapons." According to the article, "the greatest paradox is that the Jews, who were its victims in the last century, have today become a breeding ground for [fascism]" (Arabi 21, July 26, 2023).

► Several articles referred to the implications of the legal legislation on Israel-United States relations:

◆ In an al-Quds editorial titled "What happens after the anti-reasonableness legislation?" argued that despite Israel's dependence on American aid and the American administration's displeasure with the legislation, the Israeli government chose to pass the bill. However, because of its interests in the Middle East, the United States will most probably not suspend its support for Israel (al-Quds, July 25, 2023).

◆ **Bassem Barhoum, a regular contributor the Palestinian Authority- (PA) affiliated daily al-Hayat al-Jadeeda**, wondered if the US would allow the Israeli government to continue promoting the legislation, given the damage it would most likely do to American interests in the Middle East (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, July 25, 2023).

◆ **Omar al-Ghoul, a member of the PLO Central Council and a political commentator who regularly contributes to al-Hayat al-Jadeeda**, echoed the July 23, 2023 Washington Post article by reporter Max Boot, dated July 23, 2023, who claimed that Netanyahu's policies endangered the close relationship between Israel and the United States. Al-Ghoul pointed out that the American administration and European countries had not yet grasped the magnitude of the crisis in Israel and did not understand that its roots went deep and were related to the heterogeneous composition of Israeli society (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, July 25, 2023).

◆ **Dr. Yusuf Rizqa** claimed that following the legislation, the United States would change its position vis-à-vis Israel with the excuse that Israel was no longer a democracy and the White House no longer completely trusted it. That possible scenario, he said,

had implications for the Palestinian issue, the issue of [Israel's] normalization with Arab countries and the conflict with Iran (Palestine Online, July 25, 2023).

◆ The Iranian Arabic-language al-Alam network published a video published titled "The Coming Disintegration" which welcomed the crisis in Israel, and the deterioration of relations between Israel and the American government (al-Alam, July 25, 2023).

## Regarding the Palestinian situation

► **Majed al-Zabda, a Gazan political commentator**, claimed the crisis in Israel was an opportunity for the Palestinians Israel's because the "Zionist parties" were on collision course, the crisis affected the IDF and Israel's various economic pillars, all of which could be leveraged by the Palestinians. They had to think very carefully about ways to weaken the "settlement project" in the West Bank and Jerusalem, strengthen the Palestinian "resistance" in order to spread it to all West Bank districts, and build a national front capable of leading the Palestinians and directing concentrated attacks on Israel's military, security and economy (Palestine Online, July 25, 2023).

► Other commentators expressed concerns that if the legislation passed, it would provide legal justification for a harsher policy towards the Palestinians. For example, **Dr. Salah al-Naami** claimed the new legislation would make Israel more aggressive in its dealings with the Palestinians because it would exempt the government from having to use legal grounds to justify measures of oppression and terrorism (Salah al-Naami's Twitter account, July 11, 2023). **Bassem Barhoum, a political commentator who regularly contributes to the daily PA-affiliated al-Hayat al-Jadeeda**, claimed that the Palestinians were the ones most affected by any development in Israel. He expressed concern that Israel's right-wing government would attempt to eliminate the existence of the Palestinians as a people with national rights. In his opinion, successful opposition to the bill and, with American support, halting the legislation, would be good news for the Palestinian public, as they would have a better chance of dialogue with Israel's left and the threat to the Palestinians would decrease (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, July 20, 2023). **Saleh al-Naami** wrote that the Palestinians would be the legislation's first victims, because it would allow Israeli ministers Ben-Gvir and Smotrich "to carry out their criminal plots against the Palestinians, plots of annexation, deportation, oppression and even extermination" (Saleh al-Naami's Twitter account, July 24, 2023).

► At the Palestinian organization summit meeting in Egypt, **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, said "we are facing an unusual phase in the conflict with the enemy and it



requires us to make exceptional decisions about how to oppose [Israel's] extremist policies." He claimed they has to exploit of the window of opportunity created by the situation in which the "occupation" was suffering from an unprecedented internal schism, tense international relations and frustration at being able to "break the Palestinian resistance" (al-Risalah, July 30, 2023).

► A rare opinion called on the Palestinian public to learn from the Israeli public and protest the trampling of their rights and the corruption in the PA. **Akram Atallah, a political commentator from Gaza**, argued that just as the Israeli public went out [into the streets] to protest what it perceived as a threat to the State of Israel's liberal democratic character, the Palestinian public should also go out into the streets and protest the corruption of the PA's senior officials and the trampling of their rights (al-Ayam, July 16, 2023 ).