

Achieving the War's Objectives and Improving Israel's Long-Term Security:

Recommended Policy for Ending the War with a Victory¹

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Main Points

This policy paper outlines the recommended strategy for ending the war in the Gaza Strip while fully achieving its objectives and improving Israel's long-term strategic posture. The majority of the principles and proposed course of action presented in this document align with the Egyptian–Arab proposal for ending the war, which was presented in April 2025 and has not been discussed by the Israeli government. It is proposed that the principles of this plan serve as a basis for negotiations. As part of these negotiations, Israel should insist on adding to the plan's stipulations the following demands: the disarmament of Hamas and the assurance that it will not be able to rebuild its military capabilities. Most importantly, steps must be taken to prevent the integration of Hamas into any future Palestinian governing framework.

In order to end the war in the Gaza Strip, it is necessary to ensure the return of the hostages, that Hamas will no longer rule the Strip and will be dismantled of its threatening military capabilities against Israel, and that a joint Egyptian-Israeli mechanism be established to prevent its rearmament. Although, as previously detailed in publications by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), a full military occupation of the Gaza Strip and the imposition of Israeli military rule in the area may be the most effective military key for neutralizing the Hamas threat, at the same time, it is the worst option from the perspective of Israel's national security strategy. This is because even under Israeli military rule in Gaza, resistance to Israel, as well as the threat of terrorism and guerrilla warfare from within the Strip, would persist. Moreover, such a scenario would entail severe consequences—Israel would bear sole responsibility for the reconstruction of this devastated area (and the heavy burden it entails in resources) without external assistance, alongside the risk of international isolation and worsening internal social polarization.

¹ Victory is defined as "Utilizing military superiority to achieve the objectives of the operation as defined by the political leadership, in order to improve Israel's strategic position." See "The IDF Strategy," (2015), p. 14.

The Strategic Dilemma: Between “Destroying Hamas” and Releasing the Hostages

[Recent opinion polls](#) conducted by the INSS indicate that the Israeli public prioritizes the return of the hostages over the destruction of Hamas.² Yet the reality is more complex. The survival of a controlling Hamas authority is essential for hostage release. However, once the hostages are freed, Hamas would lose its insurance policy for survival. This is the crux of the dilemma.

According to military briefings, the primary objective of Operation “Gideon’s Chariots” is the release of the hostages. The operation is designed to exert military and civilian pressure within the Strip, including the occupation of approximately 70% of its territory and altering the mechanism for distributing humanitarian aid in a manner that may create a rift between Hamas and Gaza’s population. This cumulative pressure is intended to force Hamas to agree to a hostage deal under improved terms for Israel.

However, what will happen after Israel achieves this? Even if we assume (and hope) that additional hostages will be released and Hamas will be beaten to the point of disintegration, it is likely that the organization will refuse to relinquish all the hostages without securing both an end to the war and guarantees for its own survival as a resistance movement. If this is the case, how can the war objective of the return of the hostages be achieved alongside the destruction of Hamas’s governing capabilities?

Conflicting Interests Between Israel and Hamas: A Zero-Sum Game?

Israel: For the Israeli government, agreeing to end the war is not an option. Politically, halting the war could destabilize the ruling coalition and strengthen calls for early elections. From a security perspective, the political leadership believes that ending the war before Hamas is completely destroyed would leave the challenge posed by Hamas unresolved. However, it is highly questionable whether the total destruction of Hamas—“until the last Hamas operative”—is even a feasible military objective. More broadly, it is doubtful whether a military campaign alone can eliminate the ideological foundation of resistance rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood, without additional repercussions that will be outlined below.

Hamas: For Hamas, the goal is to stop the war, secure the withdrawal of IDF forces from the territories they have seized in the Gaza Strip, achieve the release of as many terrorists as possible from Israeli jails, and obtain international guarantees for these outcomes and for Gaza’s reconstruction. At the same time, Hamas is aware of the public criticism it faces within Gaza and recognizes its relative weakness. As such, it needs a tangible achievement. Therefore, any form of survival would be perceived by Hamas’s leadership as a victory—even if it is left battered and dramatically weakened.

² The official objective of the war is formulated as the destruction of Hamas’s governing and military capabilities, not the destruction of Hamas itself.

As a resistance movement, Hamas may prefer to forgo governance of Gaza as a tactical step if that ensures its organizational survival.

The Strategic Concept: From War to Combat and Deradicalization

For Israel to conclude the war with a genuine victory, Hamas must be replaced by a relatively pragmatic civil administration, while security authority must remain in Israel's control. Specifically:

- The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) would continue to operate inside the Strip to target and destroy terrorist infrastructure and neutralize threats—a policy known in Israeli public discourse as “mowing the grass.” However, this would be done without maintaining permanent deployment of Israeli forces within Gaza. These actions would be coordinated with the Palestinian administration in Gaza, similar to what is practiced in Judea and Samaria.
- As Hamas weakens and an alternative civil and educational infrastructure emerges, the chances of a successful deradicalization process will improve. From a military perspective, no operation alone can create the desired long-term transformation. Such transformation requires deep changes possible only through a comprehensive political, social, and educational process. It is likely that the Muslim Brotherhood will continue to exist in Gaza as a sociopolitical movement. But even if outlawed—as has been done in Jordan and Egypt—its negative social influence and opposition to deradicalization will be difficult to eliminate entirely. Therefore, its continuous weakening over time is of critical importance.

Strategic Components

The already agreed-upon components of the strategy's implementation included in the Egyptian–Arab proposal:

1. **Ceasefire:** The intensified war will come to an end; a formal ceasefire will be declared in exchange for the release of the hostages and the establishment of an alternative government to Hamas's rule.
2. **Release of Hostages:** All the hostages, living and deceased, will be released in one phase and not gradually.
3. **International Control:** An international/Arab cabinet will be established to coordinate and control Gaza's reconstruction. This cabinet will supervise the flow of funds and internal security forces operating under the temporary Gazan government, guided by the principle that increased reconstruction equals increased demilitarization.

4. **Governance of Gaza:** A temporary technocratic administration that is neither the Palestinian Authority (PA) nor Hamas will be established. It will be staffed by capable, influential individuals approved by Israel as non-affiliated with terrorist groups. This administration will oversee civil governance and reconstruction via local or international contractors. It will also operate Gaza's Civil Committee—a bureaucratic body formally linked to the PA, coordinating between the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) and civil operations in Gaza.
5. **Law and Order—Palestinian Police:** Palestinian officers trained in Jordan by the US military (6,000 are already waiting in Egypt for approval to enter Gaza) will be employed by the new administration. Their initial role will focus solely on law enforcement, not counterterrorism.

Components of strategy implementation that are subject to disagreement and require negotiation to ensure the advancement of Israel's security interests:

6. **Humanitarian Aid Distribution:** Humanitarian aid will be distributed via civil contractors (e.g., the American firm currently operating in Gaza) or subcontractors managed by the technocratic government. Palestinian security forces—the same 6,000 mentioned above—will secure distribution to prevent chaos.
7. **Palestinian Authority:**
 - **Return to Gaza:** The Egyptian plan envisions the PA returning to Gaza within six months. This is unrealistic. Instead, the return of the PA must be conditioned on measurable, comprehensive reforms. Many Palestinians demand reform of the PA due to frustration with corruption and ineffectiveness. Therefore, this precondition presents a rare opportunity for both Israelis and Palestinians. Arab and international pressure could help overcome the PA's likely resistance to reforms, which should be made a prerequisite for aid.
 - **Israeli Security Responsibility:** Israel must retain the authority to operate in Gaza—a model similar to Area B in Judea and Samaria. This should only change once the PA proves effective in combating terrorist groups.
 - **Demilitarization:** At the end of the process, and after the PA returns to Gaza, weapons would be transferred to its control. A "wanted persons agreement" would offer amnesty for anyone who accepts the authority of the PA and joins its ranks while surrendering their weapons.
8. **Closing the "Oxygen Tube": The Philadelphi Route and Rafah Crossing.** All underground tunnels between Egypt and Gaza would be blocked by building a

subterranean barrier, alongside the establishment of an advanced international monitoring system at Rafah to prevent smuggling and ensure transparency toward Israel.

9. **Expanding the Abraham Accords:** The desired end state is to link this process of stabilizing and rehabilitating the Strip to the aspired signing of a normalization agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia. It can be assumed that the new reality that would emerge would meet the minimum requirements that Saudi Arabia has presented as conditions for normalization. While the proposed strategy does not constitute a clear path to a Palestinian state, as articulated by the Saudis, it is expected to improve the situation in the Israeli–Palestinian arena relative to the current state of affairs and lay the groundwork for a future political process.

Objection: The Main Problem and Response (Disregarding Political Resistance)

The major flaw of the proposed strategy is that Hamas will not vanish completely and will initially retain remnants of military capability. This presents a significant challenge, particularly for those who believe that a more expansive military campaign could lead to the organization’s total destruction. Opponents of this scenario call this the “Hezbollah Model,” comparing it to Lebanon’s prewar reality—although, in truth, it more closely resembles the West Bank model.

Several facts mitigate these concerns:

1. **Hamas has been severely weakened:** Its organizational structures have been dismantled; senior commanders eliminated (except for Izz al-Din al-Haddad, commander of Gaza City); it has no large-scale infiltration capacity into Israel (the entire security zone has been cleared and destroyed, and its Nukhba force has been badly damaged); its firepower is residual (it is now approximately 10% of what it was on October 7, 2023); and two-thirds, or about 18,000, of its original 30,000 fighters have been killed—according to an imprecise estimate, as are all the assessments regarding civilian casualties in the Strip.
2. **There is little added value in the full conquest of Gaza:** Expanding territorial control from 70% to 100% would yield little strategic gain. Hamas would likely hide its remaining arms, blend among civilians, and operate underground, initiating a prolonged guerrilla campaign against IDF soldiers. Even if Hamas were to theoretically vanish, new resistance groups would likely emerge—Popular Resistance Committees, Islamic Jihad, and dozens of other terrorist factions that do not accept Israel’s existence—and continue to pose a threat to IDF forces and the State of Israel as a whole.
3. **Draining the swamp and “mowing the grass” will continue under Israel’s responsibility:** Through an adapted intelligence and operational system, the

IDF and the Shin Bet will continue to pursue Hamas and other terror organizations, as is done in Judea and Samaria.

4. **Resumption of fighting and warfare, if necessary, will be possible after the release of the hostages:** Past experience proves that Israel cannot be prevented from resuming the fighting. The right to self-defense cannot be restricted. Even if the UN Security Council were to adopt a resolution condemning Israel and calling on it to refrain from exercising self-defense in the face of threats, and even if the United States chose not to veto such a resolution, it would not serve to limit Israel's actions.
5. **The Iranian axis has been weakened:** Hamas that operated before the war—including from Lebanon as part of a joint operations room within the Iran-led axis—is not the same Hamas we see today. The weakening of the axis and the disappearance of Nasrallah are both significant factors contributing to the organization's current weakness.
6. **Hope should be provided for a different, better future:** Gaza's population does not see hope for the future. There is no employment, no education, and no infrastructure that allows for decent living conditions. These days, joining Hamas is the only way to earn a basic salary and support a family. Under such circumstances, it is very easy for Hamas to rebuild its strength. Any alternative source of employment for young people in Gaza—as part of a regional reconstruction program (besides work in Israel)—could weaken Hamas and loosen its grip over the population.

Analysis of the Alternatives to the Proposal

Alternatives to this strategy include various approaches for fully conquering the Gaza Strip, imposing military rule, and clearing out pockets of terrorist and guerrilla resistance in a process that would take several years under IDF control. An analysis of these alternatives reveals severe and significant problems, far greater than those associated with the recommended strategy:

1. **Economic Cost:** The cost of occupying the Gaza Strip would be substantial. [Security officials estimate](#) approximately NIS 25 billion per year in military expenses, along with an additional NIS 10 billion annually to provide basic services to the local population, including electricity, water, medical care, and food.
2. **Internal Legitimacy and Social Resilience:** Damage will result from the fact that fighting has intensified over a prolonged period without a clear end during an extremely problematic and volatile time in Israel, in terms of internal political dynamics and growing tension in civil–military relations.

3. **“The Day After” the War:** Even if we assume a military administration in Gaza proves to be a resounding success, the fundamental question remains of to whom control of the Strip will ultimately be transferred. If nothing changes, a few years down the line, the State of Israel will once again be forced to contend with the very same questions already being asked today, yet with one key difference: The cost will have risen significantly. This rise includes the burden on the economy, the weakening of societal resilience, the erosion of international relations, and a growing number of casualties among IDF forces.
4. **Great Power Backing:** It should be assumed that American support for the war will be temporary. It is difficult to justify maintaining a military regime (with no clear recipient for eventual handover) that will likely last more than four years. By that time, a new US president will enter the White House, and such a leader—especially a Democrat—will not necessarily continue to back Israel. One of Israel’s historic mistakes in recent years was aligning itself with the Republican Party, effectively forfeiting its longstanding bipartisan support in the American political system. At the same time, a Republican president pursuing an isolationist policy could also present a challenge for Israel.
5. **International Legitimacy from Western Liberal States:** From an international standpoint, Israel has already lost the legitimacy to continue the war—a legitimacy it enjoyed during the initial stages of the conflict from most Western European countries. Europe is Israel’s second-largest trade partner, and Israeli science and technology are closely tied to Europe. (For example, on June 4, 2024, the [Ministry of Defense announced](#) a record-breaking year in Israeli defense exports, with 54% of export deals signed with European countries.) In addition, Europe is the source of most of Israel’s consumer goods imports. Consequently, Israel cannot afford to forfeit its relationship with Europe. Moreover, Israel risks being perceived as a rogue and ostracized state, signs of which are already visible, facing international isolation and potential sanctions.

Indeed, Israel is an independent state—but it is small, lacks natural resources, and depends on international services and trade markets for its prosperity. Forfeiting stable and productive international relations is exceedingly dangerous.

The Solution to the Fundamental Problem: Creating a Short-Term Framework of Understandings Between Hamas and Israel that Serves Israel’s Long-Term Interests

Hamas is a determined enemy that, despite difficulties imposed by the IDF, has adapted to the operational reality that Israel has created in the Gaza Strip. It is likely that Hamas will agree to release the hostages only in exchange for an arrangement that meets its needs and aspirations under the circumstances that have emerged since the war began. The proposed strategy offers a response to the interests of both Hamas and Israel:

- From Hamas's perspective, the war will end, and it will survive as an organization, albeit stripped of its military and governing capabilities.
- From Israel's perspective, Hamas will no longer rule the Gaza Strip, the hostages—living and deceased—will return to Israel, and Israel will retain the right to continue targeting Hamas, mostly below the threshold of full-scale war. If circumstances demand, Israel could engage in another intense military campaign, this time against a much weaker adversary than the one it faced on October 7, 2023.

Conclusion

The contradiction between the two central goals of the war—eliminating Hamas's capability and securing the release of the hostages—can be resolved by creating a situation that enables each side to believe it has achieved victory. Hamas will believe it has survived, will grow stronger, and will eventually return to rule the Gaza Strip. Israel, for its part, will have brought the hostages home, destroyed Hamas's military and governing capabilities, and will prevent any future threat from Gaza—both through ongoing operations and, if necessary, by renewing full-scale warfare.

Can we predict whose belief will ultimately prove correct? This is a test of determination and perseverance. Since Israel is the stronger party in this equation and since October 7 fundamentally altered Israel's national security doctrine, making preemption a central pillar (see the [INSS National Security Concept Paper](#)), there is no doubt that, in the long arc of history, Israel will prevail.

Rather than cling to illusions that Hamas can be completely eradicated, that the population of Gaza can be starved into submission, or expelled entirely—ideas that are at best loosely connected to reality and to Israel's actual constraints—it is preferable to shape a reality that serves Israel's interests under existing circumstances and conditions. This includes leveraging the Arab and international consensus behind the Egyptian–Arab ceasefire proposal as a foundation for negotiations while implementing necessary modifications and safeguards to ensure Israel's strategic interests and the fulfillment of the war's objectives.

Indeed, most of the principles outlined in this policy paper are already embedded in the Egyptian–Arab proposal for ending the war and securing the return of the hostages. The proposal is not perfect—it is incomplete and problematic. Yet, it is a sound starting point for negotiation. Most importantly, it is the only framework that can reconcile the inherent contradiction between the war's goals. Through determined and coordinated negotiations with the United States, it may well offer the opportunity to ensure that the end of the war will enhance Israel's national security.

At present, the Israeli government has no interest in accepting the Egyptian–Arab proposal. But the citizens of Israel have the right to demand that it be seriously considered and refined, promoting the return of the hostages and the end of the war.