

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ISRAELI POLICY ON THE “DAY AFTER” IN GAZA

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מכון ירושלים לאסטרטגיה ולביטחון

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Recommendations for Israeli policy on the “day after” in Gaza

- With the “political clock” ticking and no certainty that Israel will be given the time to complete the dismantling of Hamas’ military infrastructure, it must conquer Gaza quickly and arrive at the “day after.”
- Israel should focus on achieving its vital security interests: **preserving military freedom of action in Gaza and establishing wide buffer zones in Gaza under Israeli (non-sovereign) control.** Buffer zones should be built in the northern Gaza Strip (to distance the Israeli border communities from Gaza residents) and in the south (to reduce smuggling into Gaza from Sinai), as well as parallel to the security barrier to be rebuilt along the border.
- Israel should avoid policy clashes with the United States. Jerusalem can always say, “Yes, but.”
- Israel should support the American demand for the “revitalization” of the Palestinian Authority (PA) despite the small chances for its realization. Israel should try to influence the parameters of “revitalization” (see conditions in the Appendix).
- Israel should strive to minimize the presence of international forces as much as possible to avoid tensions with Washington and countries participating in an international force.
- The presence of the PA in Gaza is preferable to the presence of international forces, even under American leadership, because its weakness will allow Israel greater freedom of action. Limited security cooperation between Israel and the PA already exists. The PA has an administrative infrastructure in Gaza that could be of assistance when it comes to the provision of humanitarian aid. It is not certain that the PA will show any desire to enter Gaza or to undergo “revitalization.”
- In the event that other alternatives to rule Gaza (temporarily) are not implemented, an ad hoc mechanism may emerge on the ground to prevent a humanitarian disaster, the source of whose authority is unclear. The emergence of such a structure is consistent with Israeli interests because it lacks governmental authority and allows for military freedom of action.
- Israel should ensure that the flow of assistance to Gaza for its reconstruction is compatible with Israel’s interests.
- Israel should conduct extensive diplomatic activity, not just in the American arena, but also in Europe and in Arab countries with which it has ties, to explain what is needed to achieve a “revitalized” PA, and how to prevent the resurgence of Hamas – while at the same time preventing a humanitarian disaster in Gaza.
- The debate on the “day after in Gaza” cannot be divorced from the discussion of countering the attempts by Iran and its proxies to harm Israel’s population – a central element in its population-centric strategy. After defeating Hamas, Israel must consider preventive strikes on Hezbollah and key elements of Iran’s nuclear infrastructure.



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The Time Dimension

The United States and the “moderate” Arab countries want to see the IDF vanquish Hamas. It seems that the IDF still has time to achieve Israel’s war goals: the destruction of Hamas’ military infrastructure and the restoration of Israeli deterrence (the issue of the hostages is a separate issue to be resolved once the fighting ends). Building an alternative to Hamas rule in Gaza is a diplomatic project that will take time, and which can be used to continue the fighting and build the buffer zones. However, the “political clock” is ticking and Israel does not have unlimited time to attain its war goals.

The Alternatives

At the initiative of the United States, Israel has commenced a debate on the “day after.” The rhetorical question of who wants Gaza has not been answered. The alternatives mentioned are hardly appealing:

1. A power vacuum following an uncoordinated withdrawal by the IDF.
2. The return of the PA to Gaza with its coercive forces after undergoing “revitalization.”
3. The return of the PA to Gaza after an interim period of stabilization by US-led international contingents.
4. The crowning of a Gazan figure such as Mohammed Dahlan to rule Gaza.
5. An international trusteeship under the auspices of UN forces.
6. If it is not possible to instate one of the alternatives mentioned above, a mechanism will be established to deal solely with the humanitarian needs of the residents of Gaza, relying on the existing, minimal PA bureaucracy, which has managed governmental services in Gaza even when Hamas controlled the territory.

Preferences of the Main Actors

Israel

Jerusalem does not wish to remain in Gaza and take responsibility for its residents. Its postwar security objectives are:

- A. To preserve military freedom of action to curb the growth of terrorist networks in the Gaza Strip.
- B. To create wide buffer zones under Israeli control (not sovereignty), especially along the northern border of the Gaza Strip (to distance Gaza from communities on the Israeli side of the border) and along its southern border (to reduce smuggling into Gaza from the Sinai), and a buffer zone parallel to the security barrier that will be rebuilt along the border. These buffer zones should become “kill zones” to prevent access to Israeli targets.



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United States

The Biden administration is captive to the belief that the "two states" paradigm can be implemented through the return of a revitalized PA to Gaza. The US is willing to consider the presence of Arab forces (and perhaps others) for an interim period until the PA can rule in Gaza.

Palestinian Authority

According to its chairman, the PA is willing to take responsibility for Gaza on condition that a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict is reached. It is unlikely that the PA will respond to American pressure for significant reforms in government and education and waive payments to terrorists. The PA's agreement to engage in the reconstruction of Gaza and institution-building in the Strip is questionable.

Egypt

Egypt is watching events on its western border with concern. It does not want to take responsibility for Gaza, nor does it approve of the presence of Saudi or American forces on its border. However, Egypt's difficult economic situation may tempt Cairo to participate in an inter-Arab force in Gaza in exchange for generous grants. The return of the PA to Gaza would be a convenient solution for Cairo. The PA's weakness will allow Egypt to influence what is happening in Gaza. However, we should take into account that Egypt has an interest in preserving its role as a mediator between Hamas and Israel, and it is reluctant to lose this lever of influence. The existence of a thorn such as Hamas on Israel's side does not contradict Egypt's interest as Cairo does not want to see Israel too strong.

The rest of the world

With a few exceptions, the world will align itself according to whatever American formula is adopted in Ramallah.



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Alternatives from Israel's point of view

From a security perspective, a power vacuum in Gaza is not a concern for Israel as this will allow military freedom of operation with Israel able to enter Gaza at will. Of course, a power vacuum will also mean no effective resistance to buffer zones along the border with the Strip.

The likelihood that the US will be willing to accept a power vacuum is slim. The Americans fear chaos. They dream of a stable government that will bring law and order to the Gaza Strip and will be able to engage in its reconstruction with generous budgets from the international community. The ambitious American vision, as articulated recently by President Joe Biden, also includes an end to the conflict. The Americans seem to have forgotten their failures in “engineering” Muslim countries, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, even though the US military remained there for many years after their occupation.

The US will be hard-pressed to find a Gazan figure willing to rule the Strip as any such figure will fear being murdered by Hamas. Any Gazan figure that steps into the vacuum will have to raise local forces to maintain their rule. Reliance on foreign forces, and even more so on the IDF, will undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of any such figure. All other proposed arrangements suffer from the same weakness – lack of legitimacy.

Moreover, other options such as an international trusteeship backed by international forces under the UN, inter-Arab forces, troops from Western countries led by the United States, or the PA will all seek to ensure their survival and are likely to turn a blind eye to terrorist networks whose goal is to harm Israel. Their ability to influence Gaza's political culture and education system, which is the key to changing attitudes toward Israel, is highly questionable. Americans who advocated for a change in Iraq's political culture noted that this necessitated a multigenerational effort.

Israel's experience with international forces is negative. The effectiveness of international forces in preventing terrorism is limited. They disappear in the hour of need or interfere with IDF operations. Peace forces are also a source of tension with the countries whose soldiers are stationed on the ground. The PA's capabilities and desire to defend Israel from terrorism are also very limited, and its fundamental positions toward Israel are not substantially distant from those of Hamas.

In the absence of a good option that is worth the effort to implement, to maintain relations with its most important ally, Israel should opt for the least damaging option that converges with the desires of the United States. In general, Israel needs good relations with the United States to



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receive military, diplomatic, and financial assistance. This holds even more true when it comes to the “day after” in Gaza. Israel will need the US to replenish its arsenal and replace its spent munitions. Israel will also need US support if it opts to expand the war to rid itself of Hezbollah.

Therefore, it would be futile for Israel to oppose American diplomatic efforts. As part of the American obsession with a “two states for two peoples” solution, the Biden administration wants to return Gaza to the rule of the PA to reunite the West Bank and Gaza as one undivided political entity. That is why the US supports the war to eliminate the military capabilities of Hamas – the PA’s greatest rival. Despite the ongoing governmental failures of the Palestinian Authority, Washington believes the Palestinian Authority can be revitalized. The president’s determination to realize his vision should not be taken lightly.

Compliance with the US, which may be perceived as a major concession by Israel, is also important to prevent further radicalization of the position of the Democratic Party in the US. The removal of Israeli opposition to the PA’s entry into Gaza will also prove to the Biden administration that the Israeli government is not held captive by the extreme right, which strongly opposes the transfer of the Gaza Strip to the PA – a situation that the right believes may increase the chances of establishment of a Palestinian state (despite the PA’s failure to establish a functioning state in the West Bank).

Israel must support the American demand for the “revitalization” of the PA. It must propose to the Americans conditions to be met by the PA that sound reasonable to American ears.

- A. Termination of payments by the PA to family members of terrorists.
- B. Major changes in the education system to significantly reduce hatred of Israel.
- C. Dismantling of UNWRA – an organization that preserves and fans the conflict – and the transfer of all its powers to the PA to strengthen it.
- D. De-Hamasification of the Palestinian entity (outlawing Hamas, etc.)
- E. Annulment of all PA petitions to the ICC in the Hague.

Installing the PA in Gaza (even if not a revitalized PA) will, paradoxically, ensure the greatest measure of freedom of operation for the IDF – which, ultimately, is Israel’s goal; the PA’s weakness and inefficiency become an advantage for Israel. The PA is used for Israeli military freedom of operation. The PA also has a permanent interest in preventing Hamas from regaining its strength in the Palestinian arena following its defeat by Israel. This is the essence of the security cooperation with Israel so far. As in the West Bank, it is the IDF that will have to do most of the work against the growth of new Hamas cells in Gaza, and one should not expect too much resistance from the PA.



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If the PA cannot or does not want to meet the American conditions for revitalization, Israel should be prepared to deal with an American proposal for temporary rule in Gaza by an inter-Arab (or multinational) force led by the United States. During the transition period, there will be a combination of a civilian framework – which will deal with governance and rehabilitation, and a fundamental change in education and the public sphere (the chances of success are small) – and multinational police forces, which will be recruited from countries that have an interest in this (there must be no American military personnel “on the ground,” but there will be a presence at the command levels).

The downside of this proposal is the development of a strong American commitment to a “new life in Gaza” – with all that this implies regarding priorities versus security considerations. The advantage is the continued separation between Gaza and the West Bank since it is not at all certain that the local elements that will emerge under the auspices of the multinational framework will one day choose to subordinate themselves to the rule of “West Bankers.”

Timing of IDF withdrawal from Gaza

The timing of the IDF's withdrawal could become a bargaining chip for obtaining what Israel wants from the Americans in Gaza. The United States will not want to see the IDF withdraw without the establishment of a new political arrangement of its creation, which replaces the Israeli army in an orderly process. The US needs Israeli cooperation for its “quixotic” attempt to build a new PA, end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – as President Biden has put it – and create stability and prosperity in Gaza.



LETTING THE PA FAIL IN GAZA CAN BECOME AN ADVANTAGE FOR ISRAEL

PROFESSOR EFRAIM INBAR

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Hopefully, Israel will have enough time to achieve the goal of the war – the elimination of Hamas's military infrastructure and the restoration of Israeli deterrence. Israel has no desire to stay in Gaza and take responsibility for its population. However, it wants to maintain military freedom of action to stem the growth of terrorist organizations in the Gaza area after its withdrawal.

A political vacuum in Gaza should not trouble Israel too much because it allows Israel military freedom of action. Yet, the Americans fear chaos, thereby insisting on discussing "the day after." They dream of a stable government that will bring law and order to Gaza and engage in its rehabilitation with the help of large budgets from abroad. The Americans are ignoring their failures in "politically engineering" Muslim countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq after they were occupied by the American army for several years.

Remembering this American experience, and what is happening in Arab political entities such as Libya, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, and even the Palestinian Authority (PA), building a political framework that will turn Gaza into Singapore or something less, is not an easy task to accomplish.

And Gaza is not Germany or Japan, modern states, whose values and political systems were changed to some extent by the American occupation. Therefore, the expectation that after Hamas rule in Gaza ends, a new regime will be able to maintain a monopoly on the use of force to prevent the growth of terrorist organizations and eliminate the Israeli need for military freedom of action in Gaza, is unrealistic.

An international trusteeship, UN-mandated forces, inter-Arab units, and military contingents from Western countries, will all object to Israel's military freedom of action. Moreover, their top priority will be their own safety, and they will prefer to turn a blind eye to terrorist organizations whose goal is to harm Israel.



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Israel's experience with international forces is negative and their effectiveness in preventing terrorism is limited. When needed they disappear or interfere with IDF operations. Such forces would also be a source of tension with the countries whose troops would be stationed in Gaza. The PA, which the US has mentioned as an option to replace Hamas, is weak and its desire to defend Israel is questionable.

Restocking the weapons cache

Unfortunately, Israel cannot ignore American preferences. The US is very important to Israel, especially after a war when its munitions stockpiles will be empty and will need to be filled. Israel will need the support of the US if it wants to initiate a large-scale attack on Hezbollah.

Therefore, Jerusalem should take Washington's wishes into account. As part of the American obsession with the "two-state solution," the Biden administration is trying to implement this paradigm by returning PA rule to Gaza to reunify the West Bank and Gaza as one political entity. Satisfying Washington on this issue is also important to prevent further radicalization of the Democratic Party's position.

The alternative that will provide the greatest freedom of military action is counter-intuitively the introduction of the PA into Gaza. Its notorious weakness and inefficiency can become an advantage for Israel. The PA also has an interest in preventing the resurgence of Hamas. This is the cornerstone of security cooperation with Israel in the West Bank.

As in Judea and Samaria, the IDF will be the one that will have to do most of the work in Gaza. We should not expect too much resistance from the PA whose abilities are limited.

Regarding the issue of civil government, it is difficult to assume that the PA will function better in Gaza than in the West Bank. It will continue to be corrupt and ineffective. Perhaps a little of the large amount of money that will go to the reconstruction of Gaza will trickle down to the Gazans.



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It can be assumed with a certain degree of certainty that the PA will fail in Gaza. Additional disappointment from the Palestinian national movement, the nemesis of the Zionist national movement, is beneficial for Israel. There is little chance that the Palestinians will give up their dreams unless there is a revolutionary change in the Palestinian education system.

A public opinion poll from the summer shows that two-thirds of Palestinians think that Israel will not celebrate the centenary of its independence. Perhaps another Palestinian failure will convince the world that this is a failed movement that does not deserve support.

The removal of Israeli opposition to the introduction of the PA into Gaza will also prove to the US that the Israeli government is not held captive by the extreme Right, which strongly opposes the transfer of Gaza to the PA.

Egypt, an important regional actor, is following with concern the war along its western border, and probably views the return of the PA to Gaza as a convenient solution. The PA is more amenable to Egyptian influence than the alternatives.

IN EXCHANGE for the removal of opposition to the PA's rule in Gaza, Israel should demand the creation of buffer zones under its control in the North of Gaza (to distance it from the border settlements) and in the South (to reduce smuggling into Gaza from Sinai). These buffer zones and a strip parallel to the security barrier along the border should become kill zones to prevent access to Israeli targets.

The date of the IDF's withdrawal from Gaza should be used as a bargaining leverage for attaining Israel's goals there. The US would like to see an orderly IDF withdrawal to be replaced by a political arrangement of its sponsorship. The US needs Israeli cooperation in its quixotic attempt to bring stability and prosperity to Gaza. Israel should not oppose American diplomatic efforts, even though we know that after the withdrawal, the IDF will have to continue "mowing the grass" in Gaza.





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