

# Security Concerns of the Gaza Ceasefire and Hostage Release Agreement

Tamir Hayman | No. 1935 | January 21, 2025

**Beyond the immediate risk of releasing terrorists from Israeli prisons and allowing residents and Hamas militants to return to northern Gaza, the State of Israel is now facing a weighty challenge: preventing Hamas from rebuilding its strength amidst the destruction in Gaza during the current ceasefire. Israel must develop a robust contingency plan that will help mitigate risks if the ceasefire collapses or the hostage release plan is not fully implemented.**

The Israel-Hamas agreement regarding a Gaza ceasefire and the release of the Israeli hostages has caused emotional turmoil. This agreement is particularly important from an Israeli ethical and moral perspective. The Israeli citizens abandoned on Saturday October 7 must be brought home. Failure to do so could raise doubts about Israel's adherence to principles of mutual responsibility and solidarity -"all Israel are committed to each other." Alongside the hope for their return—for burial or rehabilitation—inescapable and weighty security concerns arise over the price of the ceasefire.

The ceasefire agreement may hold potential strategic benefits that depend on Israel's actions once the deal is completed. While the question of whether such an agreement could have been reached several months ago is indeed troubling, it is now hypothetical and therefore irrelevant. Such questions are best left for history to decide—or to a state commission of inquiry that we can only hope will be established.

The most acute problem of the ceasefire agreement is its gradual and staged implementation, with a troubling transition between the first and second stages. Stage two includes the release of Palestinian terrorists convicted of particularly heinous crimes, the cessation of IDF operations in Gaza, and withdrawal of all IDF forces from the Strip. Unfortunately, chances are great that this ceasefire will only be partial, as Hamas does not know where all the bodies of the slain hostages are located. It is likely that Hamas will make false claims as to the whereabouts of the slain as an "insurance policy" to prevent Israel from renewing the war. Therefore, Israel must begin developing security and strategic plans in anticipation for the possibility that the deal may collapse or remain incomplete.

## **The Security Threat**

Opponents of the ceasefire agreement argue that it poses significant security threats, highlighting three main concerns:

1. The dual threat of releasing dangerous terrorists from Israeli prisons:

- the return to Gaza of convicted individuals and potentially next-generation leaders (e.g., the 2011 release of Yahya Sinwar);
  - the fact that Hamas sees the release of these terrorists as a victory, which will further strengthen its stature and may motivate Palestinians to carry out additional kidnappings in the future.
2. Allowing residents of northern Gaza to return to areas that have been cleared of Hamas—near Israeli communities along the other side of the border—without thorough inspections could renew threats.
  3. An Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the end of the war, while Hamas still retains de facto control of the Gaza Strip, will allow Hamas to rebuild its long-term military capabilities and maintain its motivation for active resistance against Israel in the short-term.

These are, indeed, weighty challenges. However, the third concern—allowing Hamas to remain the de facto ruler of Gaza—is the main strategic problem since it contradicts the goals of the war defined by the Israeli government. All the rest can be resolved.

Releasing terrorists from prison is undoubtedly a heavy price, but it was clear from the outset that it was a price Israel would have to pay for the terrible failure to protect Israeli citizens on October 7. Nonetheless, this risk can be mitigated. Dangerous terrorists capable of inciting further violence will be exiled to a third country (Israel has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to neutralize threats anywhere in the world). Less dangerous prisoners who return to Gaza or the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) will be placed under strict intelligence surveillance, ensuring that anyone who returns to terrorism will be arrested or eliminated.

The return and actual presence of Palestinians in the northern Gaza Strip does not pose inherent danger. However, as long as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict continues, some individuals—even those who are currently innocent children—will inevitably join the ranks of terrorist organizations. Without addressing the root of the problem, we will just continue treating the symptoms. The real danger lies in the potential rebuilding of terrorist infrastructure.

Northern Gaza has been completely destroyed; both above and underground. Hamas’s terrorist infrastructure has been eradicated, as this is the area where the IDF wiped out Hamas battalions—far beyond the scope of a regular military victory.

It is reasonable to assume that the IDF will adopt a significantly different approach to preventing Hamas from rearming or renewing its threat against Israel. This strategy is likely to be far more aggressive than its pre-October 7 modus operandi, similar to its operations in Lebanon that ensured the implementation of the ceasefire signed in November 2024, which brought an end to the war with Hezbollah.

### **The Day After the CeaseFire Agreement**

The risk of allowing Hamas to remain in power is undeniably severe, as it will try to reinstate the threat against Israel. While it is possible to find localized solutions to address the problem of smuggling into Gaza via the Philadelphi Route—both above and underground—it is

impossible to hermetically seal off the Strip. Therefore, Israel must now begin preparing for the day after the ceasefire agreement., which will inevitably come. What will Israel do in the likely event that Hamas remains the de facto ruler of Gaza? After all, removing Hamas from power was one of the goals of the war and it has yet to be achieved. This means that Israel must prepare for the possibility of returning to Gaza to fight in a few weeks or months from now. When that time comes, Israel will no longer be able to avoid addressing the issue that is often more comfortable to sweep under the carpet: What do we do with the Gaza Strip?

The analysis indicates that there are four main alternatives:

1. The reoccupation and annexation of Gaza to Israel: The agreement with Hamas makes this option more complicated, even in the areas of northern Gaza where Hamas presence has been eradicated. About one million Palestinians are expected to return to northern Gaza. Evacuating them again—even if it were militarily feasible —would be unacceptable to the international community. It is not even clear that US President Donald Trump would endorse such a decision. Moreover, this option is impractical to apply across all of Gaza. While Israel could annex northern Gaza and even establish settlements there, the costs—domestic protests as well as international isolation and boycott—would outweigh the benefits. Therefore, we must ask ourselves whether reoccupying Gaza is worthwhile. It appears not.
2. Reoccupation and military rule: In this scenario, the IDF would reoccupy the entire Gaza Strip, impose martial law and continue to eradicate Hamas while taking responsibility for distributing humanitarian aid and meeting civilian needs. This option would come with enormous costs: casualties, economic strain, social-domestic legitimacy, and significant international backlash. The IDF would require a massive call-up of reservists and the procurement of vast quantities of arms and ammunition, as well as plenty of time.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had good reason to rule out this option at the beginning of the war. Even if Israel were able to cope with the international isolation and the final collapse of any hope for normalization between Israel and the Arab world, imposing martial law on the Gaza Strip could become institutionalized as the permanent solution. Would any country or organization be willing to assume control of Gaza following the IDF? Any Arab state or organization taking over Gaza in these circumstances, without a broader diplomatic solution, would be seen as collaborating with Israel and having taken control of the territory on the back of Israel's military might. Consequently, Israel would find itself forever governing Gaza—a devastated territory with more than two million impoverished, hungry, angry, and desperate Palestinians.

3. Chaos: Israel could withdraw from the Gaza Strip, leaving the situation exactly as it is today and suspending all civilian involvement. Some people refer to this as a policy of “planned chaos.” In such a scenario, Israel would retain the right to defend itself and continue targeted military operations against Hamas, but it would not be involved in any of the civilian administration of the territory. Hamas would likely regain control and rebuild itself, because it serves as the de facto authority controlling humanitarian aid. It

would only be a matter of time before Hamas's economic control of Gaza and the lack of a competing ideology to challenge its narrative of resistance pose a security threat to the State of Israel. While Israel may ultimately achieve victory by destroying what remains of Hamas's military capabilities, its presence in the territory will continue. As long as the ideology of violent resistance persists, the challenge will remain unresolved.

4. An alternative civilian regime: This option involves shifting accountability and the responsibility for the distribution of civilian aid and for managing the civilian administration of the Gaza Strip to the hands of an entity other than Hamas, while security responsibility would remain with the IDF, primarily through targeted airstrikes and covert operations. While this option is, indeed, more complex to implement, it would keep Hamas out of power, can be replicated across the Gaza Strip, and complies with international law. Unlike the option of military rule, this option ensures that the IDF remains responsible for Israeli security rather than managing Gaza's sewage infrastructure for example. Any entity assuming control of Gaza's administration must meet two criteria: Hamas must have no role, and the entity must have the practical ability to govern effectively.

The idea of a temporary committee that will manage Gaza's affairs has been discussed within the Israeli defense establishment for several months. While such a committee could receive approval from the Palestinian Authority (PA) and would potentially pave the way for the eventual return of the PA to Gaza, the PA would likely oppose the idea, given its historic tendency to avoid taking responsibility as well as its "All or Nothing" demands. In Israel, too, there is significant resistance to involving the PA, even symbolically. However, external pressure—particularly from Donald Trump, who secured the current ceasefire agreement prior to his inauguration—could compel the PA to accept such an arrangement. Even if the PA objects, it could be pressured into supporting an alternative civilian regime for Gaza.

## **Conclusion**

Israel must determine its desired endgame for Gaza. This decision cannot be avoided. The agreement for the release of the hostages marks the beginning of the end. Unless we start planning now for the day after the agreement, the war will have no end. If Israel fails to adhere to its original plan of replacing the Hamas regime with a civilian government—one that is neither Hamas nor Israel—the goals of the war will not be achieved. Israeli leadership and public will be frustrated if Hamas remains in power in Gaza, especially if all the hostages are not released, and if Hamas secures the release of its prisoners, and forces the IDF to withdraw from the Strip. Under such circumstances, Hamas leaders would likely proclaim victory—and many would believe them.

We are entering a period of heightened emotion oscillating between joy and despair, between hope and anger, marked by tension and fear that this fragile situation could end in heartbreak. After all, we have made a "deal with the devil." Each day of implementing this ceasefire agreement will be difficult and tense. Despite this emotional strain, it does not exempt us

from long-term strategic planning. The end of this agreement will inevitably come, and now is the time to present a clear exit plan that will ensure the final goal of the war—replacing the Hamas regime—is achieved by translating military achievements into a coherent political strategy. Such a plan could involve cooperation with Riyadh and may even pave the way for President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

---

Editors of the series: Anat Kurtz, Eldad Shavit and Ela Greenberg