

Israeli Policy toward the Gaza Strip

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The Strategic Dimension

The Policy of Separation

With the disengagement in the summer of 2005, Israel hoped to be freed of the burden of the Gaza Strip, which today has a population of almost two million. The disengagement also sought to confront the Palestinians with the challenge of state-building and establishing a functional, responsible political entity, and to bring about a fundamental change in the nature of the ongoing conflict between the Palestinians and Israel. The effects of the disengagement, however, did not meet these expectations. Approximately half a year after the withdrawal, Hamas emerged victorious in the Palestinian parliamentary elections. The following year, the organization seized control of the Gaza Strip; economic and civil projects that were planned as part of building a Palestinian state failed; and violence and terrorism against Israel from within the Gaza Strip continued. Since then, Hamas has also grown significantly stronger in the military realm.

In light of the negative outcome of the disengagement and Hamas's seizure of the Gaza Strip, Israel pursued a policy of differentiation and separation between Gaza and the West Bank. This approach had two elements: first, the creation of a clear and discernible gap in economic growth and governance between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which is controlled by the Palestinian Authority; the PA endorses a political process and rejects terrorism. Second, the policy aimed to minimize the negative influences of Hamas and other terrorist organizations on events in the West Bank in order to prevent the export of extremist ideas, knowledge, and terrorist capabilities from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank. In addition to differentiation, Israel implemented a policy of closure (which intensified after the abduction of

the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit on the Gaza Strip border in 2006) to prevent the smuggling of arms and other means of warfare into the Gaza Strip, and of halting the entry of Gaza residents into Israel, with the exception of humanitarian cases. As Egypt also adopted a policy of closing the border crossing at Rafah for long periods of time, in order to reduce its responsibility for the Gaza Strip and later because of Egyptian hostility to Hamas rule, the closure of the Gaza Strip was tightened. Today, the entry of goods into the Strip to sustain the local population is almost completely dependent on the Israeli government's border-crossing policy.

As the closure tightened, the distress in the Strip increased, at times reaching a level of humanitarian crisis, in part as a result of the high rate of unemployment in the region. But Hamas did not change its basic approach toward Israel; in fact, as the hardship increased, it chose terrorism and rounds of escalation as means of having the closure lifted or at least reducing its scope. Israel, as a result, failed to find a way to relieve itself of responsibility for the Gaza Strip, both on a practical level and in terms of the international perspective regarding Israel's role in this context.

As the years passed, and as it became evident that there was no solution to the problem of the Gaza Strip and no ready alternative to Hamas's dominance in the region, achieving ongoing calm – based on isolated specific measures, as opposed to an overall policy aimed at leading the way to a definitive resolution of the conflict – became the short term Israeli interest. In practice, Israel came to terms with Hamas's rule in the Gaza Strip, without formally recognizing it as a legitimate governing element, but rather designating it as the responsible actor for actions in the Strip. At the same time, Israel chose to continue exerting military, political, and economic pressure on Hamas in order to weaken the organization and slow its buildup. The strategic goal of this approach focused on postponing the next round of violence as long as possible by strengthening elements of Israeli deterrence and, at the same time, creating the conditions to improve the Gaza population's living and human security conditions. This was based on the understanding that as long as hardship in the Gaza Strip continued to increase and as long as Hamas, the sovereign on the ground, found it difficult to address the situation, the chances of a violent conflagration increased. Under these conditions, Hamas was liable to allow members of the group's military wing and other violent

elements to carry out attacks against Israel. This, it was clear, would inevitably increase the potential for deterioration into another round of clashes.

The undermining of stability and the loss of control of events resulted in three rounds of confrontations between Israel and Hamas and three Israeli military operations: Cast Lead in 2008-2009; Pillar of Defense in 2012; and Protective Edge in 2014. The destructive results of these rounds of fighting and the consequent loss of human life encouraged Hamas to continue to arm itself, developing a long range rocket array and a capacity for production of weapons and ammunition, and digging a network of tunnels for self-defense, smuggling (across the Egyptian border), and entry into Israeli for terrorist attacks. The fact that each round concluded without an agreed settlement constituted the foundation for another round, renewed armament, and hope within Hamas and other terrorist groups for better results in the next confrontation, particularly due to the increasingly powerful blows sustained by Israel from campaign to campaign. Moreover, after each military clash, Israel was forced to contend with criticism sounded in the international arena regarding the devastation and the deaths in the Strip, resulting in increased damage to Israel's status and legitimacy from round to round. Twelve years after Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip, the international community still regards Israel as responsible for Gaza due to the absence of a political solution and the security closure, which it views as unjustified.

The attempt to reach understandings regarding a long term ceasefire with Hamas at the end of Operation Protective Edge through indirect negotiations mediated by Egypt was halted due to the increasing frequency and scope of terrorist attacks in the northern Sinai Peninsula. Moreover, the escalation in incidents between the Egyptian security forces and jihadist elements in Sinai and, most importantly, evidence of operational ties between these elements and Hamas's military wing in the Gaza Strip increased Egypt's existing antagonism toward Hamas (stemming from the group's ties with the Muslim Brotherhood). Another factor that frustrated efforts to reach a settlement involved the difficulties in coordinating with the Palestinian Authority, which opposed measures that would enable Hamas to consolidate its status. For its part, Hamas firmly opposed the transfer of control over the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian Authority, which Western donor countries set as a condition for the transfer of funds to the Strip. Nonetheless, an understanding evolved in Israel that it was necessary to increase the scope of approvals and

authorizations for the entry of goods and building materials into the Strip in order to prevent aggravation of the already severe humanitarian crisis. A mechanism emerged for cooperation between Israel and the UN representative in the region, which authorized the controlled entry of building materials and heavy engineering equipment for the rebuilding of thousands of residential units. These agreements reflected a change on Israel's part regarding the transfer of building materials into the Gaza Strip, in view of the condition of the population and the threats by Hamas and other organizations to escalate the security situation if they did not see signs that the reconstruction process would begin soon.

Hamas's Current Policy

Early 2017 saw many changes in the Hamas leadership, including the election of Yahya Sinwar as the organization's leader in the Gaza Strip. This development was perceived in Israel as additional proof of Hamas's fundamental hostility toward Israel and the fact that Hamas is not a potential partner for future political settlements. In parallel, the political and geographical separation between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank has reinforced the Israeli government's position that neither a partner nor necessary conditions for a comprehensive political settlement with the Palestinians exist.

Yahya Sinwar, who in practice also controls the organization's political bureau in Gaza, relayed a number of key messages in a media briefing in August 2017. Most prominent was a declaration that Hamas was not interested in a military confrontation with Israel. "Hamas has absolutely no interest in war, and if it is delayed for an hour, a day, or a year or two, it will be to everyone's benefit. We will delay the war for as long as we are able to, but in the event that the occupation dares to initiate military aggression, our strength has increased. The resistance has recovered what it lost during the last confrontation." Sinwar also expressed opposition to "Gaza's disengagement from the West Bank," explaining that this "would be suicide for the national project" and that "Hamas has no such intention." In the same breath, however, he clarified: "We will not allow any element to incite the public against us, and if we understand that this is what is occurring, we will be the first to turn the tables on the occupier."¹

In early 2017, Hamas made efforts to normalize its relations with Egypt in an effort to encourage Egyptian openness to the Gaza Strip and ensure an

economic and political umbrella for its continued rule in the Strip. This was also a means of bypassing the difficulties imposed by the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip in an effort to weaken Hamas, including salary cuts to PA employees and restricted payments for the supply of electricity. To further this goal, Hamas obtained Egypt's agreement to involve Muhammad Dahlan (who is supported by the United Arab Emirates and leads the opposition to President Mahmoud Abbas within the Fatah party) in the affairs of the Strip. Sinwar himself acknowledged "that the crises of the Gaza Strip, including poverty, electricity, the salary cuts, unemployment and the danger to the health system are what pushed Hamas to reach understandings with Muhammad Dahlan." Israel, for its part, took advantage of Qatar's involvement in the Strip as a mediating force vis-à-vis Hamas in order to advance economic and civil projects that are perceived as means to ease pressure in the region.

The change in the Hamas leadership in Gaza brought with it a new approach to the idea of reconciliation with the Palestinian Authority (PA). In the second half of 2017, Sinwar launched a process with Egypt to restore civilian control of the Strip to the PA. This initiative bespeaks Hamas's acknowledgment of its failure to provide for the welfare of the Gaza population. Egypt's President el-Sisi identified herein an opportunity to create conditions that would facilitate a resumption of the political process between Israel and the Palestinians; deny any pretext that the Palestinian rift is the obstacle to progress in the political process; and obviate skepticism regarding the feasibility of the political process as long as Hamas rules in Gaza. This allowed for the formulation of a staged process, beginning with the transfer of authority over the crossings from Hamas to the PA, including the Rafah crossing.

For Israel as well as for the PA, Hamas's refusal to dismantle its military wing and integrate its capability in the PA security apparatus is a highly problematic issue. Israel reacted fairly neutrally to the reconciliation and avoided any measures that would block transfer of authority to the PA. At the same time, Israel continues to insist on the three conditions stipulated by the Quartet for the recognition of a Fatah-Hamas unity government: renunciation of violence and terrorism; acceptance of existing agreements between Israel and the PA; and recognition of the State of Israel. Hamas, while not prepared to recognize Israel or existing agreements between Israel and the PA, seems amenable to a long ceasefire, in order to enable a

reconstruction process in the Strip. As such, there are advantages to Israel in a process where Israel does not have to supply benefits, while the PA gains additional responsibility and there is an extended ceasefire. This is also an opportunity for the situation in Gaza to improve – and for the PA, not Hamas, to receive the credit.

Israel's Objectives vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip

Israel's objectives in the Gaza Strip encompass multiple areas:

- a. Calm and stability in the realm of security.
- b. An improved and stable humanitarian situation, which prevents the internal political-economic-social crisis from impacting negatively and prompting an outburst that would ultimately lead to a security escalation.
- c. Removal of Israeli responsibility for the Gaza Strip and deletion of the term "Israeli occupation" from Gaza's lexicon.
- d. Egyptian commitment to security calm in the Strip, to a halt to the flow of weapons via its territory, and to restraint of Hamas and other terrorist forces.
- e. Integration of Western, international, and Arab parties into the circle of those contributing to prevent a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and for achieving calm and stability.

The implementation of Israeli policy regarding the Gaza Strip and Hamas forges a number of tensions:

- a. Israel's formal policy of the non-recognition of Hamas clashes with Israel's recognition of Hamas as the force controlling the Strip in practice, and therefore as the party that is responsible for what occurs there. Calming tensions and allowing the provision of humanitarian aid requires coordination with Hamas.
- b. The urgent need to launch a project to extricate the Gaza Strip from its humanitarian and economic suffering must be balanced against the need to prevent the strengthening of Hamas.
- c. The need to ease restrictions on passage in and out of the Strip to improve the situation challenges Israel's (and Egypt's) security needs, which dictate tight controls to define and prevent the entry of dual-use materials into the Strip that can be diverted toward weapons and tunnels production.

- d. The need to involve the PA in the rebuilding of the Strip while not opposing a Palestinian national unity government contradicts the policy of separation between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.
- e. International awareness of the problematic situation in the Gaza Strip must be cultivated, despite the sense of futility in the international arena regarding investments in the region due to the constant danger of security escalation and the absence of political horizon.

Israel has thus far refrained from formulating a comprehensive strategy regarding the Gaza Strip and Hamas's rule. Israel until recently came to terms with Hamas's rule in the Gaza Strip due to the lack of any better alternative and the need for a party that is responsible for what occurs there. At the same time, however, Israel seeks ways of weakening Hamas and, in the future, of bringing about the establishment of a stable regime that is less hostile toward Israel.

In the current situation, Israel has three primary alternative courses of action. The first is to continue and expand the present framework. With the assistance of UN/Quartet representatives, construction materials and other goods and necessities required for basic life and the gradual rebuilding of homes can be transferred to the Gaza Strip in a controlled and measured manner. The return of civilian authority to the PA will enable the acceleration of the reconstruction project and ease the transformations that Israel can provide for Gazans in exchange for security calm, without a need to involve security apparatuses against Hamas. Operation of the border crossings and the movement of goods in and out of the Strip must be improved, including more goods approved for entry at the Erez Crossing. There must be assistance in the rebuilding of infrastructure, such as water, sewage, and the provision of energy and electricity on a regular basis, and the fishing zones must be expanded. Nonetheless, it is clear that such activity will not serve to delay the inevitable, as it lacks stabilizing factors and elements to deal with the fundamental problems of the Gaza Strip.

The second option is to involve the PA in the management in the Gaza Strip, in coordination with Egypt, the Arab Quartet, and the international community. Prospects for this option have grown with the transfer of civilian authority to the PA, and this should encourage a comprehensive regional and international project toward reconstruction of the Strip. To increase this option's viability, Israel will need to refrain from opposing internal

Palestinian reconciliation. Israeli openness to initiatives aimed at resuming the political process and expanding the PA's authority in the West Bank on the path to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state would go a long way toward promoting the implementation of this option.

The third option is to realize the idea of full disengagement from the Gaza Strip. Based on the understanding that in the near future there is no alternative to Hamas dominance in the Gaza Strip (even if Hamas continues its military buildup, along the lines of the Hezbollah model), Israel should launch a process of reconstruction in the Gaza Strip, to be led by the international community and supported by the Arab states. The aim of this initiative would be to open up the Gaza Strip to the world and reduce (to the point of altogether ending) the Strip's dependence on Israel for the provision of goods, materials, and equipment. This will require building a seaport near the Gaza shore with security measures that meet Israel's security demands. A critical element in this option is close coordination with Egypt in order to ensure that the measure is not perceived by Cairo as an Israeli action aimed at placing responsibility for the Strip on Egypt's doorstep.

Several premises underlie implementation of any of these options, including:

- a. Hamas will remain the only significant military entity in the Gaza Strip, and the economic and humanitarian plight will intensify.
- b. The chances for success of the reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas are extremely slim. Still, the formation of a Palestinian unity government focused on the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip remains a possibility.
- c. The Palestinian Authority and its president currently lack the direction, desire, and ability to reestablish its rule over the Gaza Strip given the slim possibility of effecting a material change in the region and the inability to disarm Hamas. This situation precludes realization of President Abbas's vision – "one authority, one law, and one gun." The PA will be at a disadvantage if it attempts to initiate a violent confrontation with Hamas, that is, unless it receives substantial military support from Israel and/or Egypt.
- d. The Gaza Strip is of little interest to the Arab world, or at least to its major actors. The international community is also less interested in the

Strip than it was in the past given the regional and global crises that are diverting attention and resources.

- e. Integrating the Arab world and the international community into the reconstruction and administration of the Gaza Strip will reduce legitimacy for Israeli military action and responses to terrorist attacks emanating from the Strip – even if such action stems from Israel’s right to self defense.

Realizing the advantages in the different options will require Israel to present an initiative aimed at breaking the political stagnation in the Israeli-Palestinian arena. However, in light of these premises, none of the three options is optimal from Israel’s perspective. None ensure ongoing security calm, and all three are dependent on the mobilization of Egypt, the Arab world, and the international community – or an essential change in the balance of power between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. Moreover, each option would result in reduced Israeli influence on the events in the Gaza Strip and a curbed ability to defend its security interests.

Expanding the existing framework of activity requires Israel not to block reconciliation-related measures, or alternatively, to come to terms with Hamas’s dominance in the Gaza Strip and promote an accelerated reconstruction process coordinated by the UN. This involves taking risks by allowing the entry of dual-use materials that will enable Hamas to gain strength and continue fortifying its tunnels, and by recognizing the central role of Hamas. However, reconstruction of the Strip that is not led by the PA denotes the enhancement of Hamas’s status as the sovereign in the Strip. This reduces the chances of a return of the PA to the region, raises Hamas’s status in the Palestinian arena as a whole, and heightens its influence in the West Bank as well.

Therefore, Israel must see the implementation of the reconciliation agreement and the transfer of civilian authority to the PA as an opportunity to advance the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, so that the achievement will be attributed to the PA rather than to Hamas, which will strengthen the PA as compared with Hamas.

The Operational Dimension

The Dilemma of Israeli Deterrence

There are several reasons for the erosion of Israeli deterrence vis-à-vis Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Over the years, small terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip

have increased in strength. These groups periodically fire rockets at Israel, intensifying the tension between Hamas as the governing force controlling the Strip and its responsibility for the valued principle of “resistance.” Occasionally, especially when Palestinian civilians are killed following Israel’s interception of rocket fire by small organizations or in an Israeli response to rocket fire, Hamas is also forced to join in the rocket attacks, taking into account that such action could nonetheless result in escalation. In addition, when it encounters a severe governance crisis due to a shortage of funds and inability to provide for the needs of the population, Hamas tends to engage in escalation against Israel in order to blame Israel for its inaction.

In the meantime, Hamas continues to build a strategic array of long range rockets capable of striking deep inside Israel, as well as a system of tunnels facilitating the infiltration of terrorist cells to carry out attacks within Israeli territory. The organization’s sense of confidence is based on the assumption that Israel is aware of these elements and will attempt to avoid escalating the confrontation in order to prevent attacks in its territory. Moreover, the organization understands that Israel has no better alternative than Hamas as the strongest element in the Gaza Strip, and it therefore holds an insurance policy of sorts against Israeli attempts to topple its rule and reestablish control over the Strip, given the damage this would incur. Another element that harms Israeli deterrence concerns the conflicting messages on the part of the Israeli government regarding its intentions vis-à-vis Hamas in particular and the Gaza Strip in general. Finally, inconsistent Egyptian policy sometimes raises hopes within Hamas that Egypt will prevent Israel from doing severe damage to Hamas and its rule in the Strip.

At present and in the immediate future, Israel faces the challenge of preventing a Hamas buildup and stopping its efforts to build a rocket arsenal that would allow it to fire rockets over many successive days and pose a massive extended threat to population centers in Israeli territory. Israel can act in accordance with three possible strategies:

- a. Physically blocking the smuggling route in the Strip by means of a ground operation to take over the Philadelphi axis and control it over time, while attacking against the smuggling routes from Iran to the Gaza Strip. No ground initiative to damage smuggling into the Gaza Strip was undertaken during Operations Cast Lead, Pillar of Defense, or Protective Edge.

- b. Placing the job of halting smuggling in the hands of a third party (the Egyptian and American commitments in this context following Operation Cast Lead were not fulfilled; for limited periods, following the Egyptian military's toppling of the government of the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt demonstrated better performance and increased resolve to take action against the smuggling tunnels).
- c. Continuing the regular activity undertaken by the IDF and the Israel Security Agency (GSS) within the Gaza Strip to dismantle the terrorism infrastructure. This would necessarily incur ongoing friction and pose a permanent threat of escalation (this policy could be implemented following a military operation to seize control of the Strip, a cleansing of the area of terrorist infrastructure, and the creation and maintaining of the situation by means of an ongoing campaign involving activity deep inside the Gaza Strip).

To contend with the challenge posed by high trajectory weapons and rocket fire from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory, the Israeli security system continues to improve its abilities to intercept rockets of varying ranges, mortar fire, and unmanned aerial vehicles. In 2017, to address the challenge of the tunnels, Israel began building an underground and above-ground security obstacle meant to prevent attempts to infiltrate Israeli territory in order to carry out attacks, and to provide early warning of such attacks. Once the obstacle is completed, Hamas and other terrorist groups will be deprived of one of their main means of deterring Israel from taking measures to damage the group's infrastructure.

Despite Egypt's increasing determination under President el-Sisi to address the issue of smuggling from Egypt into the Gaza Strip, including by means of destruction of the tunnels, the extent to which Egypt is committed to contend with the future military buildup of Hamas and other elements that are active in the region remains unclear. Therefore, Israel will need a comprehensive and effective plan to curb Hamas's military buildup in the event that Egypt fails to deal effectively with the issue. This challenge is particularly complex due to the establishment of an infrastructure for the production of rockets, missiles, and unmanned aerial vehicles in the Strip itself. The production of the weapons was aided and guided by Iran. This infrastructure is based on the entry of dual-use materials into the region, which means that Israel needs to reject materials meant for civilian use that

could be used in the production of weapons. Note that Hamas's military buildup, which illustrates the risks Israel will be taking in a future peace treaty, runs counter to another important principle: the demilitarized nature of a future Palestinian state.

Recommendations

The notion of *tahadiya* (a lull in the hostilities) or *hudna* (an ongoing ceasefire lasting five or ten years) between Hamas and Israel, in exchange for a massive reconstruction process in the Gaza Strip and the construction of a seaport, has been raised from time to time via secret channels. The logic underlying the idea of a *hudna* takes on greater importance in light of the formulation by Hamas of an updated policy document issued in May 2017, which inter alia expresses the organization's willingness to make due (at this stage) with a Palestinian state within 1967 borders, albeit without recognizing the State of Israel. Thus far, however, the Israeli government has refrained from making a genuine attempt to advance an arrangement of extended calm with Hamas, primarily as this would undoubtedly mean formal recognition of Hamas's status in the Gaza Strip and its demand for an Israeli withdrawal to 1967 borders in the West Bank. In addition, following Hamas's victory in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections and the establishment of a Palestinian unity government (which was disbanded after a short period), Israel embraced the three conditions advanced by the Quartet for the recognition of the Palestinian government (meaning Hamas). Hamas rejected these three conditions, despite indications within the ranks of its leadership of a willingness to cease its violent activities for an extended period of time. In practice, Hamas's opposition to these demands since 2007 has blocked any possibility of making progress toward reconciliation between the Fatah and Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The impossibility of reaching understandings with Hamas regarding ongoing calm highlights the need for a fundamental debate regarding Israel's willingness to use force against the buildup of Hamas and jihadist terrorist elements in the Gaza Strip. In the past, Israel has taken action against aspects of this buildup that endangered its security, and a central element of Israel's current security strategy is the ongoing campaign, between wars, not only to strengthen Israeli deterrence but also to prevent, or at least reduce, the ability of Israel's enemies to engage in military buildup. The development

of criteria for possible action to prevent buildup is extremely important as a basis for decision making in this context within the Israeli security system.

The Israeli government's strategic aim vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip is to strengthen its deterrence and achieve security calm and stability in southern Israel. In this arena Israel contends with Hamas, a sub-state actor, that also functions as a terrorist organization, whose activity is characterized by fewer restraints and inhibitions than what is typical of states – even if it is clear that its actions may elicit a response that will be severely damaging to the population and the infrastructure of the Strip and to its own strongholds and assets. In its military campaign against Israel, Hamas's aim is to survive and maintain its ability to fire rockets at Israeli population centers and do injury to large numbers of civilians, with no sensitivity regarding harm done to the inhabitants of the Strip and the infrastructure in the region. This dramatic asymmetry obligates Israel, prior to any operation against Hamas, to commit profound thought to the results that can be achieved, how they can be portrayed by the enemy and their perception by the international community. Israel must also clarify Hamas's weak points that, if damaged, would disrupt the rationale for its activity and cause it great damage. In this context, striking at the head of Hamas's military wing and neutralizing the organization's strategic system and its production infrastructure in the Strip would represent an important intelligence and operational accomplishment. Therefore, an additional concept of operations must be used, with targets identified for broad strike damage that would have significant systemic effect, with primary emphasis on the power components of Hamas's military wing.

The Current Imperative: Reconstruction in Exchange for Arrested Buildup

Israel must move forward with an initiative for the multinational task force for reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. After years of diplomatic, economic, and military efforts – whose combined aim was to limit Hamas's actions, weaken its rule, and cause its downfall, against the background of ongoing stagnation in the political process with the Palestinians – Israel will need to raise awareness regarding the increasingly severe situation in the Gaza Strip in order to elicit a willingness among international parties to contribute. No broad military confrontation has occurred between Israel and Hamas since 2014, and ostensibly the ceasefire is holding; this has also worked to remove

the Gaza Strip from the top of the regional and international agenda. The reconstruction, however, is a need that continues to intensify.

Five conditions must be met in order to advance Gaza Strip reconstruction:

- a. Israel's deterrence must be strengthened, including with activity to negate the ability of Hamas's military wing to inflict damage within Israel territory by standoff fire and the dispatch of terrorist cells into Israel.
- b. There must be a mutual Israeli, PA, and Hamas commitment to ongoing security calm in order to establish an atmosphere that is conducive to reconstruction and to prevent additional destruction in the Strip. Also required is a mutual Israeli and Hamas commitment to establish protected zones in which both sides would refrain from attacking water, energy, and economic infrastructure, even in the event of hostilities.
- c. The PA must lead the Gaza Strip reconstruction. To this end, Israel must refrain from disrupting the process of Fatah and Hamas reconciliation and the establishment of a Palestinian technocrat unity government that would focus on the reconstruction project.
- d. Egypt must be persuaded to play a central role: by mediating and restraining Hamas's actions to prevent the smuggling of weapons into the Strip; and opening the Rafah border crossing permanently for the passage of people and goods, within the framework of an international reconstruction mechanism. To this end, it would be wise to encourage security and economic recompense for Egypt.
- e. Regional and international involvement must be mobilized for the establishment of an international task force that would be responsible for the reconstruction project with regard to resources, planning, and management; and an effective supervisory mechanism established to prevent reconstruction resources from falling into the hands of Hamas for the purposes of military buildup.

Notes

- 1 Ronit Marzan, " Hamas Leader in Gaza: Postpone the War with Israel," Forum for Regional Thinking, March 9, 2017, <https://goo.gl/pH6E6v>.