

A Framework for Ending the War in Gaza and Establishing a Regional Coalition—Chances and Challenges

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The Institute for National Security Studies conducted a simulation to examine an American–Arab framework for ending the war in Gaza, normalizing relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, and forming a regional security-economic coalition. In the simulation, Hamas rejected the framework as long as it is capable of fighting and no alternative mechanism for governing Gaza is established. Israel responded positively to the framework despite the price required, such as advancing a political process toward a two-state-for-two-peoples solution. This development led to a significant positive shift in regional and international attitudes toward Israel. However, questions remain about what would persuade Iran, Hezbollah, and their proxies to agree to ending the war of attrition against Israel, especially given the connection between ending the war and forming a regional security coalition being perceived as an alliance against Iran. The simulation also revealed that contrary to Israel's expectations, the events of October 7 actually increased the value of the Palestinian Authority as the primary platform for establishing a Palestinian state and progressing toward regional normalization with Israel.

The Scenario

The United States, along with Arab states including Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Morocco, as well as Western countries, presented a three-phase framework for ending the war in Gaza and establishing a regional security-economic coalition:

First Stage: Declaration of a ceasefire in Gaza and along the Israel–Lebanon border.

A condition for the ceasefire is a deal for the release of hostages. Simultaneously, humanitarian aid to Gaza will be expanded, and IDF forces will withdraw from cities and refugee camps in the Gaza Strip.

Second Stage: Steps to stabilize Gaza and establish a civilian governance mechanism connected to the Palestinian Authority.

- A technocratic administration linked to the Palestinian Authority government in Ramallah will be formed, staffed by professionals and experts, primarily from Gaza, who will take responsibility for managing civilian affairs in the Strip.

- An inter-Arab task force will be established to assist the “revitalized Palestinian Authority” in implementing reforms and supporting efforts to restore its control over Gaza, ensuring that its return to the area is welcomed by the local population.
- A policing mechanism for Gaza will be set up, to be trained in Egypt under the guidance of the American security coordinator, responsible for maintaining public order in the Strip.
- As long as all Israeli hostages are not released, Israel will maintain a security zone in the Netzarim Corridor and the Philadelphi Corridor, and will not relinquish its military freedom of action against threats and terrorist infrastructure in Gaza.

Third Stage: Advancing a political process under regional sponsorship.

- A regional and international conference will be convened, during which the establishment of official relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia will be announced, alongside the formation of a regional security-economic coalition led by the United States with the participation of moderate Arab states and Israel.
- A supervisory committee, chaired by the United States and including Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, will be established to ensure that the Palestinian Authority implements the necessary reforms to become a viable partner in advancing a political process.
- If the committee determines that the required reforms are being implemented and the Palestinian Authority demonstrates effective governance, a political process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority will be initiated to pave the way toward a two-states-for-two-peoples reality.
 - **Demands on Israel:** Freeze settlement construction outside the settlement blocs; develop transportation and economic infrastructure in the West Bank to improve the economic functioning and quality of life for the Palestinian population; allow the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip.
 - **Demands on the Palestinian Authority:** Cease the transfer of funds to the families of terrorists and prisoners; promote education for peace and tolerance; limit and distance extremist elements.

Reactions of Various Actors to the Scenario

Hamas: Hamas rejects the proposal and demands international guarantees for ending the war and the withdrawal of IDF forces from all areas of the Gaza Strip. The organization intensifies terrorist cell activities against IDF forces, continues launching rockets, murders Gazans collaborating with the Palestinian Authority, and rejects the hostage release deal.

Israel: Upon understanding Hamas's stance, Israel agrees to the two stages of the plan—ending the war and normalizing relations with Saudi Arabia, while expressing willingness to participate in a political process leading to a two-state-for-two-peoples solution in the future.

Hezbollah: The organization's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, announces that he will continue the war of attrition as long as IDF forces remain in the Gaza Strip. In close coordination with Iran, Hezbollah repeatedly attacks Israel whenever it violates the ceasefire with Hamas, even if there is progress in the framework for ending the war.

Iran: Iran continues to activate its proxies against Israel and threatens to retaliate against Saudi Arabia if it establishes official relations with Israel. Iran is determined to thwart the process of normalization but finds it difficult to separate it from the ceasefire/end of the war in Gaza, as it is interested in the survival of Hamas. Nevertheless, Iran's desire to disrupt normalization outweighs Hamas's survival, leading it to continue the war of attrition against Israel through its proxies. Iran's worst nightmare came true in its attack on Israel on April 14 when the regional air defense system operated alongside Israel. As a result, Iran threatens potential Arab partners in the regional security agreement, urges its proxies to intensify their activities, and continues to transfer funds and weapons to Hamas.

Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia is encouraged by Israel's willingness to end the war and engage in a political process with the Palestinian Authority. Saudi Arabia is ready to advance normalization provided it receives American benefits, even if the war-ending framework is not completed. However, as long as the war in Gaza and between Israel and Hezbollah continues, Saudi Arabia finds it difficult to establish official relations with Israel and postpones its commitment to implement a regional security coalition framework.

Egypt: Egypt welcomes Israel's response to the plan and supports efforts to create regional stability, expressing readiness to assist. Although Egypt provides humanitarian aid to Gaza and opens the Rafah crossing, it demands that the Palestinian Authority control the Gaza side of the crossing. Egypt refuses to send forces to stabilize the Gaza Strip, but it is willing to support an Arab or international task force for Gaza's reconstruction.

Palestinian Authority: The PA accepts the framework and agrees to send the Presidential Guard forces to the Rafah crossing, but it postpones sending security forces to manage the Strip as long as the war continues. In return for the PA's positive conduct and its integration into the regional framework, the PA demands a freeze on settlement construction; extensive aid from Arab countries; establishment of an Arab force to help regain control over Gaza; special support for its security apparatuses for salary payments and capability improvements; and the release of all the Palestinian funds of which Israel is delaying their transfer. The PA agrees to have Arab oversight on education and for deradicalizing the content.

Jordan, the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco: These countries welcome the plan and are willing to contribute to Gaza's reconstruction in the future. They demand that the Palestinian Authority implement the reforms and express readiness to assist but they refuse to send forces to Gaza, setting three conditions: cessation of fighting in Gaza; an invitation from the Palestinian Authority (not the United States or Israel) to join in the stabilization of the Strip after proving its readiness and capability to manage the area; and Israel's commitment to cease military attacks in Gaza.

Russia: Russia opposes the plan as it seeks to divert global attention to the Middle East and away from the war in Ukraine. It maintains close coordination with Iran and China and continues military cooperation with them, establishing a joint learning mechanism about the military capabilities of Israel and the United States. Russia and China try to cool down Saudi Arabia's approach toward normalization with Israel and a security alliance with the United States.

Europe: Europe supports the plan and is ready to assist the Palestinian Authority in implementing the required reforms.

Insights from the Simulation

As long as Hamas is capable of continuing to fight and no alternative governance mechanism for the Gaza Strip is established, it retains veto power and can disrupt or even thwart the framework. Hamas rejects the framework, understanding that it might receive a better offer due to the multitude of parties aiming to end the war. Hamas will do everything to remain relevant and involved in Gaza's governance, even if it does not lead it, and will retain its military power and terrorist cells.

Israel is not willing to relinquish operational freedom aimed at preventing the resurgence of Hamas and countering threats. None of the actors accept Israel's demand for operational freedom, and conversely, no one is committed to sending effective forces to dismantle Hamas's terrorist infrastructure and prevent its regrowth. However, Israel's positive response to the framework, including its willingness to "pay

a price” by advancing a political process for a two-state-for-two-peoples solution, leads to a significant positive shift in regional and international attitudes toward it. Saudi Arabia is willing to advance normalization even if the fighting in Gaza has not ceased, in light of Hamas’s refusal.

A significant gap remains in the framework regarding what would lead Iran, Hezbollah, and other Iranian proxies (such as the Houthis) to agree to end the war of attrition being waged against Israel, especially as the connection between ending the war and forming a regional security coalition is perceived as an alliance against Iran and its proxies. Another question is how to persuade Saudi Arabia to show determination and advance normalization with Israel even if there is no calm in all arenas. (The simulation did not reach the stage where fighting with Iran and its proxies continues, and Israel implements military freedom of operation to prevent Hamas’s resurgence in Gaza).

An obstacle to advancing normalization and establishing a regional coalition is Israel’s conduct in the West Bank, particularly the creeping annexation. This is evident in recent government decisions and actions, which are perceived regionally and internationally as intended to collapse the Palestinian Authority. Contrary to Israel’s expectations, October 7 actually increased the value of the Palestinian Authority as the primary relevant platform for establishing a Palestinian state and achieving an Israeli–Palestinian political settlement as a condition for advancing regional normalization with Israel. Instead of alleviating the concerns of the regional countries and encouraging them to advance according to the regional security-economic coalition framework, even without a resolution to the Gaza war, Israel makes it difficult due to the expansion of settlements in the West Bank. This policy is seen as aiming to thwart the possibility of establishing a viable Palestinian state.

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