

**An Arrangement in the Gaza Strip: The International Dimension**

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**Israel should strive to change the post-fighting political, security and economic reality in the Gaza Strip, in order to avoid a recurrence of the situation that prevailed in the region on the eve of Operation Guardian of the Walls. The previous three rounds of confrontation between Israel and Hamas failed to jumpstart an arrangement that would change the reality in the embattled area. In order to promote change that improves Israel's strategic environment vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip, Israel will need to decide on an overall strategy – not just find provisional solutions for isolated issues. This strategy should include principles for cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, Arab states that have normalized their relations with Israel, and other states and international entities. The main goal should be the comprehensive reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, a significant improvement in the population's standard of living, and a complete cessation of all violent actions from Gaza toward Israel, through three integrated international efforts – political, economic-reconstruction, and military-security. Given the absence of any real chance of a change in Hamas's orientation, and certainly not toward democratic processes, the establishment of this complex international mechanism would presumably help, albeit indirectly, to weaken the organization's power.**

The military operations that Israel launched in the Gaza Strip since Hamas seized power (Cast Lead, 2008- 2009; Pillar of Defense, 2012; and Protective Edge, 2014) ended without an overall arrangement in three main domains – political, security, and economic – and above all, they did not weaken Hamas and its hold on the Gaza Strip. Without a comprehensive and integrated arrangement on these three key aspects, there is much likelihood that Operation Guardian of the Walls will not yield results different from those of its predecessors. Therefore, Israel must strive to change the political, security, and economic reality in the Gaza Strip in order to avoid a return to the longstanding, preexisting situation. First and foremost, it will have to decide on an overall strategy, and not just individual solutions to isolated issues. In this context, Jerusalem will have to achieve cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, with Arab states that have normalized relations with Israel, and with international states and bodies.

The main goal of an integrated action plan should be to establish perennial stability, which would pursue comprehensive reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, significantly improve the population's standard of living, and ensure an end to all violent actions from Gaza toward Israel. Achieving this goal requires three different mechanisms regarding the three principal dimensions.

***The political dimension:*** Without a profound change in Hamas's political orientation or, alternatively, a weakening of its influence and grip on Gaza, it will be difficult to change the reality in this area. A change resulting from a democratic process is preferred, but it is difficult to envision this process and / or the desired result. The alternative is to create a mechanism that will indirectly lead to the weakening of Hamas's power. This mechanism, a kind of advisory council, would consist of representatives of the Palestinian Authority, the Arab League, and the Quartet (UN, United States, EU, and Russia).

Why would Hamas agree to a process that weakens its power? The answer lies in presenting a plan by Israel that makes political, security, and economic sense, and in the willingness of the regional / international community to leverage its readiness to contribute to a comprehensive economic reconstruction process to extract the necessary concessions from Hamas. Israel will also be required to decide whether it ought to endorse a move that will be anchored in a Security Council resolution, which external parties may demand in the framework of a broader Israeli-Palestinian political process, whose success is not guaranteed and may reduce Israel's freedom to maneuver in the Gaza Strip, both economically and militarily.

***The economic-reconstruction dimension:*** A necessary condition for change is comprehensive and sustainable economic reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. Beyond obtaining financial resources, this requires the establishment of an international civilian mechanism that serves as an economic shadow government. It would include experts on various issues (economy, infrastructure, health, law, education) from the Palestinian Authority, Arab and Muslim states, international institutions, and donor states. Such a body could significantly improve the quality of government in the Gaza Strip and the services provided to the civilian population. If established, there will be a mechanism responsible for the absorption of funds and their allocation according to an orderly and coordinated plan between the parties involved. This will ensure that these funds are channeled to the required projects and minimize Hamas's ability to use some of the donations for military purposes.

As in the political dimension and certainly the military one, Egyptian cooperation is imperative. The flow of materials used by Hamas to build the military infrastructure is made possible mainly by smuggling from the Egyptian side of the border with the Gaza

Strip. Without sealing the passages that have enabled the flow of materials and weapons, regulation efforts will amount at best to partial and short-lived success.

Presumably a regional-international economic entity will demand commitments from Israel in both the economic and security spheres. These demands may include the absorption of products from Gaza in Israel, expedited procedures for exporting agricultural products abroad and importing raw materials into the Gaza Strip, and guarantees for the supply of fuel, electricity, and water to the Gaza Strip in any situation. In the longer term, these demands may extend to the construction of a seaport and airport and the establishment of water and electricity infrastructure. Israel will also be asked to guarantee that it will not harm these infrastructures, built with major capital invested by the international community.

***The military dimension:*** A different outgrowth from the last operation than that of previous operations requires that Hamas's ability to replenish its stockpiles must be curbed, and its ability to reconstruct military infrastructure be restricted, including the tunnels. Some of these goals will be achieved if the proposed bodies are established, including the economic body that will channel aid and other resources. In addition, a mechanism is required to monitor the reconstruction activities of the military capabilities of the various local organizations. In this regard a Security Council decision has advantages and disadvantages for Israel: its main advantage will be the deployment of a foreign military-security element in the Gaza Strip, which will help reduce the ability of Hamas and other factions to reconstruct their military infrastructure. Israeli consent for the construction of highly-financed infrastructure must be conditional on the establishment of an effective monitoring mechanism that ensures that the terrorist organizations in Gaza do not use it as a cover for activities against Israel, which in turn guarantees that it will not attack. Efforts should be made to staff such a mechanism with soldiers from Arab countries with diplomatic relations with Israel and from other countries – including members of NATO.

Israel's experience with international monitoring mechanisms is not unequivocal, and includes failures and successes. Examination shows that the successes stem more from a strategic decision by the Arab body that accepts the international mechanism to cease military activity against Israel, and not necessarily from the effectiveness of the mechanism itself. At the end of the previous three operations in the Gaza Strip, Israel did not try to bring about a foreign and permanent military / security presence in the arena, but in light of the past failure to prevent Hamas from a renewed military buildup following the rounds of confrontation, considering such a presence is recommended. Willingness on the part of Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and countries outside the region to participate in such a body may make it easier for Israel to agree to this measure.

Regarding the military dimension, and perhaps more so than in the political and economic dimension, a Security Council resolution is required, as a necessary condition for the involvement of certain countries and organizations such as the European Union and NATO. While Israel risks the restriction of its freedom of action, the potential improvements enabled by these elements over the reality in the Gaza preceding Operation Guardian of the Wall justifies the risk. Moreover, one of the clear results of the last operation is the strengthening of Egypt's position in the conflict area itself and in the international arena. From this standpoint, Israel's investment in strengthening security and economic cooperation with Egypt has proven worthwhile. At the same time, Israel must prepare for the possibility that along with Egypt's willingness to integrate into the arrangement between Israel to the Gaza Strip, Cairo will seek to use its success in achieving a ceasefire with Hamas to expand its activities in the political process between Israel and the Palestinians. This desire on Egypt's part will also be predicated on the clear messages conveyed by the United States and the European Union to Israel during Operation Guardian of the Walls: a solution to the Gaza problem must be part of the overall solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that is, a two-state solution. This view seems detached from the current internal political reality, both in Israel and among the divided Palestinian entity. But this should not prevent a measured and multi-stage progression toward the solution envisioned by the countries of the region and the international community.

Israel will be able to escape the hitherto established pattern following the previous three rounds of confrontation with Hamas if it takes advantage of its strengthened relations with Egypt, the strength of the Abraham Accords with Gulf states, internal Arab pressure following the waves of violence in Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and unrest in Israeli cities, and the Biden administration's position to stand with Israel during the operation (the first test of the new administration), in order to improve the regional and international reality in which it finds itself. Hopefully Israel's internal political crisis of the past two and a half years will not jeopardize the process of examining various alternatives for creating a different and constructive reality in the Gaza arena after another military confrontation – the fourth in twelve years.