

Gaza after the War:

What Can Be Built on the Wreckage?

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Articles & Testimony

David Makovsky, director of The Washington Institute's [Project on the Middle East Peace Process \(template102.php?SID=16&newActiveSubNav=Project%20on%20the%20Middle%20East%20Peace%20Process&activeSubNavLink=template102.php%3FSID%3D16&newActiveNav=researchPrograms\)](#), testified before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and Asia about the possibilities of strengthening peacemaking efforts after the Gaza conflict and Israeli elections. The following is Mr. Makovsky's prepared statement. [Read \(http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing_notice.asp?id=1046\)](#) the testimony of other participants and [listen \(http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing_notice.asp?id=1046\)](#) to complete audio of the hearing.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member,

It is an honor to be with you today.

Until post-conflict arrangements are settled, it is premature to reach a definitive conclusion on the recent war in Gaza. However, it is possible to make a preliminary assessment.

Israel set forward one major objective for itself at the start of this war: specifically, to avert Hamas rocket fire aimed at its southern cities. The objective of this war was not the toppling of Hamas. Israel also sought to restore the deterrence that it felt it had lost in the inconclusive 2006 war against Hizballah in Lebanon. As a result, in contrast to the 2006 war, Israel's objectives were defined more carefully.

One of Israel's main tactics for ensuring that its cities are not the targets of Hamas rockets is to target the myriad smuggling tunnels along the Egypt-Gaza border that Hamas uses to rearm itself. As such, Israel's success in shutting down or destroying these tunnels will also be part of the post-war evaluation.

First, some background to this conflict. Israel and Hamas had been observing a ceasefire for six months, but which expired on December 19th. Israel made clear that it wanted to extend the ceasefire, yet Hamas fired 200 rockets at Israeli cities. There are those who argue that Hamas wanted to use rocket fire as a means of changing the terms of the ceasefire. However, Israel felt it had no choice but military action. Hamas believed that, by taking up positions in densely populated parts of the Gaza Strip in order to fire indiscriminately at Israeli cities, it would be immune to retaliation. This was not the case. Israel embarked on what it called "Operation Cast Lead," a campaign that went on for less than a month, first by air and then by ground, primarily in northern Gaza.

While Hamas has sought to claim victory in the aftermath of the fighting, these claims are largely hollow. Its leadership was in hiding throughout the fighting. Hamas did not offer serious opposition on the ground -- a fact that will make it difficult for the organization to credibly claim that it defended Gaza, let alone scored a victory. In contrast, Hizballah in 2006 offered substantial resistance and determined opposition to Israeli ground forces, employing the full range of its capabilities. According to the Palestinian-run Jerusalem Media and Communication Center polling unit, only 35 percent of Palestinians in Gaza believe Hamas's assertions of victory.

Israel succeeded in degrading Hamas's ability to fire rockets at Israeli cities. At the start of the war, Hamas was able to fire up to eighty rockets per day, but by the end, that number dropped to no more than twenty. Military analysts widely believe the Israeli army was much better prepared for this conflict on nearly every level -- planning, training, equipment, and force readiness -- than it was in 2006. In particular, reserve units were carefully deployed and only committed after a period of training. Israel sustained far fewer fatalities and injuries than it did in 2006. Arab casualties likewise were lower in Gaza than in Lebanon, but were still considerable.

Although many thought Israel's deterrence was eroded in the 2006 war, Israeli officials state that it was restored after the current fighting with Hamas. Hamas is responsible for the Gaza population in a manner that is not true for Hizballah in Lebanon. Therefore, there is hope that this deterrence can be sustained over time.

It is noteworthy that Hizballah, Syria, and Iran were all either unwilling or unable to assist Hamas during the conflict, excluding rhetorical support. This should give Hamas pause about the value of its alliances. Hizballah did not open up a second front, contrary to speculation that it might. This may be a sign that Israel did increase its deterrence during the 2006 war, which would be significant.

While Iran interpreted the inconclusive outcome in 2006 as a victory for its proxy, Hizballah, and for Tehran's own regional influence, Iran will have to view the Gaza conflict as a setback. It cannot believe that it gained any momentum with this episode. Moreover, divisions surfaced within the Arab world. Egypt and Saudi Arabia boycotted an aborted Arab summit that they viewed as supportive of Hamas, and, implicitly, Iran. The Egyptian leadership was willing to withstand demonstrations and criticism and still refused to support Hamas's demand that it gain control of a key access point to Gaza. All these developments were negative from Hamas's perspective.

The Gaza war brought fresh international focus to the tunnel network between the Egyptian Sinai and Gaza. The issue of border security has become increasingly important for Israel, particularly since the network is crucial to Hamas's ability to rearm. During the recent conflict, Hamas fired 122-mm Grad artillery rockets -- a type of rocket that was designed by Iran to fit through the tunnels -- hitting Gadera, twenty miles south of Tel Aviv. One million Israelis are now within this rocket's range, including the largest city in southern Israel, Beersheva. If more sophisticated, longer-range rockets are smuggled into Gaza, Israel's international airport could come within range in the near future. For Israel, this new international focus on the tunnel network is necessary, albeit not sufficient.

However, international focus on an issue is not synonymous with action. In 2006, UN Security Council Resolution 1701 addressed the issue of arms smuggling by calling for an embargo on weapons to Lebanese militias; this provision, however, has never been enforced. As a result, Israeli sources estimate that Hizballah has nearly tripled the number of rockets in its arsenal since 2006. This time, however, international parties have chosen to adopt a practical method of intercepting rockets, rather than relying on UN resolutions. Towards the end of the war, the United States and Israel signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that authorizes U.S. assistance to Egypt to halt the flow of arms. This international assistance could potentially involve U.S. Navy and NATO elements to help police international waters, since the Grads are believed to come from transit points in Iran, Somalia, Eritrea, and Yemen. The Obama administration must follow up, work with allies, and make sure that verbal commitments to stop arms smuggling are transformed into reality.

In theory, the Gaza conflict sobered Egypt to the implications of an Islamist-ruled entity on its eastern border, armed with sophisticated weaponry. The hope is that Cairo will now take steps

to prevent Hamas from rearming -- rather than casting a blind eye to the smuggling -- and thereby protect Egyptian security interests. Moreover, failure to act by Egypt will lead Israel to ultimately launch a second operation. I don't like to make grand predictions, yet I am willing to be very explicit. If Egypt does not handle the problem, Israel will occupy the southern corridor of Gaza known as the Philadelphia Corridor, where the tunnels are located, which in turn could lead Palestinians in the Rafah area to force their way across the border and pour into Egypt. If the current effort fails, the Egypt-Gaza border will assuredly become a flashpoint, triggering another Israeli intervention.

A key question is whether Egypt recognizes that its national security is at stake. This is not a favor to Israel. As senior Egyptian officials point out, an armed Gaza on its eastern frontier hurts Egypt. It weakens the Palestinian Authority, of which Egypt has a leading champion. It also strengthens the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's main opposition group. As President Mubarak made clear in a public speech last week, Hamas adventurism serves Iranian interests in the region. In rare remarks, Mubarak spoke cryptically but unmistakably. He declared, "they are trying to take advantage of Israeli aggression to force a new reality on the current Palestinian and Arab situation. A new reality that will alter the equation and reorganize the balance in favor of known regional powers and will serve their agenda."

The hoarding of weapons in Gaza poses a risk to Egyptian sites in the Sinai. Egyptian tourist areas in the Sinai have already been the targets of terrorism. Finally, fighting in southern Gaza risks the specter of Gazans fleeing over the border as they did in January 2008. Egypt and the United States need to work closely, and Cairo should update Washington regularly on its arms interdiction efforts.

Consequently, the moment seems right to consider enhancing the mission of the U.S.-led Multinational Forces Organization (MFO) in the Sinai. The MFO was created after the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty to prevent renewed hostilities. Given the thirty years of bilateral peace, the MFO could be enlisted to monitor the weapons smuggling that occurs on the very few roads that actually traverse the Sinai.

Another idea is for Egypt to engage in more extensive border security arrangements. This could mean setting up needed facilities -- scanners, fences and the like -- south of the Egyptian town of Rafah, given the limited space between that town and the actual border.

Thanks to Congressional assistance, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been helpful, but more is required.

Apart from the border security question, the Gaza operation raised another issue, namely the humanitarian dimension of the conflict. In their respective urban warfare conflicts with Israel, both Hizballah in 2006 and Hamas in 2009 used Arab civilians as human shields to launch attacks on Israeli cities, forcing Israel into making terrible choices, as its enemies care little about their own populations. Israel must grapple with how to stop rocket attacks on its own citizens while also minimizing the Arab human toll. Israel believes that its actions during the offensive, such as dropping leaflets before bombing an area or evacuating wounded Palestinians, is something that Hamas would never do. Nonetheless, given the shift of warfare away from traditional battlefields to urban areas, Israel might consider setting up an "urban corps" dedicated to designating safe havens for civilian evacuees. Israel could post soldiers in these areas, so its good will cannot be exploited by terrorists seeking refuge. As the nature of warfare has moved from battlefields to urban zones, the humanitarian dimension is increasingly viewed as vital for military success.

In terms of the post-conflict period, there is likely to be an effort to see if the Palestinian Authority (PA) can return to the Gaza crossing points and whether it can manage reconstruction. As you know, Hamas staged a takeover of Gaza in June 2007, expelling PA officials even though the PA still pays salaries to 80,000 Gazans. I think if there is an effort to have the Palestinian Authority take over the crossing points, there may need to be a buffer of international troops to separate them from Hamas given the enmity between them. If the PA is to lead a reconstruction effort in Gaza, it has to be done carefully so it is the PA and not Hamas that gets the credit. If it pursues this path as a result of a donors meeting in Cairo in the coming weeks, the PA is likely to bring together a group of technocratic experts in Gaza who are best positioned to make reconstruction happen.

Yet, the Arab world should not just aid Gaza reconstruction. It needs to delegitimize Hamas. Arab efforts are more meaningful than what is said by the United States and Israel. Here again, we should note Mubarak's rare remarks. He accused the Islamist Palestinian movement of being responsible for the shedding of Arab blood. "How long will Arab blood continue to be spilled, only to hear those who admit to miscalculating the scope and scale of Israel's response?" Mubarak asked in a speech marking Egypt's national day to honor its police force. Mubarak's comment came in reference to remarks reportedly made by Hamas political leader Khaled Meshal who admitted at the end of the three-week Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip that he did not anticipate the scope of Israel's operation. Mubarak went on to say that resistance movements must take responsibility over the welfare of their people. "The resistance must take into account victories and losses. It is responsible for the people, who in turn should settle the score [with the resistance] over the gains it has achieved, but also the sacrifices, the pain and the destruction it has caused," he said.

The Israeli elections were also affected by the Gaza conflict. While it is still uncertain whether it will be Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni or Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu who will head the next coalition, it seems very possible that neither will be able to govern alone. At the same time, there is no doubt that the right-wing bloc has gained 14 seats in the 120-member Knesset, and that can be traced to Hamas and Hizballah rockets. Israelis thought when they exited Lebanon in 2000 and Gaza in 2005 they would become more secure, but now believe they are more vulnerable to rocket fire. Sharp increases in votes for right-wing parties can be seen in towns in southern Israel which were rocketed by Hamas.

The belief among Israelis and Palestinians that peace is not possible is due at least in some measure to the plethora of peace ceremonies that they have witnessed over the years, which ultimately yielded nothing. An all or nothing approach usually ends up being nothing in the Middle East. If people do not see how peace impacts their daily lives, they are likely to remain cynical. Therefore it is important to maintain a societal foundation for peacemaking. U.S. policy needs to be geared to making peace relevant for people.

There are things that certainly would improve the quality of Palestinian life and not come at the expense of Israel security. If the parties cannot reach a grand deal, perhaps gradualist steps can be taken. The differences on where the border between Israel and the West Bank will ultimately be have narrowed greatly. If this border could be demarcated even if the IDF needs to remain in the West Bank until trust can be built up, perhaps tension could be reduced. This could end the mistrust on the settlements issue that has plagued the conflict since 1967. Failing that, even a Netanyahu led government realizes an Obama administration will want to see an end of settlement expansion.

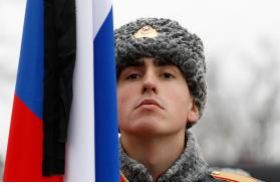
There could also be a U.S.-led effort like the U.S. Customs Service applies in a variety of countries of sealing shipping containers in order to facilitate Palestinian exports. Another idea would be to upgrade Israeli crossing points with appropriate biometrics, in order to shorten the line for visitors. The United States should ask the wealthy Gulf Arab states to fund major construction projects that could kick-start the Palestinian economy.

In this cost-benefit equation, it is important to demonstrate that Palestinians in the West Bank are better off being under the jurisdiction of the PA rather than Hamas. It should be pointed out that there were few pro-Hamas demonstrations in the West Bank during the recent Gaza conflict. Indeed, economic strides have been made in the West Bank as evidenced by progress in Jenin and other areas, thanks to a variety of players ranging from PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, Quartet Envoy Tony Blair, national security advisor Jim Jones, and Lt. Gen Keith Dayton, who is doing the work of training and equipping the PA security services. Their efforts should be commended, and bolstered wherever needed. With enhanced security cooperation between the PA and Israel, it seems more likely that one can envision Israel withdrawing from Palestinian cities along the lines of September 28, 2000 even as it remains in the West Bank.

As Israel makes moves towards the Palestinians, it needs to know there is reciprocity. Beyond the security issue, Israel will want to know that the educational curriculum being taught to a younger generation is geared to coexistence and not hatred since it is vital to send favorable messages to the younger generation. Both sides will not believe the change, until they see the change.

There is a new administration here and there will be one shortly in Israel. The strength of this alliance is its dynamism. Its dynamism will be tested in the coming months if we can find ways to bolster moderates and weaken the radicals.

Thank you. ❖



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