

“The Day After”: Regional Outlines and Post-War Gaza Strip

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Analysis of the initiatives and regional outlines on the question of the post-war Gaza Strip indicates both considerable gaps between them and the official Israeli position but also possible areas of agreement. Examining the initiatives, some of which are no more than “trial balloons,” is the first and essential step toward realizing the objectives of the war in Gaza and shaping the situation for the day after. The main political and security gaps emerging at this stage concern the role of the Palestinian Authority in any permanent solution, the future of Hamas, and the identity of the future governing and military forces in the Gaza Strip. At the same time, the initiatives have room for flexibility and could provide an opening for freeing the hostages, the weakening of Hamas, and the conditional and gradual return of the Palestinian Authority to the Strip. Moreover, some of the initiatives offer the possibility of reviving normalization discussions with Saudi Arabia, coupled with more significant involvement from the Kingdom and the other Arab peace states in the Gaza Strip on “the day after.”

Both regional and international players are proposing political and security solutions for the Gaza Strip for “the day after” the war. Most of them, especially the Arab countries, have focused on providing humanitarian aid to the residents of the Strip and on coordinating efforts, particularly through pan-Arab organizations and the UN, to condemn Israel and call to stop the fighting. Particularly active are Qatar and Egypt, usually in coordination with the United States, on brokering concrete deals for releasing the Israeli hostages held by Hamas and promoting a ceasefire.

Together with these specific initiatives, there is growing engagement with overall political solutions and proposals to end the fighting and establish an alternative to Hamas in Gaza, sometimes involving the organization in a future government. Some of the proposals, which have not been officially approved (they have been leaked to the media), appear to be [more advanced](#) and detailed than those Israel has [published](#). Egypt and Saudi Arabia, perhaps in coordination with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Jordan, are promoting the regional initiatives, while Qatar

is offering possible outlines. Other initiatives have been suggested by the United States, the European Union, and the UN.

In a discussion in the Knesset Foreign and Security Affairs Committee, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [said](#) that Saudi Arabia and the UAE would be ready to take part in the rehabilitation of Gaza after the war. The head of the National Security Council, Tzachi Hanegbi, in an article for the Saudi newsite *Elaph*, [wrote](#) that there was room for Israel's regional partners to "rebuild the Strip in order to create a new reality." Hanegbi added that this would require a combination of regional and international forces to maintain law and order in Gaza. In this context it was reported that officials from countries in the region had made it clear to the United States that they were not keen to send their police or military personnel to Gaza as part of an international peace keeping force, but they did not reject the idea outright if they were to receive something in return, mainly a revival of the peace process with the aim of establishing a Palestinian state. It was also reported that Saudi Arabia and the UAE had [agreed](#) to provide financial assistance to rebuild Gaza after the unprecedented destruction caused by the war. However, they had certain demands from Israel, primarily handing over control of Gaza to the Palestinian Authority or its representatives, striving to achieve a two-state solution, and even [re-examining](#) the Arab Peace Initiative.

These initiatives differ not only in their sources and their agenda but also in their objectives; some focus on immediate and [specific](#) questions, such as the release of the Israeli hostages and various humanitarian arrangements in the Gaza Strip, while others look to the future and [propose](#) arrangements for the "day after." This article will focus on the long-term initiatives, by mapping them, defining their potential value, the interests of the states proposing them, and the extent to which they meet the interests of Israel.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE

Israel attaches great importance to the participation of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the economic and physical reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. This also emerges from the [plan](#) presented by Israel's minister of defense to the cabinet ministers, but in the framework of this outline, the participation of Saudi Arabia and the UAE as part of a multilateral force will not involve imposing law and order; that is, ruling the Strip. In response to Netanyahu's statement that the Gulf States will fund the rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip, the UAE's ambassador to the UN was [quick to clarify](#) that his country would only do so if they were shown a "serious" road map with a clear timeframe and objectives for the establishment of a Palestinian state. To demonstrate the seriousness of their intention to invest in the residents of

Gaza, the UAE set up water desalination plants at Gaza's border with Egypt, sent humanitarian equipment, and set up field hospitals within Gaza. The UAE's extensive humanitarian activity and its actions within the UN framework, as well as its consistency and [determination to](#) preserve its relationship with Israel, perhaps indicate its willingness to play a central role in "the day after" in the Gaza Strip, although the UAE has not made its proposed initiative public.

Saudi Arabia has also been very engaged, particularly through its [state media](#), with the intermediate stage from the end of the war to the formation of the replacement government in the Strip. In the [outline](#) for the "day after" in the Gaza Strip, written by the Saudi Gulf Research Center, it was proposed to exile Hamas's security and military leadership to Algeria and to allow a different ruling force to take its place, perhaps in return for the release of the hostages. It was also suggested that an Arab peacekeeping force should be deployed to the Gaza Strip after the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces, to be responsible for managing civilian life with a mandate from the UN. That would be followed by a joint transitional council to be responsible for the rehabilitation of Gaza until elections could be held. This outline does not rule out the participation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad representatives in the ruling body.

In response to the unveiling of the "Saudi outline," which was submitted to the French foreign minister, the author [denied](#) that it reflected the position of the Saudi leadership. However, the plan seems to indicate a Saudi wish to see an end to the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip and to deliver a blow to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, which Riyadh perceives as a threat, and to weaken the regional axis led by Iran. The Saudi plan is similar to the Israeli perspective, although it also differs as the Saudis seek to strengthen what they see as moderate elements, particularly the Palestinian Authority, but with new leadership.

The United States for its part is [interested](#) in linking normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia to the "day after" arrangements. According to media reports, the United States proposes for the Saudis and other countries to take part in rebuilding the Gaza Strip together with the "new Palestinian Authority"; that is, linking both Arab aid in rehabilitating the Strip and establishing an alternative government to Hamas with normalization between Jerusalem and Riyadh. In return for normalization, or "integration" as the Saudis call it, the Saudis and now also the Americans want to see a plan to establish a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Even in the normalization talks before October 7, the Saudis spoke about a political horizon but in a more vague way. Now, with the growing wave of anti-Israel sentiment in the region, they have become far more committed to the idea of a Palestinian state, as reflected in the Saudi press. The [words](#) of the Saudi

ambassador to Washington, Reema bint Bandar Al Saud, at the Davos Forum also indicate support for Israel's "integration" in the region, in return for Israel's willingness to accept a Palestinian state. When the Saudi foreign minister, Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, was asked at Davos whether Saudi Arabia would recognize Israel as part of such a deal, he answered, "[Certainly](#)."

The Gulf media also indicates that some Arab countries show a striking [lack of enthusiasm](#) for getting involved in the Gaza Strip and fear of the high price that they, particularly those in the Gulf, could have to pay, both economically and in terms of their image. They have a variety of concerns that include being accused of collaboration with Israel by entering Gaza "on Israeli bayonets" and turning their backs on the Palestinians; investing in infrastructures and facilities that could be destroyed again in the next war; and the security risk to forces sent to the area before the fighting stops. So on what can they agree? As the Arab countries see it, Israel cannot remain in Gaza as an occupying force, and a solution must be found for the governing vacuum and the chaos that will serve as a breeding ground for terror and extremism. Therefore, the [solution](#) proposed by the Arab countries is that the Palestinian Authority govern, perhaps also with some participation by Hamas, and on these points their approach differs from the official Israel position.

Financial support from Saudi Arabia and the UAE for the rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip on the "day after" the war is important but insufficient in Israel's view. The Gulf States must also fulfill an active political role in supporting a new Palestinian leadership to fill the vacuum left by Hamas, pushing aside Qatar and its negative influence, easing Israel's security control of Gaza, and granting Arab legitimacy to the alternative governing mechanism. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE could see this as an opportunity to expand their influence in Gaza specifically and in the Palestinian arena in general, even though they are deterred from such broad involvement without a political horizon, lest they be perceived by the Arab public as supporting Israel's occupation of the Gaza Strip, and the risk that their investment would be destroyed in another war.

Qatar

This small but wealthy Emirate has close connections with the Hamas leadership, more than any other country, and it has taken part in the negotiations to release the Israeli and foreign hostages from Hamas captivity as well as in various humanitarian initiatives, with the aim of stopping the fighting. Due to its political weight and its relations with the United States, Qatar could have a role to play in the "day after" in the Gaza Strip. So far, Doha has not published an official initiative

in this context, but messages from senior officials and the media discourse through its mouthpiece Al-Jazeera indicate its political preferences.

As the main supporter and funder of the Hamas government, Qatar has an interest, even if not expressed publicly, in maintaining the organization's power as much as possible. Apparently Doha [does not wish](#) to strengthen the Palestinian Authority in the Strip, since it understands that greater influence of the Palestinian Authority would be at the expense of Hamas. The option of removing Hamas as the main governing body in Gaza would significantly harm Qatar's ability to influence what happens in Gaza and in the Palestinian arena generally, its regional and international standing, and, above all, its relations with the United States—because Doha is gaining a lot of points in Washington from its connections to and mediation with rough elements. It should be stressed that Qatar is not demanding any political “price tag” from Israel; it is the only Arab country that is not making its economic contribution to the “day after” conditional on the start of an Israeli–Palestinian political process.

In contrast, Israel does have an interest in ending Qatar's support for Hamas. While nothing is preventing Qatar from taking part in any Arab–international task force that may emerge with temporary responsibility for the Gaza Strip, Qatar should not be permitted to lead it. At the same time, forces in Israeli politics that do not wish to restart the political process may find Qatar's involvement in Gaza appealing, as it is the one country not making any political demands of Israel. Given Qatar's pragmatic approach and its desire to maintain its influence in the Palestinian context, this scenario is possible, unless Israel manages to transform the alliance between Qatar and Hamas into a diplomatic burden for Qatar and establish an alternative to Hamas. There are benefits in giving various Arab elements access to the Gaza Strip, above all the elimination of the Qatari monopoly in the Strip, but also disadvantage—if it leads to inter-Arab competition for influence in the region.

Egypt

According to reports in the Arab press, Egypt has begun promoting vis-à-vis Israel and the Palestinian factions a framework initiative leading to an end of the war in Gaza. According to [Egyptian officials](#), these are preliminary proposals that have not yet been finalized and could eventually develop into a general initiative that would balance the reservations of both sides. The deputy head of the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies (ECSS) Mohamed Ibrahim Eldewery [clarified](#) that these are not “sacred” proposals that the parties must accept in their entirety but an open basis for negotiations—a “light at the end of the tunnel”—to end the fighting.

As for the details of the Egyptian proposals, the Saudi newspaper *a-Sharq* [reports](#) on a three-stage initiative: the first stage includes a humanitarian pause of ten days, during which all Israeli civilians held by Hamas would be released in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, and movement would be permitted from the south to the north of the Strip; in the second stage female soldiers held by Hamas would be released in return for an approved number of Palestinian prisoners, and the parties would exchange bodies held; in the third stage, kidnapped Israeli male soldiers would be released for an approved number of Palestinian prisoners, while the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) would withdraw from the Strip, and Hamas would stop its actions against Israel. The transition from one stage to the next would depend on completion of the previous stage.

There are conflicting [reports](#) about the possibility of the outline including a national Palestinian dialogue with the aim of setting up a technocratic government to engage in the rehabilitation of Gaza and prepare for general elections. According to the Saudi weekly *Al Majalla*, which is published in London, the Egyptian initiative includes setting up a technocratic government in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which means Hamas would relinquish control, after achieving a ceasefire. The proposed negotiations on the matter would take place in Egypt with the involvement of representatives from Qatar and the United States. These three countries would sponsor the process, supervise it, and coordinate the establishment of a neutral Palestinian government after the announcement of the ceasefire.

The Egyptian initiative—in the outline emerging from leaked publications—serves a range of Egyptian interests: preventing the outbreak of a regional war; a rapid end to a war that has already [caused](#) huge damage to Egypt's Suez Canal revenues and to the tourism sector, Egypt's main sources of foreign currency; halting the mass waves of Gazan residents from pouring across the border whether voluntarily or with Israel's direct encouragement; positioning Egypt as a central element in the processes of brokering humanitarian aid and reconstructing Gaza, while bringing other regional and international players into the process; paving the way for a return of the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip and the creation of a political horizon for renewal of the peace process.

As Israel sees it, the advantage of the Egyptian initiative is that it creates a secure outline for the release of the hostages. According to some reports, the initiative also suits Israel's aim of installing transitional rule in the Gaza Strip by means of a technocratic government, including neither Hamas nor the Palestinian Authority, at least in the initial stage. However, it appears that the Egyptian initiative does not meet Israel's other interests: the IDF's maintaining the security responsibility

for Gaza; the total collapse of Hamas as a ruling and military force for the medium to long term; the removal of Qatari involvement in Gaza; and the demilitarization of the Strip.

In addition, Israel and Egypt are in dispute over tighter supervision of the Philadelphi Corridor, which is essential to preventing Hamas and the other terror organizations in Gaza from regaining their military strength by smuggling weapons. Netanyahu's statement on the need for Israeli control of the corridor [was met](#) by strong criticism from Egypt, which warned that Israel's renewed occupation of this buffer zone would be a breach of the military appendix to the peace treaty, which led to the deployment of Egyptian border guards along the border. According to several reports, Egypt has so far also [rejected](#) Israeli requests to place [deterrent sensors](#) along the corridor to detect smuggling tunnels.

Emerging Disagreements

An examination of the initiatives published to date reveals some gaps:

The future of Hamas as a political player: Various Arab initiatives give Hamas a role, albeit not as a sole ruler, as part of a future government of the Gaza Strip. According to senior Israeli officials, this possibility is unacceptable to Israel. This approach is also contrary to the American position that Hamas is not a legitimate player with a right to rule Gaza. In addition, there are considerable gaps among the initiatives themselves, irrespective of the Israeli and American positions. These gaps, for example, over the role of Hamas after the war, reflect divisions in the Arab world, particularly between the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt on one side, and Qatar on the other. Qatar is also opposed to the American position that stresses the need to replace Hamas with a "revitalized Palestinian Authority."

The return of the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip: The Israeli government rejects the possibility of the Palestinian Authority fulfilling any role in Gaza in general, and particularly in the absence of deep reforms in its ranks. However, most of the Arab initiatives so far, excluding that of Qatar, give the Palestinian Authority a central role in Gaza's future. Israel has officially declared that it has no intention of ruling Gaza, and, of course, it is strongly opposed to Hamas's rule in the area, but as for "the day after," its messages are more vague. It is not entirely clear what is being referred to in Israel's statement about "local elements" in Gaza that will manage its daily life and step into the vacuum left by Hamas. These vague messages are in conflict with those of the United States, stressing the need to promote the two-state solution and its wish for a "[revitalized Palestinian Authority](#)."

The involvement of Arab countries: The role of Arab countries in Gaza on the “day after” remains deliberately vague, to avoid exposing agreements or disagreements. Therefore, a gap is possible between Israel’s expectation of their active involvement in the political management of the Gaza Strip and maintenance of its internal security, and their actual positions. The Gulf States for their part are not eager to take on a role that could cause them political and reputational damage, certainly not without (what they see as) a political quid pro quo from Israel. In any case, it is more likely that they will agree to take on an economic role in Gaza’s reconstruction—providing remote support—rather than a role with any security implications. Egypt is also not expected to agree to sending its police forces to Gaza, where they could become embroiled in direct conflict with Hamas.

Security arrangements: Other potential disagreements relate not only to different political views but also to security concepts that diverge from those of both Israel and the United States. For example, the American administration wishes to maintain the territorial area of the Gaza Strip as it is and is opposed to any changes that Israel already appears to be making on the ground, including the establishment of a security “perimeter” along the Israeli border about one kilometer from the Gaza Strip. Another security disagreement relates to the Philadelphi Corridor, where Egypt will be asked to be flexible in allowing an arrangement that considers Israel’s essential security needs.

Reconstruction of the Strip: The issue of financing the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip is critical and has implications for the nature of Gaza’s future government. The main address for funding is the international community, above all the Gulf States (with or without Qatar), some of which have competing agendas.

Areas of agreement

Information about the various initiatives proposed by Arab countries is based partly on deliberate leaks, intended to test their feasibility. Still, examining them vis-à-vis the Israeli position as presented leaves significant room for agreement:

Involving the Palestinians in the government of the Gaza Strip: An agreement could take place over control by a “reformed” Palestinian Authority in Gaza and with a different leadership. On this matter, Israel could align with the United States, the international community, and the Arab countries, subject to reforms of the Palestinian Authority and/or replacing Abu Mazen with a different leadership. This was clearly evident in the article by Tzachi Hanegbi in *Elaph*, who stated that Israel was aware of the international community’s wish to involve the Palestinian Authority in the future of the Gaza Strip, and Israel could agree to this after the Palestinian Authority engages in reform in the fields of education and ends the

incitement against Israel. There is room for possible consensus in this context in that Israel and many Arab states, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia, share a dislike for the leadership of the Palestinian Authority. Another possible way out would be to set up a “technocratic” government of professionals with links to Gaza and/or who do not officially identify with the Palestinian Authority and its current leadership, such as Salam Fayyad.

Weakening Hamas: The initiatives could turn out to be beneficial if they combine a minimally “respectable” exit for Hamas with the achievement of Israel’s principal war goals, above all the release of the hostages, while neutralizing the military and governing capabilities of Hamas and ensuring suitable and sustainable security arrangements for Israel vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip, for the medium and long term. The release of the Israeli hostages in return for the exile of Hamas leaders—as proposed by the Saudi initiative—could offer such a solution, but it is not clear whether it is realistic given the emerging opposition of Hamas in Gaza. Palestinian unity—with Hamas remaining as a weakened, disarmed political factor, subordinate to the Palestinian Authority—could be another solution, if only temporary, and even if not desired. Such an outline, which would be hard for Israel to accept, could become the basis for the involvement of other countries in establishing a new strategic reality in the Gaza Strip.

The role of Arab countries in Gaza: Another area for possible agreement lies in the Arab willingness to take an active part in what happens in Gaza on “the day after.” While the Arab countries have stipulated conditions for any such involvement, it appears that they have understood that responding positively to requests from the United States could bring strategic benefits—weakening Iran and its proxies, potentially expanding their influence in the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Authority, as well as in the Arab world, and the possibility of restarting an Israeli-Palestinian political process. The Americans and the international community will need to compensate in exchange for more active Arab involvement in post-war Gaza.

Renewal of the normalization processes: Saudi Arabia seems to have agreed to link the renewal of the normalization process with Israel with their having greater involvement in the post-war Gaza. The Saudi consent to renew negotiations toward normalization has the potential for a political process that inter alia will strengthen the Palestinian Authority at the expense of Hamas, subject to a positive American response to Saudi demands (a civilian nuclear program, a defense treaty, and advanced weapons) and to Israel’s [agreement](#) to revive the political process. This Saudi demand is not new but has been reinforced by the war in Gaza due to the strengthening of pro-Palestinian sentiments in the region.

Conclusion

Not everyone in Israel recognizes the importance of the need to formulate and present an Israeli strategic concept for “the day after” the war. Even the term “the day after,” which is used in the political and media discourse around military moves, has different meanings for many people, inside and outside Israel. The international initiatives that have been made public so far highlight the central role of Arab countries in supporting the various solutions and in being involved in their implementation. Moreover, the Arab initiatives—particularly the Saudi and Egyptian ones—are also the most detailed, going beyond the basic principles found in all the international outlines discussed here. Although these initiatives are not yet complete, our analysis indicates both significant gaps and possible areas of consent between Israel, the Arab countries, and the United States, and above all—a future government by a “[reformed](#)” Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip. Israel must therefore try to exploit these areas of consensus with the Arab countries and with the international parties, in order to terminate Hamas’s rule. This cooperation between international and regional parties also could advance Israel’s security interests.

In spite of the work by Israeli professional bodies, including the National Security Council, the Israeli government has so far refrained from publicly presenting its response to the regional initiatives or its own idea for the day after the war, whether due to political-coalition considerations, or the desire to keep its response under wraps, or due to real difficulty in formulating practical solutions. However, senior Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, have referred to the central role that they believe specific Arab states must play in shaping the future reality of the Gaza Strip. Another possible way of bridging the gaps could be adopting a gradual process in which the Palestinian Authority would not return to Gaza immediately to replace Hamas but rather would be conditional upon the necessary processes and outcome of the preparation and reform in the Palestinian Authority, as an objective for the medium and long term. While Israel will agree to the final objective, implementation would be subject to the creation of suitable conditions on the ground, as well as reviving the normalization process with Saudi Arabia.

The Saudis are leaving the door [open](#) to normalization, or “integration” as they call it. The Saudi and American interests and the motivation to achieve an agreement remain valid and have grown even stronger, while an end to the Hamas government in Gaza would provide an opportunity to renew the process while linking it to active Saudi, Egyptian, and other Arab participation in providing financial support for the Palestinian Authority, training its forces, and assisting in

holding elections, but not in running daily life or imposing law and order in the Gaza Strip. An Israeli–Saudi normalization agreement would be an appropriate response to Hamas and Iran, who sought to derail the process. Such an agreement would yield economic dividends and improved legitimacy for Israel in the Arab and Muslim world, strengthen the status of the United States in the region, and upgrade Saudi Arabia’s political and security power as a counterweight to Iran. Israel would be seen as opening the door to peace, reaping numerous dividends from the American administration, and with the help of the Arab world and a supportive international community on “the day after” in Gaza.

Recommendations

Israel should formulate and present a strategic concept for “the day after,” with the focus on areas of possible agreement between itself and the Arab countries.

Israel should recognize the gap between its wish to see the Arab countries taking direct responsibility for the running of the Gaza Strip and maintenance of law and order after the war and their actual position and reluctance to do so.

Israel should keep the United States and the European Union on its side to ensure an appropriate response to its security interests, the weakening of Hamas, and the recruiting of countries in the region to take on constructive roles.

Israel should ensure that any role for Qatar in the Gaza Strip after the war is conditional on a change of its policy toward Hamas—if the organization remain in Gaza as a political force—and its integration in the international-Arab mechanism there.

Israel should link the creation of the requested political horizon in the Palestinian context and the gradual integration of a reformed Palestinian Authority in Gaza, to advancing the normalization process with Saudi Arabia.