

PART 3: ANALYZING THE ALTERNATIVES

Managing the Conflict



Outline

Continuing the current policy of managing the conflict and adapting to changes, along with an effort to control the levels of escalation vis-à-vis Hamas through individual military actions. This alternative means coming to terms with the fact that Hamas is sovereign in the Gaza Strip—albeit weakened and deterred—and that a continuous effort must be made to delay its military buildup and to reduce as much as possible the direct impact of this situation on Israel (rounds of fighting) as well as the indirect impact (costs). A central element of this policy is intensifying the differentiation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, along with weakening the two parts of the Palestinian system—the PA in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza—which would allow creating political and territorial facts on the ground and delay the possibility of a return to negotiations with the PA.³



Strengths

1. Hamas, which would remain the sole body responsible for the Gaza Strip, would continue to manage the civilian and military aspects of the Gaza Strip.
2. The differentiation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would keep the residents of Gaza out of the demographic equation in a future Israeli-Palestinian agreement, or in any independent Israeli action, such as annexing territories in Judea and Samaria.
3. The existence of an autonomous Hamas government in the Gaza Strip is compatible with the logic of Israel creating facts on the ground, as it enables advancing plans to annex territories in Area C in the West Bank, while the Palestinians self-govern over the majority of their population.

3 At a meeting of the Likud caucus on March 11, 2019, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defended the decision to allow the transfer of money from Qatar to the Hamas government in Gaza, claiming that maintaining the division between Gaza and the West Bank prevents the establishment of a Palestinian state. See Lahav Harkov, "Netanyahu: Money to Hamas Part of Strategy to Keep Palestinians Divided," *Jerusalem Post*, March 12, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/vxzkfcm>.

4. Hamas's focus on Gaza and its efforts to consolidate its rule delay—and perhaps prevent—the expansion of its influence in the West Bank and therefore in the entire Palestinian system.
5. Israel's control over the entry of goods and the provision of electricity and water in the Gaza Strip prevents a humanitarian collapse there.
6. Economic and military leverage in Israel's hands enables it to impose its will on Hamas, to contain escalation events, and to maintain longer-term military stability and calm using hard and soft power.
7. Hamas—even if it is weakened, deterred, and restrained—effectively rules Gaza, restrains other terrorist groups, and thus prevents chaos or takeover by more extreme groups, such as PIJ or Salafi-jihadist groups.
8. As Israel continues to implement this alternative, it does not have to change its policy and enact controversial measures that include the investment of considerable resources. Delaying the diplomatic step allows political flexibility and abstention from making difficult decisions.

Hamas is aware that as long as it implements a strategy of harassment (small amounts of rocket fire, sporadic attempts to penetrate into Israel, attacks from the air using drones and explosive balloons), it challenges Israel below the threshold of a large-scale military conflict, and it thus can continue to extort Israel while maintaining its power and its rule.

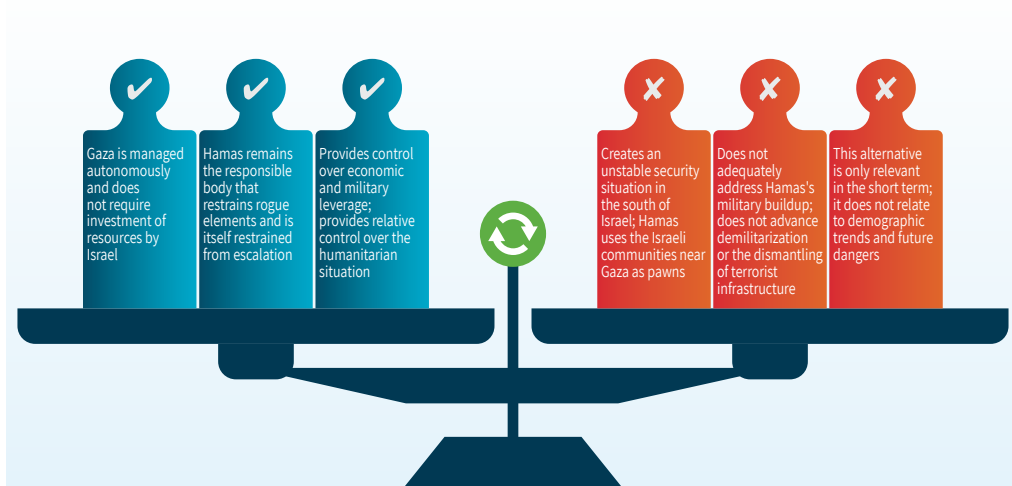


Weaknesses

1. The alternative does not address the increasing insecurity of areas within Israeli territory near the Gaza Strip, which includes the area of the security fence, the region near the border with Gaza, the south of Israel, and the maritime area.
2. This alternative does not address Israel's demand to stop Hamas's military buildup or create conditions for demilitarizing the Gaza Strip in accordance with the interim agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), or based on a long-term settlement.
3. This alternative does not correspond to Israel's current defense doctrine, according to which an ongoing campaign should be waged to dismantle terrorist infrastructure and maintain military control along the border in order to prevent its military buildup.

4. The alternative focuses on the short term and ignores long-term demographic and infrastructural trends: the collapsing infrastructure, the lack of almost any potable water, the mounting unemployment, and rising birth rates, which have already turned the Gaza Strip into a “pressure cooker” and a “time bomb.” All of these, in addition to the closure, create a sense of imprisonment and instills a lack of hope among the residents of Gaza.

Figure 7. Strengths and weaknesses of the alternative of managing the conflict



In summary, the conclusion that arises from weighing the advantages and disadvantages of managing the conflict is that this alternative maintains instability as it does not strive for a solution or, at least, for relieving the problem. Implementing a strategy of managing the conflict ensures relative military calm, but occasionally this is violated by Hamas and the rogue organizations. Hamas is aware that as long as it implements a strategy of harassment (small amounts of rocket fire, sporadic attempts to penetrate into Israel, attacks from the air using drones and incendiary balloons), it challenges Israel below the threshold of a large-scale military conflict, and it thus can continue to extort Israel while maintaining its power and its rule. Although Israel holds economic and existential leverage over Gaza (the provision of electricity and water), it is forced to apply it sparingly, as a significant economic improvement would benefit Hamas and strengthen it. This is one of the reasons Israel is limited in its ability to control the level of escalation. Indeed, on several occasions during 2018–2019, the Israeli government was close to deciding on large-scale military operation in Gaza.

An Extended Ceasefire Arrangement in Return for Significantly Easing the Closure on Gaza



Outline

Both Israel and Hamas recoil at the concept of an “arrangement” that would include mutual recognition and provide the adversary with legitimacy. Therefore, it is more convenient for them to use the term “understandings” or “semi-formal arrangement.” In the negotiations that have been ongoing for many months between Israel and Hamas, via Egyptian mediation, understandings are being developed regarding a lengthy period of restraint in return for a large-scale easing of the closure of Gaza. The PA is not involved in these talks and is not expected to be a party to the agreement—if it is achieved. The desire is to reach a five-to-ten-year ceasefire as part of the arrangement, which would enable the rebuilding of Gaza’s infrastructure and creating employment centers. The ceasefire is meant to include the cessation of all forms of fire toward Israel (rockets, explosive drones, incendiary balloons, and so forth) as well as the cessation of violent demonstrations along the border fence. In addition, the agreement ideally will include the return of all of Israelis—living and dead—held by Hamas, in return for freeing Hamas’s prisoners, especially those whom Israel had released as part of the Gilad Shalit deal and then re-arrested.



Strengths

1. The stability of the alternative—and thus inevitably also the stability of the security situation—would depend on significantly improving the humanitarian crisis and the quality of life in Gaza. This would require allowing increased entry and exit of goods and workers through land crossings, the establishment of employment and commerce areas on the border, and even beginning the construction of a seaport, subject to agreement on the operational security mechanisms.
2. The arrangement alternative would require that Hamas prevent terrorist activities by rogue organizations, which would certainly try to undermine the stability of the ceasefire.
3. At the current time, Hamas’s leadership in Gaza has been pragmatic, as a result of its continued responsibility for a population of two million people. Hamas’s leadership is interested to reach and implement understandings—first and foremost with Israel—that would enable it to provide for the needs of Gaza’s residents, even at the cost of reducing the use of violent resistance.

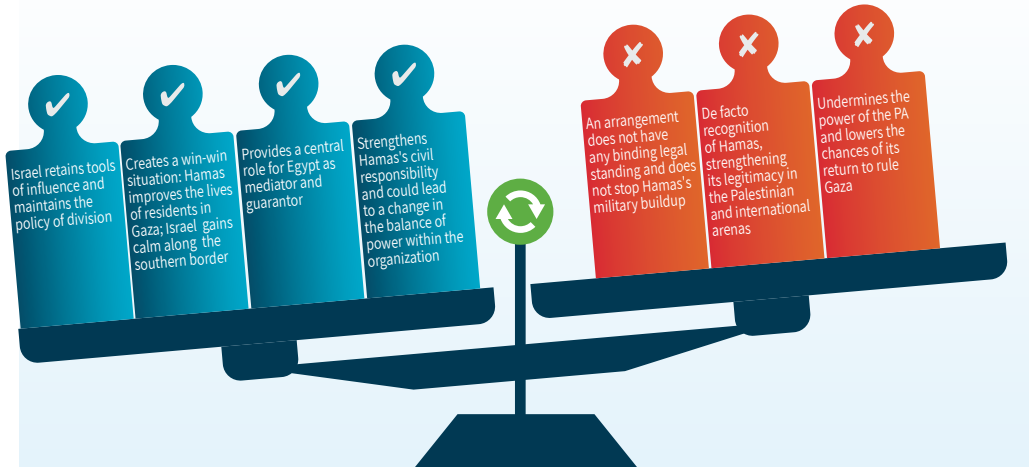
- If Hamas would receive enticing offers for an arrangement, it most likely would strengthen the influence of the pragmatic political leadership at the expense of the belligerent military wing and help them impose a ceasefire.
4. Egypt has a central role: It should serve both as a mediator in negotiations and as a guarantor for implementing the arrangement. Inter alia, Egypt would need to combat the smuggling of illicit items into Gaza, especially firearms; that is, it would need to play a key role in the mechanism of supervising Hamas's military buildup.
 5. An arrangement would make it possible to provide for the immediate needs of each side, including long-term stable security and de-escalation for Israel and the ongoing provision of basic needs for the residents of Gaza. Improving Gaza's situation is a clear Israeli interest, as the humanitarian situation in Gaza is verging on collapse, and there is a danger that ultimately Israel will bear the burden of dealing with it.
 6. An arrangement would not weaken Israel's economic and military levers of influence over Gaza. In addition, Israel would be able to maintain its policy of differentiation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.



Weaknesses

1. An arrangement between Israel and Hamas would inevitably weaken the standing and power of the PA, and as a result, the chances of returning Gaza to its control would decrease. The PA might even try to sabotage the implementation of the arrangement by not transferring funds to Gaza and especially by blocking the transfer of contributions to infrastructure projects.
2. It is impossible to reach an arrangement that includes dismantling Hamas's military wing and demilitarizing Gaza. Israel would try to set conditions for stopping the military buildup, but it would be unable to enforce this demand without damaging the stability of the arrangement. In this situation, Hamas would be able to maintain and even improve its military strength.
3. A formal or informal arrangement with Hamas would strengthen its legitimacy and serve as de facto recognition, and it could exploit the calm and the reconstruction activities to build up its military strength unhindered and to continue its efforts to take over the entire Palestinian political system.
4. Formal understandings or an unofficial arrangement would not be a legally binding diplomatic agreement and would likely be difficult to enforce over time and to maintain a mechanism for supervising and rectifying violations. The challenge of implementing the understandings would increase if the external or internal conditions changed, leading the sides to shift their interests.

Figure 8. Balance of strengths and weaknesses of the arrangement alternative




In summary, the alternative that includes an extended ceasefire arrangement has a high level of feasibility. In effect, this is the direction that the Israeli government and Hamas's leadership are moving toward, and in their view, it is a desirable stage, after managing the conflict. In May 2019, Israel and Hamas—with Egyptian and Qatari mediation—reached understandings regarding military non-belligerency in return for easing the closure. The fact that Hamas sat on the fence and did not participate in the escalation that took place between Israel and the PIJ in November 2019 shows that Hamas is ready for an arrangement. However, an arrangement in the format currently being advanced by the Israeli government weakens the PA while it simultaneously bolsters terrorist organizations and maintains the separation between the two Palestinian entities.⁴

Implementation of this alternative without taking appropriate steps vis-à-vis the PA would strengthen Hamas, provide legitimacy to violent resistance organizations, and would favor their way over the non-violent path of the PA. Israel needs to take steps that would help the PA maintain the balance of power in its favor and keep the door open for the possibility of the PA returning to manage the Gaza Strip.

4 Shlomi Eldar, "The Arrangement Will Distance Gaza from Ramallah," *Al-Monitor*, December 10, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/r27nhph>.

The probability of a ceasefire continuing for many years is not high and the PA would need considerable compensation for not undermining—and perhaps even assisting—Gaza’s reconstruction efforts. In order to avoid weakening the PA and crippling its public standing in the Palestinian arena, Israel would need to take diplomatic steps to show that it continues to see the PA as the sole Palestinian representative for future negotiations and in the international arena. In addition, Israel must ensure a role for the PA in the reconstruction of Gaza. In order to prevent the rogue organizations from gaining strength and to prevent any undermining of the stability of the West Bank—such as by the security forces that cooperate with Israel in thwarting terrorism—Israel must reward the PA leadership in order to show its advantages over Hamas’s rule. Implementation of this alternative without taking appropriate steps vis-à-vis the PA would strengthen Hamas, provide legitimacy to violent resistance organizations, and would favor their way over the non-violent path of the PA. Israel needs to take steps that would help the PA maintain the balance of power in its favor and keep the door open for the possibility of the PA returning to manage the Gaza Strip.



Creating Conditions for Intra-Palestinian Reconciliation



Outline

This alternative involves implementing a reconciliation agreement between Hamas and Fatah upon the principles of resolving their disputes and reuniting the Palestinian system. The main aspects of the agreement would include transferring civil management of the Gaza Strip to the PA (this issue has already been discussed in the past between the sides) and the establishment of a government based on professional ministers (technocrats) who would be acceptable to both sides. Despite the PA's desire to make Hamas's military wing subordinate to its security forces, it is unlikely that Hamas would agree. At most, Hamas would agree to the establishment of a coordination mechanism for exercising force and restraining the rogue organizations, as long as it would maintain its military capabilities; however, Hamas would have to agree not to exercise them without prior coordination with the PA.



Strengths

1. While Hamas would have to give up its governance over Gaza, it would be relieved of the burden of its responsibility for civil and economic management. As soon as the PA assumes responsibility for the Gaza Strip, it would remove the sanctions that it imposed on the Hamas leadership and cancel all of the steps taken to impede the living conditions of Gaza's population, including the obstruction of essential infrastructure projects.
2. The two organizations would work to establish a coordination mechanism to restrain belligerent factions currently active in Gaza. The goal of this mechanism would be to maintain calm and stability.
3. The international community would make the transfer of aid for the reconstruction of Gaza and the improvement of the quality of life contingent upon the PA's role as the governing body. Therefore, reconciliation would advance many infrastructure reconstruction projects and the creation of workplaces in the Gaza Strip and in northern Sinai.
4. Israel would continue to have levers of influence over the situation in Gaza. In return for a commitment by the PA and Hamas to respect previous agreements that were signed with Israel, as well as respecting the demand for non-belligerency, Israel would be able to provide many concessions that would aid efforts to rehabilitate and build governing infrastructure in Gaza. These

include the passage of people and goods, increasing agricultural exports, providing permits to work in Israel, expanding the fishing area, increasing electricity quotas, and providing gas and medical supplies. In addition, Israel would be able to assist (even if not directly) by recruiting an international and regional economic aid package for long-term infrastructural projects. The implementation of such plans could significantly influence the sides' success in maintaining the conditions of the reconciliation. In contrast, if Israel chooses to prevent reconciliation between the Palestinian camps, it could withdraw from previous understandings and even suspend relations with the Palestinian government, for example if the latter does not fulfill the Quartet's conditions. Another condition that Israel could uphold is the receiving of an Egyptian and inter-Arab guarantee to prevent Hamas's military buildup and its takeover of the PLO's mechanisms.

5. Reconciliation between the Palestinian camps meets the wishes of the majority of the Palestinian public. Public support would help the senior Palestinian officials to approve the reconciliation principles and to adhere to them over time, despite the opposition of certain Palestinian organizations.
6. Intra-Palestinian reconciliation would weaken the influence of the PIJ in the Palestinian arena and thus diminish Iran's influence in Gaza. In addition, reconciliation would neutralize Hamas's cooperation with jihadist elements in the Sinai Peninsula. These elements would likely try to undermine non-belligerency clauses and the process of rehabilitating Gaza, but a combined effort by Israel, Egypt, and the PA could minimize damages and even strengthen the PA's determination to continue as a responsible and functioning body.
7. Addressing a single Palestinian leadership would be advantageous for Israel when it wishes to return to the path of diplomatic agreements.



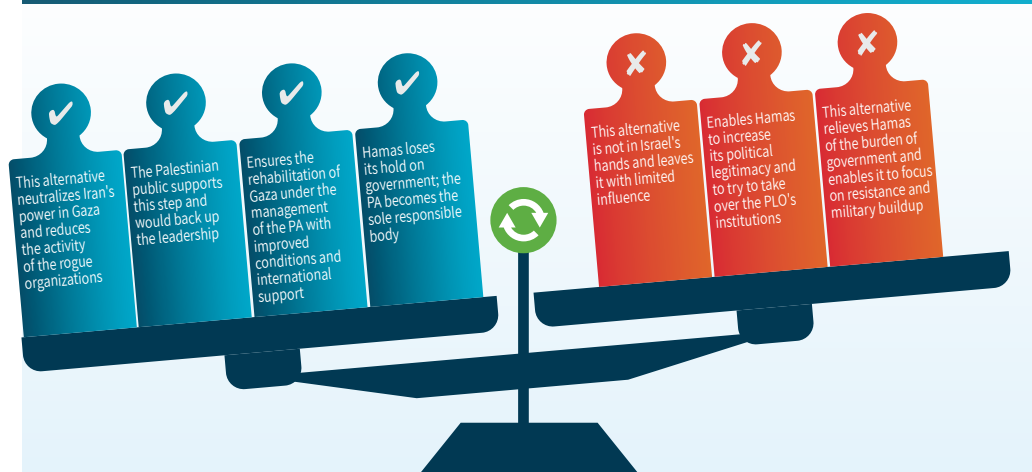
Weaknesses

1. Implementing this alternative is not in Israel's hands, and in addition, it contradicts Israel's policy of differentiation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.
2. Hamas—relieved of the burden of taking care of Gaza's population—would be able to restore its standing, which has eroded due to its inability to provide for the needs of Gaza's population. As a result, it would regain legitimacy; this would, of course, have a considerable impact on its ability to become a worthy political alternative to Fatah. From Israel's perspective, this is a weak point, especially if Hamas bolsters its leadership status in the Palestinian

- system without accepting the Quartet's conditions, according to which it must refrain from terrorism and violence and recognize existing agreements between Israel and the PLO.
3. The reconciliation plan does not address the need to prevent Hamas's military buildup and its hold on the monopoly of force in Gaza.
 4. Hamas conditions intra-Palestinian reconciliation upon its integration within the PLO and its recognition as a legitimate political actor. Thus, there is a concern that it could exploit reconciliation to take over the organization's institutions.

Israel's influence on promoting reconciliation is limited, but it would have considerable influence on its implementation—if it is eventually implemented. Currently, however, Israel is not at all interested in intra-Palestinian reconciliation, and it maintains a policy of differentiation.

Figure 9. Balance of strength and weaknesses of creating conditions for intra-Palestinian reconciliation



In summary, Hamas has already expressed willingness to transfer civil management of Gaza to the PA, but the two sides cannot manage to agree on a formula. In the current state of relations between Hamas and the PA, mainly with Fatah being the primary actor and with Mahmoud Abbas as the president of the PA, the feasibility of this alternative is low. Beyond the ideological gap between the two organizations, as long as Fatah has the upper hand, the organization does not have any reason to compromise and allow Hamas to gain strength.

Unilateral Disconnection of Gaza from Israel



Outline

This alternative involves completely disconnecting the Gaza Strip from Israel—continuing the process of the 2005 disengagement, according to the logic of separation—in order to reach a situation in which Gaza manages itself independently. Implementation of this alternative requires building infrastructure for subsistence in Gaza in the fields of energy, water, production of goods and commerce, as well as infrastructure that would enable exports and imports. This means that free passage of goods and people from Gaza to the Mediterranean and to Egypt via land border crossings would need to be ensured. In this way, Gaza would become autonomous under Hamas rule, which would receive de facto recognition of being a sovereign entity that is separate and different from the PA.



Strengths

1. This would maintain the differentiation between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and between the PA and Hamas, and it would support the claim that there is no Palestinian partner for a comprehensive diplomatic agreement.
2. Israel would be relieved of the responsibility for the situation in Gaza, creating a basis for Israel to demand international recognition of its border with Gaza (acceding to this demand would be conditional upon removing the maritime closure of Gaza).
3. Hamas would have to focus on governance and taking care of the population of Gaza. This could intensify the rift within the organization's ranks that could weaken it: The extremists would claim that strengthening the civilian wing damages the logic of resistance and completely changes the character of the movement.

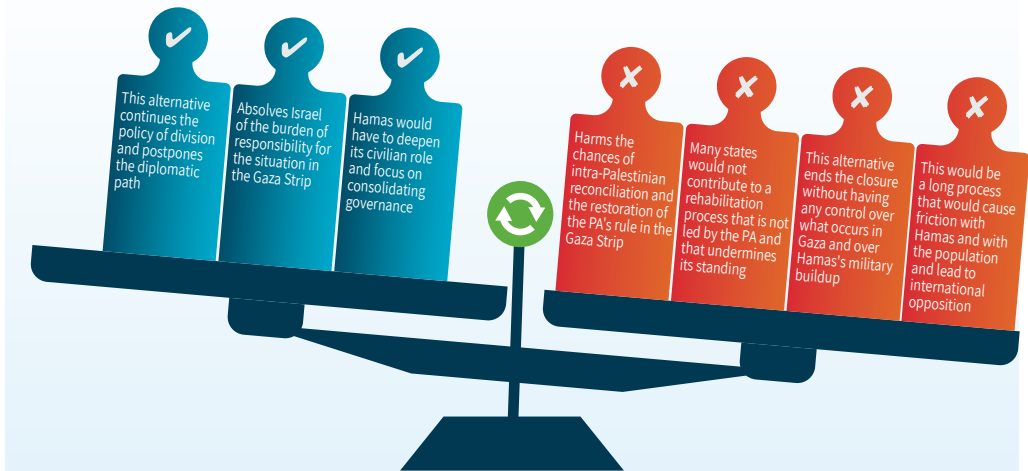


Weaknesses

1. Disconnection could only be implemented gradually, in a lengthy process that would likely be characterized by considerable friction due to broad opposition from the Palestinian side.
2. Even if Gaza develops the ability to be independent, the sides would have to coordinate their activity at the border crossings in order to address shared regional challenges, such as environmental problems. The proximity of the Gazan entity to Israel and its influence on issues of environment, health, management of natural resources, and so forth would, in effect, prevent total disconnection.

3. Disconnecting Israel from Gaza could not be implemented without Egypt's cooperation, as it would have to commit to permanently opening the crossings into Gaza and enabling the passage of goods and people. Egypt would not agree to being Gaza's only outlet to the world, as then it would be considered responsible for what occurs in Gaza. Consequently, Israel would have to provide Gaza with an outlet to the Mediterranean Sea and perhaps access to airspace; thus, it would also have to allow the construction of a seaport and airport in Gaza. This is a weak point of this alternative, as border crossings without Israeli supervision would weaken Israel's ability to monitor and prevent the entry of weapons and dangerous elements into Gaza.
4. Egypt would likely oppose this alternative as it would strengthen the position of the Hamas government—which is identified with the Muslim Brotherhood—and would harm the standing of the PA and the chances of returning Gaza to its control. Thus, Egypt would only cooperate if it believed that disconnection was the only option for bringing about long-term calm and stability in the Gaza Strip and only if Egypt reached the conclusion that this alternative would provide it with advantages such as improving its foreign trade. In any case, Egypt would likely oppose maintaining the differentiation of the two Palestinian subsystems.
5. The PA would oppose disconnecting Gaza from Israel and would probably try to thwart its implementation and success. Disconnecting Gaza from Israel interferes with the PA's ambition to rule Gaza again and to unite it with the West Bank, harms the PA's international standing as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, and perhaps even undermines the current international recognition that the West Bank and Gaza Strip are a single territorial unit.
6. Disconnecting Gaza from Israel could possibly encourage unification between Hamas and Fatah; more likely it would lead to strengthening Hamas's standing and giving it the upper hand, thus creating poor conditions for achieving an agreement between the factions.
7. Implementing this alternative would require recruiting resources and developing infrastructure over time. The issue of raising funds is a barrier that would be difficult to overcome, as the United States, the Gulf States (except for Qatar), and the European states (including the European Union) all define Hamas as a terrorist organization. These bodies also would not financially support an agreement that weakens the PA.
8. Iran could exploit Israel's extended disengagement from Gaza to strengthen its influence via military and economic aid.

Figure 10. Balance of strengths and weaknesses of the unilateral disconnection of Gaza from Israel alternative



In summary, under the current conditions, the alternative of Israel's unilaterally disconnecting from the Gaza Strip has a very low feasibility. In any case, it would be impossible to implement all at once and rather would be a lengthy, difficult process, requiring international funding in order to massively invest in infrastructure, such as constructing a seaport. Furthermore, there is considerable risk that by advancing this alternative, the arena's security as well as Gaza's economic and humanitarian situation would deteriorate. In addition, this alternative would likely encounter severe opposition from various parties, including the PA and regional players—first and foremost Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf States.

The Israeli public would also likely disapprove of a second disengagement process, given the prevailing view that the first disengagement, which took place in 2005, left the territory in the hands of terrorists. The Israeli public would consider a second disengagement as de facto recognition of a hostile independent entity bordering Israel.

Unilateral disconnection would be impossible to implement all at once and rather would be a lengthy, difficult process, requiring international funding in order to massively invest in developing infrastructure, such as the construction of a seaport.

Large-Scale Operation to Defeat Hamas's Military Wing



Outline

Conducting a large-scale military operation in the Gaza Strip would cause Hamas to lose most of its military capabilities, including the ability to attack the Israeli home front. However, there is only a medium probability that Israel could leverage its military success in order to achieve fundamental change in Gaza. Hamas would continue its civil rule even after being struck, deterred, and dwarfed, as it would still have the ability to maintain law and order, or it would be willing to return Gaza to the control of the PA.



Strengths

1. Severe damage of Hamas's military wing and other terrorist organizations (especially the PIJ) would be achieved. This damage would include the destruction of infrastructure for weapons production within Gaza and striking both the rank and file and the top brass of Hamas and the other hostile organizations.
2. Depending on the success of the campaign, it could have a substantial chance of fundamentally changing the situation in Gaza by imposing an arrangement on Hamas in accordance with Israel's demands or by creating conditions for the PA's return to rule Gaza via international support and aid.
3. The IDF would prefer to defeat Hamas and then immediately withdraw from the territory, as a prolonged presence could drag the IDF into reconquering Gaza. Following the operation, and as needed, the IDF would conduct raids into Gaza in order to thwart terrorism and prevent Hamas from renewing its military arsenal and building military infrastructure.
4. Dealing Hamas a strong blow does not contradict Egypt's interest in weakening Hamas and restoring the PA's control over Gaza. Israel could demand that Egypt engage in more effective efforts in order to prevent weapons production and the smuggling of weapons from Sinai into Gaza, so that the operation's achievements would be maintained over time.

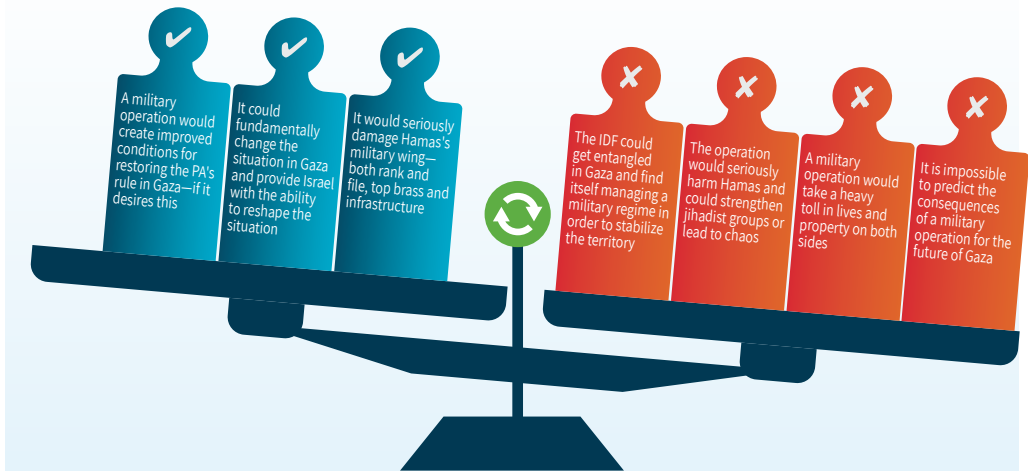


Weaknesses

1. The main disadvantage of this alternative is the inability to predict its consequences for the future of Gaza. An overly powerful attack could entangle Israel in Gaza over time should Hamas be unable to restore order, compelling Israel to leave forces within Gaza in order to stabilize and manage it. An insufficient attack would not produce the desired results and would leave Israel in a position of managing the conflict, while Gaza's destruction and its humanitarian situation would only deteriorate.
2. If Hamas were to collapse following the operation and no other body were found to take on the reins of government in Gaza, this would create a vacuum that would allow jihadist elements to take over the territory. In order to prevent chaos, Israel would have to stay in Gaza and take on its civil management.
3. The optimal possibility is restoring PA rule in Gaza, but there is reasonable concern that the PA itself would be reluctant to take on managing Gaza, lest it be seen as exploiting Gaza's tragedy to strengthen its rule. The PA also would be reluctant because of the heavy costs that would be required to rehabilitate the Gaza Strip after the destruction caused during Israel's military operation.
4. A military operation would take a heavy toll on life and property both in Gaza and in Israel. In addition, Israel would risk a lengthy war of attrition if it were forced to remain in the Gaza Strip over time and Israel would severely jeopardize its international standing due to the images of destruction that would flow out of the Gaza Strip.
5. Hamas, which is a movement with a broad social-religious basis, would likely reappear immediately after the IDF's withdrawal.
6. This alternative is based on the assumption that a dichotomous separation between Hamas's military and political wings is possible, and that in the case of a military defeat, the political wing would continue to function. This is an unproven working assumption, and it should be seen as a significant weakness.

The main problem with this alternative is that without the possibility of inserting a ruling body in place of Hamas—the PA or an international body—even if significant deterrence is achieved with the completion of the operation, it would not be maintained over time.

Figure 11. Balances of the strengths and weaknesses of a large-scale operation to defeat Hamas's military wing



In summary, the inability to ensure the desired end-state—a militarily defeated Hamas that continues in the civil management of Gaza—is a significant weakness. Whether the IDF succeeds to critically damage Hamas or not, the organization's continued ability to rule in practice and to manage Gaza with all of its challenges is not guaranteed. The assumption that it is possible to separate between civil rule and military rule in Gaza would pose a real challenge for the IDF in meeting the operation's objectives. The main concern that arises from this alternative is that Israel would be dragged into maintaining a longer-term presence in Gaza, whether because the operation's objectives were not completed and hidden cells still need to be located and eradicated, or because Hamas's rule collapses, leaving Gaza without a governing body to assume responsibility for civil management. This might lead to chaos and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis, and Israel would have to help provide for the basic needs in Gaza. To deal with this situation, Israel would need to institute a military regime and prolong its presence in Gaza, thus increasing the number of casualties and costs, as well as international criticism of Israel, and perhaps even sanctions.

Grading the Alternatives—Expert Assessment

Based on the criteria for comparing the alternatives, a number of experts were asked to provide a score between 1 and 5 on how well the alternative addresses each criterion. Different weight was given to each criterion: essential (x3); important (x2); desirable (x1).

Figure 12 below is a summary of the weighted scoring of each alternative, made up of the scores that the researchers gave for each criteria and calculated according to their weight:

Figure 12. Summary of the scoring

Intra-Palestinian reconciliation – (not in Israel's hands)	7.0
Arrangements for a long-term ceasefire	6.9
Disconnecting from Gaza	4.6
Military campaign against Hamas	4.6

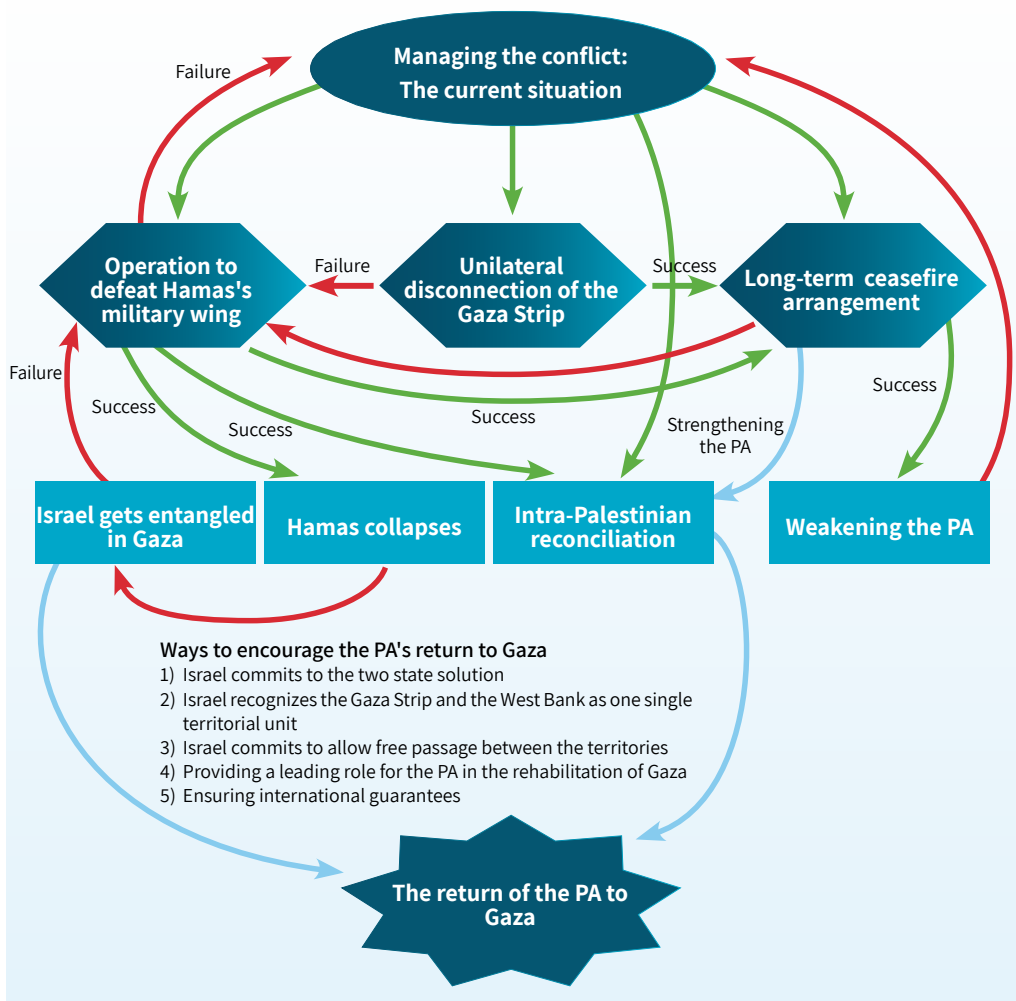
Figure 13. Criteria for scoring

Essential (x3)	Improving stability in the West Bank and strengthening the standing and performance of the PA
	The collapse of the alternative will not worsen the situation when compared to the current reality
	Having one functional, responsible Palestinian body in Gaza
Important (x2)	Maintaining strategic relations with Egypt and Jordan
	Preventing Hamas's military buildup
	Israel maintains various tools of influence
	The alternative does not close the door on a political resolution for a comprehensive settlement
Desirable (x1)	The ability to recruit external aid for Gaza
	Feasibility of implementing the alternative within the Israeli political system
	Preventing a humanitarian collapse
	Strengthening regional and international standing
	Reducing Israel's responsibility

Connectivity between the Alternatives

In the diagram below, the connectivity between the alternatives creates a circular dynamic: Implementing an alternative in the short term leads to a different alternative in the medium term and even a return to managing the conflict in the long term. **It is evident that none of the alternatives is stable over time. Breaking out of this circularity is only possible in a situation in which the PA returns to ruling and managing the Gaza Strip**, thus creating a single functioning leadership for the two Palestinian territories—this is the preferred way to restore security to the Israeli communities near Gaza and to maintain Israel’s regional interests.

Figure 14. Connectivity between the alternatives and avenues of success and failure



Consequently, in addition to improving the security situation and advancing stability over time in the Gaza Strip, in the arrangement alternative Israel must promote the conditions for returning control of Gaza to the PA and ensuring its central role in reconstructing Gaza.

According to the diagram above, disconnection appears to be the least stable of the alternatives, as it inevitably leads to implementing another alternative. Its success would lead to an arrangement vis-à-vis an autonomous Gaza, while its failure would lead to escalation and a military operation to eradicate terrorism. This understanding and the practical difficulties of implementing this alternative make it clear that this is an undesirable alternative. The alternatives of an arrangement and of a military operation are more dominant, as they both have the potential to substantively change the security situation. However, while an arrangement could reduce the chances of intra-Palestinian reconciliation,

a military operation would create the necessary—albeit insufficient—conditions that could lead to the return of the PA to managing Gaza. **A military operation could also lead to an arrangement, but this would not necessarily be better for Israel than an arrangement without a military operation.** Furthermore, Gaza's destruction and its humanitarian crisis would become more severe and more difficult to rehabilitate following a military operation. The inability to control the final results and the heavy toll of a military operation—in terms of human lives, costs, and Israel's international standing—increase the risks inherent in this alternative.

In order to reap the benefits of the arrangement alternative, Israel must help the PA avoid negative consequences. To this end, Israel must strengthen the PA and its standing in the West Bank and, at the same time, not sabotage intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts. Israel—in coordination with the international community—can strengthen the PA by providing it with a leading role in reconstructing Gaza, while the PA government could handle the reconstruction budgets. Consequently, in addition to improving the security situation and advancing stability over time in the Gaza Strip, with the arrangement alternative, Israel must promote the conditions for returning control of Gaza to the PA and ensuring its central role in reconstructing Gaza.