

# Gaza Conflict, U.S. Objectives

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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The Gaza conflict was born the day Hamas took control of the Strip; the clock started ticking the day the "calm" began six months ago. Unlike all of Israel's other neighbors, save Hezbollah, Hamas is an existential adversary of Israel, not a competitor for some slice of territory or for the affection of Washington. This current round of fighting might not be determinative but it certainly provides the international community -- led by the United States -- with an opportunity to achieve certain objectives that are necessary to a successful outcome of eventual peace diplomacy. These include:

- Reaffirming the internationally recognized conditions for engagement with Hamas. It is essential that, apart from vital humanitarian goods, the conflict not provide a back-door opening for third-parties to whittle down the conditions for engagement with Hamas -- conditions, one should recall, that parallel the conditions that governed U.S. engagement with the PLO twenty years ago.
- Tightening the international sanctions regime on Hamas. Here, the most important objective should be to secure an end to financial and other support provided by some states, either directly or through non-profit organizations, that finds its way into Hamas coffers. There is no reason why Arab or Muslim states, for example, should be exempt from recognizing the Quartet conditions on Hamas engagement, though for some reason they seem to consider themselves apart from this international consensus.
- Strengthening the Palestinian Authority. The best long-term hope for reasserting legitimate government in Gaza is through a successful PA, an authority that provides security and well-being to its citizens and their neighbors. This means that the United States should take the lead in improving and enhancing the "train and equip" mission for PA security forces, speed up the Blair agenda of economic and administrative reform and, perhaps most of all in the near term, ensure that the expected desire of some donors to assist the people of Gaza in the wake of the current fighting goes to PA institutions, not to Hamas or NGOs that survive on Hamas' good graces.

It is unlikely that the current fighting will end Hamas control of Gaza, but -- if handled properly on the diplomatic front -- it could begin a new countdown to that day. ❖

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