Chapter 1: Strategic Framing

The Strategic Problem:

Slipping into a prolonged and static war of attrition, which reduces the chances of returning Israeli hostages held by Hamas and replacing Hamas's rule in the Gaza Strip, also jeopardizes the special relationship with the United States, undermines the security of the country's borders, and leads to Israel's isolation in the regional and international arena.

Objectives:

1. Restoring the sense of security and safety to Israeli citizens while rehabilitating settlements in the western Negev and along the northern border, and bolstering Israel's internal resilience;

2. Eliminating the Hamas threat;

3. Establishing an alternative civil government to Hamas in the Gaza Strip;

4. Maintaining Israel's security responsibility in the Palestinian arena;

5. Weakening the Shiite axis led by Iran;

6. Improving Israel's regional standing (economic, security, and geopolitical);

7. Preserving and strengthening Israel's special relationship with the United States.

The Alternatives Considered During the Fighting:

1. Military government in the Gaza Strip—placing responsibility and authority of the region in Israel's hands;

2. Transfer of responsibility for the Gaza Strip to Egypt (strong Egyptian opposition);

3. Creation of a local entity composed of tribes and clans to govern the Gaza Strip as separate "cantons" (failure in implementation will lead to anarchy);

4. Management of the Gaza Strip by an interim international/Arab administration (not viable without a governing component of the Palestinian Authority);

5. Establishment of a Palestinian interim government that is not affiliated with the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah;

6. Returning the (renewed) Palestinian Authority to control the Gaza Strip, with the assistance of an international coalition, including Arab and Western countries.

The Recommendation to Choose the Sixth Alternative Is Based on Two Considerations:

- The lack of Israeli interest in returning to control the Gaza Strip, both due to the internal/military implications of such a move and its international ramifications (isolation, sanctions, and so forth).

- Any solution whose purpose is to strengthen Israeli social resilience, as well as to integrate the international and Arab community in rehabilitating the Gaza Strip or in taking responsibility for the civilian governance in the region, necessitates the involvement of the Palestinian Authority. Despite the controversy within Israel's political arena regarding the reliance on the Palestinian Authority, no better solution has been found at this time, when compared to the other alternatives.

The Central Idea:

The rapid achievement of the goals of the war by pursuing a quick hostage deal (while being willing to stop the war) and taking advantage of the cessation included in such a deal for the following purposes:

1. Establishing a civil management mechanism in the Gaza Strip, connected to the Palestinian Authority, supported by the international community, and linked to the regional arrangement.

2. Delivering a massive influx of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip and distributing it through local Fatah entities, connected to the Palestinian Authority and supported for their protection by Arab and international coalition forces.

3. Implementing a ceasefire in the northern arena, which will be stipulated in understandings regarding the withdrawal of the capabilities of the Radwan force from the border region and effective international monitoring (with an emphasis on the removal of infiltrating forces and anti-tank missiles).

A declaration of an end to the state of war does not restrict the State of Israel from taking action to remove threats and protect its citizens, including continued efforts to dismantle the governmental and military capabilities of Hamas.