

PART 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementation of the arrangement alternative would require additional preparations that aim to prevent the weakening of the PA's standing in the Palestinian arena vis-à-vis Hamas. Processes that encourage a significant improvement in the economic situation and the quality of life in the West Bank, along with strengthening the PA's functioning and stability within its territory, would help increase public support.

There is no magic solution for creating positive substantive change in the Gaza Strip; however, this research shows that the best alternative—and with the highest probability—is establishing a long-term ceasefire arrangement between Israel and Hamas through Egyptian mediation. A ceasefire would include significantly easing the closure of Gaza and advancing infrastructure projects.

In order to increase the value of this alternative for Israel, external stabilization and supervision mechanisms would be required, and especially Egypt's commitment to support these mechanisms would be necessary. In addition, the ceasefire would need to include barriers for preventing Hamas's military buildup. Although it is possible to formulate understandings for a ceasefire from a more advantageous position after a large-scale military operation, based on strengthened deterrence, it is doubtful whether this is necessary. Even as this

document was being prepared (December 2019), **understandings in this spirit could be reached through indirect negotiations with Egyptian mediation, without the heavy toll to lives and property that would certainly accompany a military operation.** Comparing the alternatives shows that the conditions for an arrangement following a large-scale military operation would not be considerably better than what is possible to achieve without such an operation: Even after a military operation, no solution would completely prevent Hamas's renewed military buildup, nor return the PA's civil and security rule over the Gaza Strip.

The alternative of a ceasefire arrangement with Hamas would maintain Hamas's current standing—being the only functioning body responsible for Gaza. By emboldening Hamas's leadership role, Hamas would have more tools to keep Salafi-jihadist elements, especially the PIJ, at bay, which are Iranian inspired and currently seek to undermine Hamas's rule or divert it from its civil commitments toward resistance by shooting at Israel and dragging it into military action. In order to carry out the understandings and maintain a state of calm with Israel, Hamas would have to take a hard line against these groups, thus further solidifying its status as sovereign, which it already enjoys today.

The preferred option for Israel is for the PA to rule in the Gaza Strip; but without the necessary conditions, Hamas's rule is the best of the worst from Israel's perspective, since it also strengthens the coordination between Israel and Egypt. As for Jordan, Israel must convince it that an arrangement with Hamas will not undermine the PA's leading role in the Palestinian system, and that these understandings aim, first and foremost, to bring about calm and stability in the region—which correspond to Jordan's interests. The regime in Egypt of President el-Sisi, who has a pragmatic policy toward the Gaza Strip, would likely continue to support this alternative as long as it is seen as a temporary solution that does not preclude the return of the PA to the Gaza Strip and on a future diplomatic solution. On the practical level, it is possible to realize the ceasefire both within the Israeli political system and that of Hamas.

Reconciliation between the Fatah/PA camp and the Hamas camp could be a main lever for returning Gaza to the PA's rule. This strategy is preferable to the strategy of differentiation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which is currently a central component of the Israeli policy.

Israel must ensure that Hamas's achievements, as perceived and demonstrated within Gaza, should be matched with no less, and perhaps even more, impressive achievements that the PA can provide for the residents of the West Bank. An extremely significant achievement that the PA could utilize to consolidate its standing would be restarting negotiations for a political arrangement, in which Israel would refrain from taking any steps to annex territories in the West Bank. Pursuing such steps depend entirely on Israel.

Optimal implementation of a ceasefire arrangement requires a dual policy aimed at both Gaza and the West Bank. Alongside an arrangement with Hamas, it would be necessary to strive toward an arrangement with the PA in the West Bank. Implementing the outline for separation from the Palestinians in the West Bank, as proposed in INSS's "Strategic Framework for the Israeli-Palestinian Arena," would significantly improve the economic situation and the quality of life in the West Bank.⁵ In addition, in order to recruit international support and financial aid for infrastructure projects in Gaza, the PA must be included, as it is considered the sole legitimate Palestinian government by the international community. Consequently, it is essential to enlist the PA's support for achieving tranquility in Gaza by granting it a unique status in the rebuilding process—which would erode the victorious image that Hamas would try to create for itself. An

5 Amos Yadlin, Udi Dekel, and Kim Lavi, "A Strategic Framework for the Israeli-Palestinian Arena" (Tel Aviv: INSS, March 2019), https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/MitveENG_e.pdf.

arrangement between Israel and Hamas without the PA (as is the case today) would give Hamas more power to dictate the character of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

None of the alternatives examined, except for the military operation option, include an effective way to prevent Hamas's military buildup, and they do not ensure the possibility of demilitarizing Gaza in the longer term or dismantling military capabilities and terrorist infrastructure.

Israel needs to create mechanisms that bypass Hamas vis-à-vis the private civilian sector in Gaza and to promote the PA's involvement as much as possible. Only when the PA returns to power in Gaza and regains an undisputed leadership status, it will be able to participate in negotiations for a comprehensive agreement.