

Abstract/Main Recommendations

The state of Israel stands at a crossroads.

The current path we are treading along leads to damage to Israel's resilience and status, while presenting a set of serious risks:

1. Halting the operational momentum in the Gaza Strip and losing the initiative, while slipping into a long war of attrition in both the southern and northern arenas;
2. Damaging the resilience of Israeli society while delaying the rehabilitation of civilian life;
3. Diminishing the reputation of Israel's military strength and the deterrence against Iran and its axis, in addition to facing a violent outbreak—worse than the current one in Judea and Samaria, while strengthening Hamas's position there;
4. Transforming Israel into an isolated state in the international arena, losing American backing, and severely damaging relations with Arab states, particularly Jordan and Egypt, in addition to increasing antisemitism;
5. Missing out on the historic opportunity for normalization with Saudi Arabia.

It is crucial to end the ambiguity and confusion resulting from the gap between a significant reduction in fighting and the pursuit of an undefined “total victory.” Realistic goals must be defined within a specified timeframe to end the war. Therefore, Israel should pursue an alternative path that achieves the war's objectives and substantially improves Israel's strategic balance. This includes:

1. Restoring security and a sense of security in the border regions;
2. Reducing damage in the international arena and working toward reinstating Israel's standing worldwide;
3. Initiating the rehabilitation process of Israeli society and healing its wounds;
4. Designing a regional system to counterbalance the axis of resistance led by Iran and to serve as an infrastructure for Israel's integration into the region;
5. Opening a political horizon in the Palestinian arena that could eventually lead to conflict mitigation.

Choosing this path entails implementing strategic recommendations, with the main ones being:

1. Pursuing a **hostage deal** that includes a (seemingly unlimited) ceasefire;
2. Acknowledging that an (**“upgraded”**) **Palestinian Authority**, with potential support from an inter-Arab and international coalition, is the preferred pragmatic solution for addressing civilian control in the Gaza Strip;

3. Taking advantage of the ceasefire accompanying the hostage deal to reach **an arrangement on the Lebanese border** and eliminate the threat of infiltration and direct fire;
4. Transferring **massive humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip**, including from Israeli territory, to be distributed by the Palestinian Authority under the auspices of the Arab and international coalition;
5. Developing a plan for the **hermetic closure of the Philadelphi Corridor**, in close cooperation with Egypt and the United States. A **military operation in Rafah** will occur at a later date as part of the postwar stabilization efforts.

Summary of the Recommendations:

1. Relations with the United States—The war has led the United States to become actively involved in the Middle East once again, and it has strengthened its ties with Israel. INSS previously pointed out the risk to the special relationship between the two countries, stressing that it was a serious threat. While the current US support for Israel has not substantially altered this threat, American support for Israel sharply contrasts with the distancing from Israel and the criticism of the war and Israeli policies among large segments of the American public. However, maintaining the current situation increases the danger to the stability of the special relationship, stemming in part from long-term sociopolitical trends within American society itself. Therefore, it is imperative to stabilize relations and, at the same time, strengthen the reengagement of the United States in the Middle East as a **geostrategic opportunity** of utmost importance for the security of the State of Israel. **Implementing the recommendations detailed in this document will enhance relations with the United States and even help prevent further deterioration of Israel's international relations.**

2. Regional architecture and an alternative government in the Gaza Strip—Local Fatah entities connected to the Palestinian Authority, which will undergo reform processes, should be established as the civilian alternative to Hamas. Their organization will be facilitated with the assistance of an international-Arab coalition within the framework of a new regional order, which will include normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia and regional defense alliances with the United States.

3. Returning the hostages—A deal for the hostages should be quickly pursued, despite the heavy price involved in the release of prisoners in exchange for a cessation of fighting and for a renewed preparedness of forces around the Gaza Strip. The cessation included in the deal should be used to solve other challenges of the war (concentrating efforts in the northern arena to eliminate threats, solidifying the new situation in a memorandum of understanding,

carrying out extensive humanitarian efforts in the Gaza Strip, transferring responsibility for civilian matters to the Palestinian Authority/Fatah, preparing the ground for a military operation in Rafah by returning the displaced to the northern Gaza Strip, and accelerating diplomatic efforts to promote normalization with Saudi Arabia). It is doubtful whether such a deal is possible without Israel's willingness to declare, at any stage, an end to the fighting, and we must be prepared to make such a declaration as part of a comprehensive deal.

4. The humanitarian issue in the Gaza Strip—The humanitarian problem must be reduced by providing food supplies, treatment for epidemics, and sanitation in the Gaza Strip. It is crucial that Hamas is not involved in the distribution of aid. To ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches its intended recipients, a responsible entity for public order and aid distribution is required. We should leverage humanitarian aid to cultivate an alternative civil authority to the Hamas government, capable of establishing public order. Currently, the available alternative is the local Fatah (affiliated with the Palestinian Authority), which will receive assistance from a regional organization (Arab and international coalition) and will serve as a source of legitimacy for Israeli action. This will guarantee that the aid reaches its intended destination and prevent it from falling into the hands of Hamas.

5. The military effort/Rafah—The operational effort to block the border with Egypt and dismantle Hamas battalions there must be completed. It should be emphasized that the main goal of this operation is to block the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip to prevent arms and weapons smuggling. This should be carried out with a different operational method, and the timing can be postponed until the diplomatic moves with Egypt and the United States are completed, which will create the optimal conditions for Israel to carry out the operation.

6. The return of evacuees from the northern settlements—Residents from the northern part of the country should be allowed to return to their homes as quickly as possible. If feasible, this should be achieved without engaging in a full-scale war against Hezbollah. Therefore, it is necessary to design an improved border regime, based on removing threats (especially Hezbollah's Radwan force) in accordance with Resolution 1701. This will require effective monitoring of its implementation by the international community, while being ready for Israeli enforcement in case of violation as well as reinforcing the international forces present in southern Lebanon.

Such an arrangement is only possible in the event of a prolonged cessation of fighting in the Gaza Strip (likely within the framework of a hostage deal), and a stable reality in the north is only feasible with powerful counterweight force—against not only Hezbollah but the entire “axis of resistance”—which is most likely possible based on a broad regional coalition with the support of the United States.

The implementation of these recommendation will enable the initiation of a normalization process with Saudi Arabia under American auspices, while forming a broad front with moderate Arab states and under the leadership of the United States against Iran and the axis of resistance. This will dramatically improve the State of Israel's strategic balance.