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ISRAELI IDEAS FOR THE DAY AFTER IN GAZA

Introduction

While the full military defeat of Hamas – for which Israel says an operation in Rafah is essential – remains outstanding, both international and domestic Israeli attention remains on the question of the “day after” Hamas in Gaza.

Who will assume control and take charge of urgent civilian priorities like the distribution of aid? How much control will Israel retain? What will be the role of the Palestinian Authority? And what will be the role of Arab states and the wider international community?

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This BICOM research paper assesses the variety of Israeli thinking on these and other questions. Drawing on the government’s (limited) official policy, as well as a diverse range of expert proposals, the paper identifies those areas where there is a consensus of opinion and those where different thinkers, despite desiring the same outcome of a demilitarised and deradicalised Gaza Strip no longer able to threaten Israel, reach substantively different conclusions.



The Israeli Government's War Aims

The Israeli government has set out principles for the future of Gaza. Listed in sections of immediate, medium and short term, an outline was presented to security cabinet ministers in late February which focused on the principles for Gaza:

In the immediate term: the IDF will fight until the war aims are achieved which include destroying the military capabilities of Hamas and Islamic Jihad and their infrastructure, returning the hostages and preventing any security threat from Gaza.

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In the medium term: Gaza's demilitarisation, IDF freedom of action (similar to that it exercises in the West Bank), and the establishment of a security zone. The paper states that "Israel will maintain freedom of operation in the entire Gaza Strip, with no time limitation, in order to prevent the reemergence of terrorism and prevent any threats from Gaza." PM Netanyahu has talked about a security zone "as long as there is a security need for it" and that Israel needs a 'southern closure' on the Gaza–Egypt border – ideally in cooperation with Egypt and the US – to prevent the ability of terrorists in Gaza to rearm. Israel also envisions Gaza's "complete demilitarisation... beyond what is required for the needs of maintaining public order", with the paper stating that Israel will be responsible for realising this goal for the foreseeable future.

Local officials – rather than the Palestinian Authority (PA) – should take responsibility in Gaza. The document itself does not explicitly rule out the participation of the PA in post-war governance in Gaza. Moreover, the head of the National Security Council, Tzachi Hanegbi, wrote in Saudi paper Elaph that Israel could agree to involving the PA in the future of the Gaza Strip after it engages in reform in education and ends the incitement against Israel. Israel Hayom also revealed that Israel had begun working with local Gazans affiliated with Fatah to coordinate and secure the delivery and distribution of aid in the Strip. Senior Palestinian Authority official Majed Faraj, the head of its General Intelligence Service, is thought to have been critical in securing this cooperation. At the same time, Netanyahu has warned against Gaza becoming a 'Fatah-stan' [The PA is dominated

by the Palestinian faction Fatah]. The civilian component part of the document calls for local officials with administrative experience not identified with “countries or entities that support terror” to be responsible for the civil administration in Gaza.

Reconstruction and Deradicalisation – According to the plan, Israel will also promote a “de-radicalisation plan... in all religious, educational and welfare institutions in Gaza.” This ideally will be advanced “as much as possible with the involvement and assistance of Arab countries that have experience in promoting de-radicalisation.” Gaza’s financial reconstruction can only be contributed to by states acceptable to Israel and after deradicalisation is achieved.

In the long term: Israel opposes the imposition of final status negotiations and unilateral recognition of Palestinian statehood. The government pushed back on what it termed ‘international dictates’ regarding a permanent settlement with the Palestinians. It adds that such an agreement should only be reached through direct negotiations between the parties, without preconditions, and that Israel continues to oppose the unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state, which it calls a “reward for terror.” The outline also talks about continued Israeli security control in the West Bank.

Adding details to principles. At the request of Gadi Eisenkot, member of the inner security cabinet, a plan was drawn up by Amos Yadlin and an Israeli NGO, the MIND Israel team, that sought to expand on Netanyahu’s document. The plan (not formally approved) emphasises that Israel needs to be a strong, safe and prosperous Jewish and democratic state as well as the pressing need to dismantle Hamas, reach a hostage deal, create an American-Israeli-Arab coalition, and to transfer responsibility for Gaza’s citizens away from Israel to a local Palestinian agency under international and regional supervision in cooperation with Israel.

Promoting diplomatic steps but (temporarily) rejecting Palestinian statehood. The Eisenkot plan explicitly states that Israel will not commit to a Palestinian state for the next five years in order not to give Hamas a prize. It states that direct negotiations on a diplomatic arrangement will be contingent on extensive reforms in the PA, and

strictly ensuring the complete demilitarisation of any future Palestinian entity. The plan stresses the need for complementary diplomatic steps alongside IDF operations in order to prevent Hamas from rebuilding its military might and to create a governmental alternative in the longer term. The plan also stresses the importance of strengthening relations with Israel's potential regional allies, including Saudi Arabia, and of preparing to address the threats from Iran, with an emphasis on its nuclear programme and destabilising activity in the region. A special emphasis was put on the opportunity to formulate an Israeli-American vision in the Palestinian theatre on the basis of these Israeli demands, as an alternative to the American demand for a Palestinian state.

Think Tank / Civil Society Ideas

Since October 7th, Israeli think tanks and civil society initiatives have suggested their own principles for the conduct of the war and the 'Day After' in Gaza. This BICOM paper will explore the ideas published in the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA) – an October essay entitled [URGENT: An Israeli Strategy for a Post-Hamas Gaza](#) and a March piece written by Toby Greene and Jonathan Rynhold, [Beyond Humanitarian Aid: A Plan for Gazan Civilians Is a Strategic Necessity for Israel](#); a paper from the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) titled, "[The Day After](#)": [Regional Outlines and Post-War Gaza Strip](#) and "[The Day After](#)" [Hamas's Rule in Gaza: Time to Sober Up From the Illusions](#); [The Israeli Initiative](#) published by Mitvim together with the Berl Katznelson Center (Mitvim); ideas published in the Fathom Journal by former Oslo negotiator Yair Hirschfeld, [The Peace Process, Past and Future: An Insider's Reflections and Advice](#); and several articles written by Gabi Siboni, Zaki Shalom and Kobi Michael of the Institute for National Security Studies and Zionist Strategy ([Misgav Institute](#)).

Some Israeli proposals are closer to the government's position that the PA should have no role in Gaza. Zaki Shalom and Kobi Michael at the Misgav Institute [write that](#) attempts to politically unify the West Bank and Gaza are in error. "The very complex reality in the Gaza Strip requires its own unique and elaborate solution, and therefore, any attempt to combine the crumbling Palestinian Authority in the West Bank with the Gaza Strip will lead to utter failure in both."

Israeli security control, and interim military government prior to new regional-local framework in Gaza. In a separate piece, [Michael and Siboni argue](#) that “the endgame in Gaza must be complete Israeli security control, and establishment of a Palestinian civil government that is subject to supervision of regional or international bodies.” In order to facilitate this, “the IDF will have to continuously interdict any attempt by hostile actors to rebuild a military/terror presence in Gaza. This is a prerequisite for ensuring a de-Hamasification / deradicalization process in Gaza, which will take years.” While not envisaging a long-term military re-occupation, Michael and Siboni argue that such an interim arrangement would “lay the groundwork and set the stage for introducing an international-regional administration that will assume the responsibility for administering the area and the population and for initiating the process of the strip’s rehabilitation, while also mentoring and training a local civilian administration unaffiliated and unassociated with Hamas.”

Other policy ideas bear greater similarity to those within the international community that ultimately seek to promote a two state solution. While different, many share broad ideas as to the way forward. These include:

- **The weakening and delegitimisation of Hamas.** Hirschfeld calls for encouraging the US-led ‘coalition of the willing’ to adapt the language and action of UN Security Council Resolution after 9/11 to apply to 7 October. He also proposes stopping all income getting to Hamas by taking effective action against Iran, Qatar, and Turkey, if they continue to finance the group. He adds the importance of putting an end to Hamas’ military capacities by destroying their entire military buildup.
- **Ensuring the flow of humanitarian aid.** BESA calls for Israel to move proactively with respect to the plight of civilians and to adopt a coherent and consistent approach to Gaza’s humanitarian situation. Hirschfeld discusses providing massive humanitarian relief to the civilian population in Gaza by creating a functioning system of governance and security. A ‘coalition of the willing’ (the US, UK, the UN Envoy for Humanitarian Relief and Reconstruction Sigrid Kaag, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan, Egypt) should assist the PA in establishing a Gazan National Emergency Committee, which shall be enabled to take over governmental

duties. (It's worth noting that for Michael and Siboni at the Misgav Institute, the only way to solve the challenge of humanitarian aid is "full Israeli control over aid distribution." They thus suggest the "establishment of a provisional Israeli military government, initially in the north of Gaza, and later as circumstances may allow also in the centre and Khan Younis, is the only reasonable, relevant and effective option.")

- **A reformed PA is crucial in Gaza.** The INSS paper argues that a "renewed Palestinian Authority returning to power in Gaza is the default option for Israel, especially in terms of the United States and the [pragmatic] Arab states which will play a key role in the future of Gaza," adding that it could be implemented quickly and would have the support of the international community. Mitvim's *The Israeli Initiative* discussed "rebuilding a revitalised PA as a basis for a state-in-the-making." That paper argues that the reforms should be implemented "in the spirit of the plans promoted in the past by Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad." Such reforms would also include measures to promote "de-radicalisation of Palestinian society and profound change in the Palestinian security apparatus, and the education and judicial systems." In a similar vein, the October BESA paper argues that "Israeli interests are best served by establishing in Gaza a PA-linked administration alongside a massive reconstruction program backed by the US and other international and regional actors."¹
- **Creating a political horizon.** BESA's March paper says that in order to restore international legitimacy, Israel should "tie its war aims to a broadly acceptable political vision for Gaza and the wider Palestinian arena." This, it explains, means "aligning with US-led proposals for regional peace, including a credible path to an eventual two-state solution." Hirschfeld suggests that the US and Israel should to negotiate a security and political Memorandum of Understanding, defining milestones on the way to a secure, stable and prosperous Middle East, with parallel US understandings with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan, Egypt and the PA. Mitvim's *Israeli Initiative* calls for a "sharp transition from war to constructive political action" which it says entails convening a peace conference that sketches a

1. The paper further states that a declaration of support by Israel for establishing such a regime as soon as possible would provide a political direction to the military operation and enhance its international legitimacy – something that did not happen.

political horizon based on the two-state vision, and the formation of an international-regional framework (a proper replacement of the paralysed Quartet) to support its advancement. One of the parts of this process will be international recognition of a Palestinian state (relating to a demilitarised and viable Palestinian state living peacefully alongside Israel in accordance with a stable political settlement.)

- Key role for Sunni Arab allies
 - **Necessary for reconstruction** - The monetary sums required for Gaza reconstruction are tremendous and can likely only be brought from Arab states. Hirschfeld in Fathom discusses being guided by the “political, security, economic and business interests of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, other Gulf states and India.” He recommends a crisis-support and reconstruction plan that should be designed and executed with an eye on the wider, longer-term ‘Economic Leap Plan’, which will be based on integrating Gaza with key regional projects and regional economic cooperation at large. Within this context, he suggests fitting Gaza in along an intra-regional East-West and a parallel South-North Corridor, connecting the Indian Ocean, the Arab Gulf, and the Red Sea via land and sea routes to the Eastern Mediterranean and onwards to Europe. Such a plan would require connecting the railway structure of the East, via a 400-kilometre railway connection in Jordan to the existing Israeli and a planned Palestinian railway networks, creating many hundreds of thousands of employment opportunities along the way. Mitvim’s Israeli Initiative envisions international and Arab assistance in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip, and the building of Palestinian state institutions and mechanisms for a renewed PA. These state institutions will enable the PA to effectively fight terrorism and serve as the basis for the demilitarised Palestinian state-in-the-making. Hirschfeld suggests that the Office of the US Security Coordinator cooperating with Arab police contingencies, possibly from Egypt, Morocco and other Arab states.
 - **Potential for deepening normalisation** - According to the INSS, the return of such a reformed PA It will also, so claims the paper, “integrate with the normalisation process between Israel and Saudi Arabia as well as with the formation of a new regional architecture to counter Iran’s axis of resistance.”

- **Necessary for final status diplomatic breakthrough with the Palestinians -**

The Israeli Initiative argues that “although the core of the conflict is between Israel and the Palestinians, its resolution can only be achieved through a broad regional approach leading to an Israeli-Palestinian-regional settlement.” It describes a process lasting 2-3 years which will prepare the ground for the renewal of an Israeli-Palestinian-regional peace process including deepening Israel's normalisation processes and partnerships with Arab states. One key component is ultimately a regional defence alliance led by the US and Israel and with the participation of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Morocco.

Iran’s unprecedented direct attack on Israel on the night of April October 13th provided the clearest indication yet that just such a security framework is already emerging.

The active participation of Jordan, along with Israel’s western allies, in neutralising 99 percent of the over-300 missiles and armed UAVs launched by Tehran was highly significant and, along with the active cooperation of Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, signaled a new era of an Israeli-Western-pragmatic Arab state alliance against Iran.

- **Both Israel and the Palestinians will have to make declarative intent and undergo changes.** The *Israeli Initiative* lists ‘confidence-building measures’ that the Israeli and Palestinians governments should take.

- For Israel these include: the gradual resumption of passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; transfer of territories in the West Bank to Palestinian responsibility; convening of the Joint Economic Committee and updating the Paris Protocol to promote and nurture a Palestinian economy independent of Israel’s; release of Palestinian prisoners as a goodwill gesture conditioned on their commitment to abandon the path of violence and terrorism; freezing construction in settlements deep inside the West Bank and evacuating illegal outposts in coordination with the US administration; incentives to encourage settlers to evacuate homes deep in Palestinian territory and move to Israeli territory or to settlements in settlement blocs near the Green Line that are intended to remain in Israeli hands in any future arrangement; promoting de-radicalisation measures through a comprehensive government programme from the political echelon level down to field commanders designed to prevent

violence and terrorism by Jews against Palestinians in the West Bank.

- For the Palestinians these include: declaring the 1967 territories (the Gaza Strip and West Bank) as the areas of the future Palestinian state and recognising Israel as a sovereign state in accordance with the principle of two states for two peoples (something previous Palestinian leaders have refused to do); to undertake to abandon the path of terrorism, Palestinian elections should be conducted under the terms of an advanced political process illustrating the achievements of a moderate political path. *The Israeli Initiative* stresses that they will need to take place in accordance with the three principles set in the past by the Quartet – the commitment to abandon terrorism, recognising Israel as a sovereign state, and accepting the official agreements signed in the past by Israel.

The Way Forward

The challenge for the Israeli government in achieving its stated principles is the absence of a stable address in a post-Hamas Gaza other than Israel or the PA, the latter option currently rejected by PM Netanyahu. Moreover, the only way Arab states will be involved in the rehabilitation of Gaza – also considered essential – is both if the PA is present on the ground and if a serious political horizon has been created. This too is an idea the current right-wing government will struggle to agree to.

One option, hinted at by the Majid Faraj initiative, might be to have cooperative and reformist elements within the existing PA – or indeed exiled former PA heavyweights like Mohamed Dahlan or Salam Fayyad – work to empower non-Hamas Gazans in the creation of their own moderate, technocratic administration.

The challenge for the other Israeli (and international community) plans that emphasise the importance of a rejuvenated PA and the creation of a political horizon is that it's far from clear either of these are possible.

Can the PA reform (and Palestinian society de-radicalise)? Even before October 7 and when its remit ran only to the West Bank, Mahmoud Abbas's unpopular and oppressive government struggled to maintain supremacy over independent and

Iranian-backed militias. The current PA has demonstrated little willingness to move beyond cosmetic and towards significant reforms and would require substantial outside assistance in being able to maintain authority against rejectionist elements committed to violent struggle. The tolerance of a Palestinian public – whether in Gaza or the West Bank – for the expansion of PA rule is doubtful. (The latest Palestinian polling shows a fall in the popularity of Hamas, but not to the benefit of Fatah.) Fayyad, the international community’s favourite to lead such reforms has single digit popularity. Doubtful also is the possibility for Palestinian deradicalisation, certainly in the short term. Polling from the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research in both December 2023 and March 2024 found 71 and 72 percent of Palestinians believe Hamas’ decision to carry out the October 7 massacre correct.²

Can a political horizon be agreed? While the US and UK seem intent on envisaging a demilitarised Palestinian State – in both Gaza and the West Bank – as a realistic medium-term possibility, **the Netanyahu government and the Israeli people are reluctant to countenance this option right now**, so soon after Hamas’ massacre. Any sense that movement towards two states has come as a reward for terror is naturally resented, with post-October 7th [polls showing](#) 65 percent of Israelis opposing a sovereign Palestinian State, a near-reversal of the figure a decade ago.

Scepticism of territorial withdrawal isn’t just amongst Netanyahu supporters. The replacement of the ideologically right-wing Netanyahu government is conceivable after elections (yet to be called). But even then, the Israeli public remains hawkish and deeply sceptical of territorial withdrawal. Such proposals, short of statehood though they are, will likely prove too worrying to an Israeli public still shocked by the massacre and facing an ongoing and imminent threat from Iran and its proxies. Views *might* change if an agreement also led to normalisation with Saudi Arabia.

In parallel, **the amenability of the PA and other elements of the Palestinian national movement to making the kind of commitments and concessions required is questionable.** Armed struggle remains the most popular answer to end Israeli

2. The number dropped in the West Bank by 11 points while and increasing in the Gaza Strip by 14 points.

occupation (although support for it is lower than in December)³ and a “political horizon” which continues to defer statehood is unlikely to be something a Palestinian leadership, of whichever stripe, can agree to and sell to a sceptical public. Why would Palestinian leaders now agree to the framework of ‘two states for two peoples’ – as suggested in Mitvim’s Israeli Initiative when its leaders have historically rejected this?

October 7th and the war in Gaza has made a Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA)

harder, not easier. A political horizon may be essential to create space for progress to be made on reconstruction of Gaza and deepening Israel’s relations with some Sunni states. However, bearing in mind the sides were unable to agree during the administrations of Clinton, Bush, Obama and Trump administrations, it remains unclear why a political horizon that maps out (or even hints at) compromises on demilitarization, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, territory etc., would be amenable to Israeli and Palestinian leaderships and public after the trauma of the last 6 months.

3. [Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research](#) Public Opinion Poll (number 91). “We offered the public three methods to end the Israeli occupation and establish an independent state and asked it to select the most effective. 46% (51% in the West Bank and 39% in the Gaza Strip) selected “armed struggle;” 25% (27% in the West Bank and 23% in the Gaza Strip) selected negotiations; and 18% (12% in the West Bank and 27% in the Gaza Strip) selected popular non-violent resistance. As shown in the figure below, these findings indicate a 17-point drop in support for armed struggle; a 5-point rise in support for negotiations; and a 5-point rise in support for non-violence. The drop in three months in support for armed struggle comes equally from both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.”



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For more information please contact:

Richard Pater
richardp@bicom.org.uk