



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

# Will Netanyahu take part of the responsibility for 7 October?



Is the moment approaching for Israel to settle accounts about who in the country bears the greatest responsibility for not preventing the attack by Hamas on 7 October 2023?

According to a new poll, as many as three quarters of Israelis believe that the time has come and that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu bears the greatest responsibility.

Following the destruction of Hamas' as well as Hezbollah's combat capabilities in Lebanon, the agreed ceasefire in Gaza, and the exchange of hostages and prisoners, Israel has largely achieved the objectives with which it began the operation in Gaza after the Hamas massacre on 7 October.

And even more than that, if the decimation of Hezbollah's potential to attack Israel is taken into account, but also the collapse of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria.

However, pacifying the threat posed by pro-Iranian militants in the region is not enough for the Israelis to put aside the question of responsibility for failing to prevent the Hamas massacre in the south of the country more than 500 days ago.

A February **poll** by the Israel Democracy Institute found that 73% of Israelis believe Prime Minister Netanyahu should take responsibility for Hamas' attack on Israel on 7 October 2023.

Almost half, therefore, want him to resign immediately, while a quarter believe he should step down as soon as the war in Gaza ends.

## Steady decline in support

Even before the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza, the Prime Minister was struggling with a lack of **confidence** in his government and in himself. Less than a year into his term, his conservative government has incurred the wrath of Israelis by attempting to restrict the independent judiciary and subjugate it to the executive.

Although the Hamas attack on 7 October

brought broader political support for carrying out operations in Gaza, this has not helped Netanyahu's approval ratings. His approval ratings have fluctuated since then, occasionally rising, such as during Israel's military responses to Iranian missile attacks.

But since 2023, it has been in a stable negative trend, rising from 52% unfavourable in 2023 to 58% last year.

**Netanyahu's mandate is being severely tested at a time when the war conditions for Israel are calming down**

Even though the balance of military operations over the last 15 months has favoured Israel, his mandate as prime minister is being severely tested at a time when the war conditions for Israel are calming down.

The question of responsibility for failing to defend against a Hamas attack in 2023 is now escalating right before the eyes of Netanyahu's government and himself, as a kind of epilogue to the war.

## Responsibility of security services

According to a recent **report**, before the tragic events of 7 October 2023, Israeli troops in the critical zone near Gaza were instructed not to approach Barrier I towards the Gaza Strip so as not to expose themselves to the risk of attacks and kidnappings.

This was undoubtedly one of the reasons terrorist groups from Gaza were able to infiltrate into Israeli territory and commit crimes, including the murder of 1,200 people and the kidnapping of civilians.

Prime Minister Netanyahu has even more reason to be concerned about the report on the causes of terrorist attacks in 2023, which was **published** by the Israeli security agency Shin Bet at the beginning of March.

The agency has taken on part of the responsibility, and its head, Ronen Bar, said that the massacre on 7 October "would have been prevented" if the Shin Bet "had acted differently in the years leading up to the attack and on the night of the attack."

### "October 7 was a complete failure" - The IDF

However, the Israel security agency considers the political climate created by the Netanyahu government in the period leading up to 7 October as one of the important factors that led to the largest attack in Israel's history.

These included the visits by right-wing government politicians to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and the creation of the impression that Israeli society is weakened and deeply divided because of the massive disagreement with the policies of the right-wing Netanyahu government.

A report on the same topic was **published** a little earlier, at the end of February, by the Israeli army, also with a long list of omissions and misjudgements that ultimately made the Hamas terrorist attack possible.

"October 7 was a complete failure, the IDF failed in fulfilling its mission to protect Israeli civilians," said an Israeli military official regarding the IDF's first such report on the tragic events of October 2023.

## Netanyahu under pressure

This wave of acceptance of responsibility for the failures that led to Hamas' attack on Israel on 7 October puts Prime Minister Netanyahu under considerable pressure to do the same himself.

However, since the crisis began more than 15 months ago, the Israeli prime minister has not once taken responsibility for the circumstances that led to the Hamas terrorist attack.



*Trump's desire for peace and stability to achieve his regional objectives leaves Netanyahu in an increasingly difficult position - Ksenia Svetlova*

This suggests that he will continue to consistently refuse to take any part of the blame for the tragedy, citing the fact that Israel's operations led to the fulfilment of the original objectives.

In doing so, however, he will face a very high level of mistrust of his policies and those of his government, accompanied by an equally widespread conviction that he bears responsibility for the tragic events of 2023.

His greatest challenge will lie precisely in the fact that Israel has eliminated most of the threats to its security and that under these conditions he will not be able to mobilise support for himself and his government from the potential threat to the country.

The challenge is even greater given the desire of the new administration in Washington to consolidate peace in the region as quickly as possible, with an undeniable alliance with Israel.

"Trump's desire for peace and stability to achieve his regional objectives leaves Netanyahu in an increasingly difficult position: he needs continued tension to justify his coalition's existence and delay elections," **wrote** Ksenia Svetlova from Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa Programme.