

The Gaza Strip: Possible Directions for Breaking the Stalemate

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This article examines the issue of dismantling Hamas's military capabilities and demilitarizing the Gaza Strip by the IDF as a proactive, preemptive measure and a necessary prerequisite for implementing the "Twenty-Point Plan" for stabilizing and rehabilitating the Strip. The working assumption is that without a fundamental solution to the issue of military power in Gaza, any attempt to advance political or economic rehabilitation processes is doomed to failure. A lack of progress means the strengthening of Hamas, the rebuilding of the threat, and Israel sinking into a war of attrition that erodes the IDF, undermines national security, and diminishes the sense of security among residents of the Gaza border communities. Furthermore, the article details the oversight architecture required to preserve the achievements of demilitarization efforts.

The current reality in the Gaza Strip creates the illusion of a status quo and, at the same time, generates a comfort zone for Hamas, the Palestinian Authority (PA), and Israel alike:

Hamas is taking advantage of the time to rehabilitate its military and governance capabilities, while hoping for a U.S.–Iranian agreement that would leave the regime in Tehran intact so it can continue supporting resistance efforts. The organization is also aware of the growing fatigue on the Israeli side and among parties seeking to advance President Trump's "[Twenty-Point Plan](#)" for the rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip. It hopes for a change in regional conditions, such as an agreement with Iran that would enable Tehran to continue supporting it and create more favorable conditions, from Hamas's perspective, for the Strip's reconstruction. The Palestinian Authority, for its part, fears that the success of the "Twenty-Point Plan" in Gaza will accelerate ideas for a similar model within Palestinian Authority-controlled areas in Judea and Samaria. Therefore, from its perspective, it is preferable that the plan not be implemented in a format that excludes the PA from playing a central role. For Israel, this period provides time to chip away at territories under Hamas control without the "Twenty-Point Plan"

advancing in a manner that might, in the view of the Israeli government, advance the return of the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip and reconnect the Strip with the Judea and Samaria region.

At the same time, since October 10, 2025, with the declaration of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, Israel has been drawn into a war of attrition. The "Yellow Line" separating the territory under IDF control from the area to its west under Hamas control has been breached — by Hamas through infiltration attempts and attacks against IDF soldiers, and by the IDF through the westward expansion of the area under its control. Since the ceasefire took effect, approximately 11% more of the territory west of the "Yellow Line" has been added to the area previously controlled by the IDF. Parallel to Hamas's repeated violations of the ceasefire, the organization has managed to rehabilitate and consolidate its governance in the areas under its control, as well as its military capabilities. Although Hamas is currently far from posing a threat similar to the one it presented on October 7, 2023, each passing day makes the Israeli effort to dismantle the organization's military capabilities and remove it as a governing authority increasingly complex.

In May 2026, Nickolay Mladenov, the High Representative liaising between and on behalf of the Board of Peace and the National Committee for managing Gaza (NCAG), published the "[15-Point Document](#)" regarding the progress of the Trump plan. Mladenov emphasized the principle of "one authority, one law, and one weapon," which mandates the disarmament of Hamas and the demilitarization of the Strip as prerequisites for improving the living conditions of the Palestinian population in Gaza and enabling reconstruction.

However, Hamas has shown no willingness to disarm, and the organization's leadership continues to present a series of unrealistic conditions that are clearly unacceptable to Israel. Their purpose is to buy time, enabling Hamas to continue rebuilding its capabilities. Consequently, the reality in the Gaza Strip is gradually becoming a blueprint for tomorrow's crisis.

Given Israel's firm opposition to advancing the implementation of the "Twenty-Point Plan" prior to the demilitarization of the Strip on the one hand, and Hamas's refusal to accept the plan's demands and act in accordance with Mladenov's "15-Point Document" on the other, a crisis may be imposed on Israel under unfavorable circumstances. These could include domestic restraints, primarily the IDF's readiness and force structure, as well as challenging regional and international conditions. Moreover, Israel's inability to defeat Hamas, in terms of dismantling it as both a military and a governing entity, projects weakness that impacts the northern arena and undermines the sense of security among residents of the Gaza border communities, despite impressive progress in the region's rehabilitation and demographic growth. Some of the fallout from the situation in the Gaza Strip could spill over into Israel — specifically sanitation, agricultural, and environmental challenges — against a backdrop of growing frustration and distress among the Palestinian population.

The Strategic Imperative of Disarming Hamas and Demilitarizing the Gaza Strip

The implementation of the "Twenty-Point Plan" requires massive international investment, the establishment of alternative governing institutions, and the controlled opening of the Strip (entry and exit) to the outside world. None of this will be possible in the presence of an armed Hamas, even if weakened. An armed Hamas presence creates three structural failures:

- **The "Hezbollah 2.0" Model (Dual Sovereignty):** It is impossible to establish an effective civilian governance mechanism (whether local, international, or Arab) while an armed force with a radical ideological agenda operates on the ground. Hamas will hold veto power over any civilian decision that does not align with its vital interests by leveraging the threat of force.
- **The International Donor Trap:** Gulf states and Western countries will not invest billions of dollars in infrastructure and reconstruction knowing that the next round of fighting is merely a matter of time, or that dual-use materials brought into the Strip for reconstruction purposes (such as concrete, iron, pipes, agricultural fertilizer, and even medications or medical oxygen cylinders) will once again be diverted to build terrorist infrastructure.
- **Israel's Security Dilemma:** Without proven demilitarization, Israel will be forced to maintain extensive and intensive operational freedom of maneuver on the ground. This is likely to generate friction, potentially violent, with local and international power brokers, disrupt the ability to stabilize the alternative governing mechanism, and perpetuate rounds of violent conflict that could escalate into a broader and more violent campaign.

Operational Alternatives for Disarming Hamas and Demilitarizing the Gaza Strip

Recognition of the necessity of disarming Hamas and demilitarizing the Gaza Strip — constituting a fundamental precondition for Israel — is also shared by other stakeholders. It can be assumed that disarming Hamas by an international, Arab, or joint task force, or alternatively by future Palestinian security mechanisms, would not be feasible from a political-organizational standpoint. According to assessments, it is also unlikely to be operationally effective. Therefore, these alternatives will not be discussed. The unavoidable conclusion is that there is no actor other than the IDF that is both willing and capable of disarming Hamas (even though this understanding is not stated publicly). Disarming Hamas and demilitarizing the Gaza Strip by the IDF, through an initiated effort, is a necessary condition for implementing the “Twenty-Point Plan” for stabilizing and rehabilitating the Strip.

The IDF faces three main alternatives for disarming Hamas: the first is the full occupation of the Gaza Strip and the imposition of a military administration, limited in duration as much as possible, whose purpose is to create the required conditions (a demilitarized territory following the dismantling of Hamas as an effective governing and military entity) for transferring responsibility to the NCAG for the implementation of the “Twenty-Point Plan”; the second is a gradual — and necessarily more prolonged — dismantling through continuous encroachment on territory under Hamas control, degrading and eroding its military capabilities until its complete dismantling as a military organization; the third is a military campaign to disarm Hamas in parallel with the implementation of the rehabilitation plan in areas under IDF control, where Hamas is not present.

The Alternatives — Characteristics and Implications

Alternative A: Full Occupation of the Strip and the Imposition of a Temporary Military Administration

A large-scale operation across the entire Gaza Strip under Hamas control, aimed at the systematic destruction of weapons stockpiles, tunnels, and weapons production capabilities, alongside strikes on the organization's command-and-control systems. The occupation of the territory will require, upon its completion, the establishment of a military administration.

Key implications and consequences: The occupation will inevitably increase harm to non-combatants among the Strip's population, due to fighting in densely populated urban areas where Hamas uses civilians as human shields, as well as the extensive and developed tunnel infrastructure.

The military administration in the occupied territory will require assuming responsibility for managing the daily lives of the population and maintaining a substantial force presence. In a reality of continued confrontation with Hamas remnants and other terrorist organizations, this will increase the burden on the military and require the allocation of forces and resources, which will affect the IDF's freedom and ability to operate in other arenas. The imposition of a military administration and a large-scale, prolonged military presence in the Gaza Strip will have direct economic implications (direct military costs and costs associated with managing civilian life) and indirect ones (loss of workdays in the national economy, potential damage to exports, etc.).

Moreover, the occupation and the military administration will generate international criticism and lead to an erosion of Israel's international standing, exacerbate tensions between Israel and its Arab partners, and strain relations with the American administration. It can also be assumed that the imposition of a military administration will reduce the willingness of states that supported the "Twenty-Point Plan" to deploy troops to an international stabilization force and to contribute financially to the rehabilitation of the Strip. Furthermore, the occupation of the Strip — and especially the imposition of a military administration — will create difficulties in transferring control to an alternative Palestinian authority, due to the image of entering the territory on the bayonets of the IDF, which will undermine its legitimacy in the eyes of the Palestinian population.

On the other hand, the primary advantage of this alternative lies in its relatively high likelihood of success in disarming Hamas and demilitarizing the Strip within a comparatively short timeframe.

Alternative B: Gradual Disarmament of Hamas Through Encroachment on Territory Under Its Control

A systematic expansion of the area under IDF control ("the green zone"), pushing Hamas out of any territory in which the IDF establishes control and creating military conditions to prevent its re-entrenchment — until control is achieved over the entire Strip. This would occur in parallel with the continued military effort to disarm Hamas in areas that remain under its control. Any area cleared of Hamas would be transferred to the responsibility of the NCAG and the international stabilization force, until the entire territory of the Strip is transferred to their control.

Key implications and consequences: This alternative would provide Israel with a relatively flexible and broader operational space, given its willingness to contribute to the implementation and success of the “Twenty-Point Plan.” It would also allow continued legitimacy for the military effort to disarm Hamas in areas where the plan has not yet been implemented — aiding IDF operations in the remaining confined areas. A less populated environment would make it more difficult for Hamas to operate under the cover of the civilian population and would reduce incidental harm to non-combatants.

A key drawback of this alternative is the possibility that Hamas will continue to disrupt its progress from areas that remain under its control. Moreover, under this alternative, the humanitarian conditions of the Strip’s population would deteriorate, as residents would be pushed into increasingly confined areas and into conditions harsher than those currently prevailing, which are already severe. The deterioration would inevitably provoke harsh criticism of Israel, overshadow its already strained relations with its regional partners, erode its international standing, and generate tensions with the U.S. administration. It can be assessed that at a certain stage, the IDF would find itself engaged in combat in a confined area in the presence of a large civilian population — further intensifying criticism of Israel and the pressure on it to avoid escalation.

Another drawback is the limited operational capacity of Palestinian security mechanisms under the direction of the NCAG and the international stabilization force — which may require the IDF to operate directly in areas already transferred to their responsibility. Such IDF activity could lead to friction with these forces and tensions between Israel and the participating states, and complicate further transfers of territory to their control.

Furthermore, if the NCAG and the international stabilization force are unwilling or unable to assume responsibility for a given area, the IDF will be required to impose a military administration there in order to prevent Hamas from reorganizing.

The result would be the failure to implement the “Twenty-Point Plan,” with responsibility attributed to Israel. In effect, Israel would arrive at the outcome of the first alternative — full occupation and military administration of the Strip — through a more circuitous and prolonged path, and at a higher cost.

Alternative C: A Military Campaign to Disarm Hamas in Parallel with the Implementation of the Rehabilitation Plan in Areas Where Hamas Is Absent

Israel would allow the gradual and controlled entry of the NCAG and the stabilization force into areas under its control, in parallel with the continued military effort to disarm Hamas in areas that remain under its control. Any territory cleared of Hamas would be transferred to the responsibility of the NCAG and the international stabilization force, until the entire territory of the Strip is transferred to their control, once it has been cleared of Hamas as both a military and governing entity.

Key implications and consequences: This alternative would provide Israel with a relatively flexible and expanded operational space, given its willingness to contribute to the implementation and success of the “Twenty-Point Plan,” and would allow continued legitimacy for the military effort to disarm Hamas in areas where the plan has not yet been implemented.

Its primary advantage lies in its gradual, performance-based approach, grounded in demonstrated capability by the program's mechanisms, alongside sustained legitimacy for the continued military effort to disarm Hamas in the remaining areas of the Strip. Another advantage is the ability to encourage population movement from areas under Hamas control to areas under the responsibility of the plan's implementing mechanisms — thereby facilitating IDF operations in the remaining confined areas. A more sparsely populated environment would make it more difficult for Hamas to operate under the cover of the civilian population and would reduce incidental harm to non-combatants.

Here too the main disadvantage is the possibility that Hamas will continue to disrupt its progress from areas that remain under its control, while the limited capacity of Palestinian security forces could require renewed IDF involvement. This risks friction with international forces and partners, complicating further transfers of control.

Weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the three alternatives against Israel's vital interests indicates that the third alternative is preferable. Although it also has limitations and drawbacks, it is assessed as providing the most effective response, with a higher probability of success and at a lower cost, for disarming Hamas, demilitarizing the Gaza Strip, and advancing the "Twenty-Point Plan." It should be assumed that even partial implementation of this alternative is likely to encounter difficulties, given Hamas's clear motivation to obstruct any progress. Therefore, to ensure its success, it must be carried out under sustained military pressure on Hamas in areas that remain under its control. It must also be taken into account that once the rehabilitation process begins under the framework of the "Twenty-Point Plan," and resources are channeled by the program's partners, pressure on Israel to avoid escalation and refrain from continued military efforts may increase, due to concerns about disrupting implementation.

Moreover, attention must be given to the monitoring architecture — a system of oversight and control mechanisms. The planning and establishment of this monitoring system should be undertaken from the early stages of any selected alternative, as a condition for its implementation. It would include both technological and physical components aimed at preventing weapons smuggling and Hamas's rearmament, thereby ensuring the preservation of achievements. Naturally, it would need to be implemented alongside the other components of the "Twenty-Point Plan" — economic development, reconstruction, and education. Within this framework, it is important to ensure that entry into the rehabilitation phase is conditioned on "reconstruction in exchange for demilitarization." The large-scale flow of reconstruction funds and the establishment of new governing institutions would take place only subject to progress in the collection of light weapons and the destruction of the remaining underground infrastructure.

The Monitoring Architecture and Blocking Rearmament Routes

The monitoring mechanism must address two primary challenges: first, efforts by Hamas and/or other organizations to reorganize and rebuild their capabilities within the Gaza Strip (it can be assumed that Hamas and other terrorist organizations will make systematic and persistent efforts to preserve and develop capabilities for smuggling weapons and essential components for their domestic production); and second, the need to block as hermetically as possible all potential smuggling routes across four domains: land (border crossings — Egypt and Israel), underground (tunnels from Egyptian territory into the Strip along the Philadelphi Corridor), maritime, and aerial (smuggling via drones). The "Twenty-

Point Plan” does not provide a sufficient framework for establishing such a mechanism or for defining the principles governing its operation. From Israel’s perspective, it would therefore be appropriate to act, in close coordination with the U.S. administration, to formulate the guiding principles and logic for establishing and operating this mechanism at the outset of the plan’s implementation, in parallel with it, throughout its duration, and beyond.

The Land Domain

This domain primarily concerns the border crossings between Egypt and Israel and the Gaza Strip. Goods enter the Strip through these crossings, and in the context of a reconstruction process, materials will flow in massive quantities. Beyond the risk that these crossings will be exploited for the smuggling of weapons, a large portion of the materials intended for reconstruction can also be used for terrorist purposes and the construction of terrorist infrastructure (dual-use materials). While responsibility for security screening at Israeli border crossings rests exclusively with Israel, the situation at the Rafah crossing — under Egyptian sovereignty and operational responsibility — is entirely different. Across all crossings, the scale of traffic and goods movement requires appropriate technological, operational, and resource-based preparedness. However, with regard to the Rafah crossing, a more complex level of preparedness is required.

To ensure effective monitoring of goods passing through the Rafah crossing and to optimally prevent smuggling, the following principles must be ensured:

- **Dual-layer inspection model:** The civilian crossing will be managed by an agreed international/Arab force (e.g., an upgraded EUBAM mechanism or a regional task force), while all movement of goods and people will be monitored remotely through technological means by Israel and the United States.
- **Advanced scanning technology (HGV scanning):** Installation of X-ray scanners and AI-based inspection systems capable of detecting anomalies in material density, explosive compounds, and dual-use metals within cargo trucks, without delaying the flow of civilian logistics.
- **Joint technological operations center:** Data from scanners, biometric cameras tracking crossings, and thermal imaging will be transmitted in real time to a joint operations center (Israel, Egypt, the United States, and the international force on the ground). Israel will be granted real-time veto authority to halt the passage of suspicious trucks or individuals.

The Underground Domain

This domain, which operated even prior to Israel’s disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005, expanded into an extensive and complex network of smuggling tunnels, managed by clans and tribes in the Rafah area under Hamas control, and in some cases also directly operated by Hamas itself. These tunnels were used for smuggling people (wanted individuals and terrorist operatives), weapons, and goods, and their activity was enabled in part by Egyptian willful blindness and, in some cases, by the active involvement of Egyptian security elements.

The tunnel infrastructure was largely destroyed during the “Swords of Iron” war and following the IDF’s takeover of the Philadelphi Corridor and the entire Rafah area (the IDF Spokesperson [reported](#) in August 2024 that 80% of the tunnels had been destroyed, with continued efforts to eliminate the remaining

20%. It can be assumed that in the time since, the IDF has destroyed the vast majority of the known tunnels in areas under its full control). The IDF's presence in the area prevents the reconstruction of tunnel infrastructure, and Egyptian oversight has also become more stringent, in part due to sharp Israeli criticism of Egypt.

The working assumption is that as long as Hamas and other terrorist organizations retain physical access to Sinai, their ability to manufacture rockets, smuggle electronic components, and introduce standard explosive materials will persist. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure the physical separation of Hamas and other terrorist organizations from the Philadelphi Corridor (the border area), and to develop an integrated response that includes the following components:

- **Smart acoustic barrier (“slurry wall”):** A deep underground reinforced concrete barrier, embedded with advanced seismic and acoustic sensors capable of detecting excavation activity within a radius of hundreds of meters and at significant depths along the 14-kilometer corridor, similar to the barrier constructed along the Israel–Gaza border.
- **Deployment of indicative fiber-optic networks:** Along the above-ground and underground fencing to detect any attempt at contact or crossing with meter-level precision.
- **Establishment of a “sterile area” (buffer zone):** Expanding the corridor and removing residential structures on the Gazan side to a distance of at least 500 meters from the fence, in order to enable clear observation and identification of potential tunnel shafts within the civilian space.

From the perspective of Israel's security interests, it would be appropriate to prioritize the construction of the slurry wall along the Philadelphi Corridor, as well as the establishment of inspection systems and transit procedures at land crossings, before the commencement of the reconstruction process (and the entry of construction materials and other goods in massive quantities), and to set this as a condition for initiating reconstruction. It can be assumed that anything not implemented at the outset of reconstruction will either not be implemented at all or will be far more difficult and complex to execute at a later stage.

The Maritime Domain

The maritime domain has served Hamas for years as a channel for smuggling weapons. In the years preceding the “Swords of Iron” war — and especially since the war — the Israeli Navy has tightened its control over the maritime arena, successfully intercepting numerous smuggling attempts and becoming an effective deterrent, although smuggling has continued, albeit on a reduced scale. The implementation of the “Twenty-Point Plan” intensifies this challenge, as the plan may require the opening of a supervised seaport or a dedicated maritime terminal for Gaza in order to enable economic independence for the area. To prevent such a port from becoming a smuggling hub, stringent maritime oversight will be required, consisting of two main components:

A. “Cyprus or El-Arish First” Model

- **Inspection at a third-country port of origin:** This solution is based on an arrangement whereby all goods destined for the Gaza Strip will not sail directly to Gaza. Instead, they will be consolidated at a designated port (e.g., Larnaca port in Cyprus or El-Arish port in Egypt).

- **Israeli and international inspectors at the port of origin:** At this port, comprehensive and stringent security screening will be conducted by a joint task force that includes Israeli representatives. Following security clearance, the vessel will be sealed with a GPS-based electronic seal (E-Seal), transmitting to a joint operations center and indicating that the containers have not been opened during transit.
- **Authorized vessels only:** Only vessels that have undergone this process and received prior digital authorization will be permitted to enter Gaza’s territorial waters.

B. Coastal Defense and Active Maritime Blockade

Beyond the direct responsibility and operations of the Israeli Navy in the maritime domain, the following will be required:

- **International naval task force:** The establishment of a maritime patrol force led by regional actors (Egypt, Europe, and Gulf states) to conduct continuous patrols outside Gaza’s territorial waters. This force would have a mandate to stop, inspect, and detain any unauthorized vessel, operating in full coordination with the Israeli navy through a joint command center.
- **Hydro-acoustic network of underwater sensors:** Deployment of a network of sensors on the seabed around Gaza’s coastline and along the maritime border with Egypt to detect diver activity, unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs), and floating payloads.
- **Maritime drones and autonomous vessels (USVs):** Deployment of unmanned surface vessels conducting 24/7 patrols along the maritime border with Egypt to prevent traditional smuggling methods, such as the dropping of waterproof packages by fishermen from Sinai and their retrieval by Gazan fishermen.

The Aerial Domain

Recently, the use of drones for smuggling weapons from the Sinai Peninsula into the Gaza Strip via Israel has increased, and possibly also directly from Sinai — primarily in the Rafah area — into the Strip. These are particularly large drones, capable of carrying several dozen kilograms. They are procured by Israeli Bedouins, flown across the border to Bedouins in Sinai, who load them with weapons and launch them back to their senders in Israel. Subsequently, significant quantities of weapons are transferred via these drones from Israeli territory into the Gaza Strip, where they are received by Hamas operatives. It is unclear whether some of these weapons remain in Hamas’s possession for future use against Israel. Control of the aerial domain requires enhanced coordination with Egypt, alongside the establishment of a monitoring system for drone activity, interception capabilities, and intelligence and operational frameworks to disrupt smuggling networks within Israel.

The proposed monitoring architecture effectively constitutes a model of “indirect Israeli security sovereignty.” Israeli forces do not need to be physically present at the Rafah crossing or at a Gaza port, thereby avoiding friction that could undermine the legitimacy of the “Twenty-Point Plan.” The proposed architecture would provide Israel with the means to prevent the rearmament of Hamas and other terrorist organizations, while maintaining a relatively low level of friction with the Palestinian population and other actors involved in implementing the plan. This architecture will achieve this —

under a scenario of full or partial implementation of the “Twenty-Point Plan” — together with the preservation of Israel’s operational freedom and Gaza’s demilitarization achievements, while enabling coordination with Palestinian and international forces.

Conclusion

Demilitarizing the Gaza Strip — an essential condition for the implementation of the “Twenty-Point Plan” and a vital Israeli security interest — depends on disarming Hamas, a task that only the IDF can carry out. This article examined three possible alternatives for implementing this effort by the IDF. The third alternative, which focuses on the gradual implementation of the “Twenty-Point Plan” in areas under IDF control alongside continued military efforts to dismantle Hamas as a military organization, is preferable. This alternative is expected to provide Israel with the most effective response to its vital interests and the greatest degree of flexibility.

At the same time, under any alternative, Israel will be required to establish a monitoring architecture and counter-smuggling system across four domains — land, underground, maritime, and aerial — to prevent Hamas and other terrorist organizations from smuggling weapons and components for military buildup into the Strip.

From Israel’s perspective, it would be appropriate to shorten as much as possible the duration of its presence in the Gaza Strip as an occupying force, and to ensure that the responsibility for civilian governance and reconstruction is placed on the Arab world and the international community — while preserving only limited, intelligence-based operational freedom of action. It is important that Israel be able to advance demilitarization without falling into the “occupation trap” and paying the heavy price of establishing a prolonged or permanent military administration, which would erode the IDF operationally, impose responsibility for managing Palestinian civilian life, burden Israel’s economy, and weaken its international standing.

To ensure the achievement of demilitarization without falling into the “occupation trap,” Israel should establish a mechanism of “reverse conditionality,” linking the depth of its military involvement to the pace of implementation of the “Twenty-Point Plan,” based on two components:

- **“Territory in exchange for alternative governance”:** As the NCAG, Palestinian security mechanisms, and the international force demonstrate effective governance and prevent rocket fire or terrorist activity within a given area (e.g., northern Gaza), the IDF will reduce its activity there, transfer inspection authorities, and allow increasing flows of reconstruction funding, materials, and equipment.
- **Leveraging the economy as a security restraint:** IDF presence (and the implications of occupation) as a direct function of the level of terrorism in the area. The local population and technocratic leadership must recognize that restraining dormant Hamas cells and preventing rearmament efforts will render military occupation unnecessary.