

Looking Ahead: The Day After The Future of the Gaza Strip

A Thought Paper



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The recent escalation of hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip in the wake of the Hamas attack on 7 October underscores the necessity of contemplating an alternative approach to addressing the future of Gaza within the context of resolving the Palestinian cause on the basis of a just and comprehensive peace and resolutions of international law. While current diplomatic efforts are focused on brokering a ceasefire in order to help civilians and end the bloodshed, out of a fear of a scenario in which war breaks out in the region, the question of Gaza's "day after" is causing concern among global political and intellectual circles because the answer to this question will determine whether the Israeli-Palestinian conflict erupts once more as it has in the past or the current conflict serves as an opportunity to establish new groundwork that will ensure lasting peace.

Numerous Western think tanks and observers of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict rushed to offer divergent perspectives and approaches regarding the "day after" in Gaza subsequent to a ceasefire, presuming that if Israel succeeded in its declared objective of eliminating Hamas, which could create new conditions and bring an end to what existed in the Gaza Strip prior to 7 October, a "vacuum" would inevitably develop in the Gaza Strip that would necessitate attention.

Apart from the question of whether this premise is feasible or still dependent on the military dynamics that are currently unfolding in the Gaza Strip, and aside from the fact that it manifests a distinct Western inclination towards the Israeli perspective, the Western approaches proposed for the future of the Gaza Strip must be evaluated for their practicality and applicability in Palestinian reality.

In conjunction with this examination of Western perceptions, a group of specialists and experts affiliated with the Egyptian Centre for Strategic Studies (ECSS) put forth an alternative viewpoint grounded in a more comprehensive understanding of Palestinian rights in the post-war era, arguing that solving the "Gaza dilemma" is primarily a Palestinian responsibility.

Biased Western Perceptions

Divergent Western perceptions surfaced concerning the future of Gaza and the anticipated characteristics of the conditions that would ensue following the military operation conducted by the Israeli occupation forces. These perceptions were entirely founded on three suppositions: 1) Israel would effectively accomplish its objective of eradicating Hamas; 2) Israel would be absolved of accountability for the Gaza Strip following the cessation of hostilities; and 3) a transitional administration would be established to fill the vacuum in Gaza following the war until the Palestinian Authority (PA) took over responsibility for the region thereafter.

The propositions put forth regarding the proposed administration during the transitional phase varied according to these perceptions, with the following being the most conspicuous:

1. **Technocratic, non-political figures take over Gaza Strip administration.**
2. **With the deployment of UN forces, the UN assumes control of Gaza Strip governance.**
3. **Multinational forces assume responsibility for security in Gaza.**
4. **A consortium of Arab countries takes on the responsibility of preserving security in Gaza.**

However, upon closer examination of these Western perceptions, a plethora of issues and quandaries emerge, which are outlined as follows:

I. The majority of these perceptions do not address the need for a ceasefire or provide timelines for when this might occur, despite the fact that these visions cannot be realized without a ceasefire.

II. Western perceptions regarding the day after in Gaza show a blatant prejudice towards Israel that is in line with official Western political slant. Upon materialization, the majority of these perceptions seek to absolve Israel of its obligation as an occupying power and impose numerous and intricate repercussions on other regional and international actors in order to lighten Israel's load.

III. The views put forth regarding the future of Gaza are only discussed in the context of what has transpired since 7 October, which aligns with the Israeli perspective that aims to isolate Gaza from the larger Palestinian cause and the prospects for the future of the Palestinian state. As a result, these perceptions limit the conversation about the Palestinian cause to Gaza and fail to consider the issue from a wider angle in terms of the political settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in line with international legitimacy resolutions.

IV. The proposed perceptions are preoccupied with the complete eradication of Hamas and hold the belief that the Israeli ground operation is competent to accomplish this objective. However, in light of the substantial human and humanitarian tolls incurred during the Israeli military campaign in Gaza, the current state of affairs in the region fails to reflect the achievement of this goal after an entire month of military engagement. Furthermore, these perceptions fail to consider the potential for the conflict to extend its geographical reach beyond the confines of the operational theatre in the Gaza Strip and even beyond Israel.

V. The proposed perceptions align with the Israeli stance, which propagates the notion that the goal of the military operation in Gaza is to eradicate Hamas rather than the Palestinians. To achieve this, Tel Aviv implements a policy of collective exhaustion and punishment and forbids humanitarian aid from reaching the Gaza Strip's civilian populace.



VI. These perceptions fail to take into account the widespread incitement among the Arab and Palestinian populations, particularly in the aftermath of the month-long destruction of Gaza Strip infrastructure and the deaths of thousands of Palestinians due to the unprecedented and violent Israeli bombardment. This generates an atmosphere of indignation among Arabs and Palestinians, who reject any Western conceptions of Gaza's day-after.

Based on these issues and conundrums, it can be concluded that Western perspectives on Gaza's future are primarily focused on guaranteeing Israel's triumphant exit from this conflict. For the most part, these perceptions reflect an Israeli desire to shirk its obligations as an occupying force and to hold others responsible for this, so that Tel Aviv stays, at least partially, detached from handling the complicated situation in Gaza in a way that guarantees gains without costs.

Additionally, upon scrutinizing the substance of the majority of these Western perceptions, it becomes apparent that they only pay passing attention to the peace settlement process, rendering them a "temporary solution" intended to appease the Israeli side. And since these perceptions are grounded in a zero-sum game (i.e., Israeli gain = Palestinian loss), they are improbable to materialize. Practically speaking, these perceptions do not benefit the Palestinian side, not even the Gaza community, which suffered an unprecedented and heavy cost during the conflict, nor do they motivate the PA to consider assuming a more significant role in Gaza's future.

A Comprehensive Egyptian Vision

The majority of Western perceptions presented for Gaza's day-after didn't disregard Egypt's role and its critical significance as the "weighted factor" for any of these potential futures in which the Strip's situation could play out. Nevertheless, these assessments didn't give enough consideration to the determinants of Egypt's stance on the Palestinian cause, not only with regards to the ongoing Gaza crisis but also with regards to the overall resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Egypt seeks a fair and comprehensive resolution that ensures security and stability in the Middle East by establishing a Palestinian state along the borders of 4 June 1967, with its capital in East Jerusalem. Perhaps this lack of consideration for the determinants of Egypt's steadfast and declared stance on the Palestinian cause is one of the reasons that would render the Western perceptions impracticable.

The Egyptian vision for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is founded upon on the steadfast conviction that a two-state resolution is the only viable course of action to resolve the Palestinian cause. It rejects the notion that military means can be used to resolve the conflict, arguing that such views are far removed from reality and therefore rejected. Furthermore, Egypt believes that the repercussions of the Israeli policy of stifling the Palestinians' political prospects will be catastrophic.

Thus, despite the intensifying hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians, Egypt continues to place a high priority on resuming the political process. This orientation also applies to the current confrontation. From the very first day of the confrontations, Egypt brought up the necessity of paying attention to the political track, along with efforts to work towards stopping or reducing the escalation. In light of this, on 21 October 2023, it hosted an international summit in Cairo that was focused on the political track. The summit was dubbed the Cairo Summit for Peace, underscoring Cairo's emphasis on the necessity of responding to the current escalation with a comprehensive peace strategy.



With the political horizon closed off by the unprecedented pro-Israel slant of the West, Cairo embraced the humanitarian approach and endeavored to rally the international community to do the same. This effort culminated in a consensus that permitted the opening of the Rafah crossing on the Palestinian side, thereby facilitating the delivery of critical humanitarian supplies to the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Egypt, meanwhile, had to deal with Israel's plans to capitalize on the 7 October attack. Cairo realized that the purpose of the Israeli escalation was to create a plan for the forced displacement of Palestinians towards Sinai, with the aim of exporting the crisis to Egypt through the largest military operation of massive bombing on the Gaza Strip, thereby turning it into a human time bomb aimed at Egypt. In response to this Israeli plan, Egypt declared categorically that it is against attempts to eliminate the Palestinian cause, that the forced relocation of Palestinians is unacceptable, and that exporting the crisis to Egypt is a non-negotiable red line.

As such, the Egyptian perspective on the day after the current Israeli-Palestinian escalation in Gaza is predominately predicated on the imperative of a ceasefire. Cairo maintains the view that discussions ought to transcend Gaza's day-after events and encompass the broader Palestinian cause, as the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza collectively comprise the Palestinian state. Egypt has made significant endeavors to sustain the peace process and achieve a political resolution to the conflict, notwithstanding the challenges it has encountered from Israel and certain Palestinian factions.

As part of these efforts, Cairo supported the PA and endeavored to bring about Palestinian national reconciliation ever since

Hamas took over control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007. This pursuit was motivated by Egypt's recognition of the threat that division poses to the Palestinian position. Nevertheless, after fifteen years of Egyptian endeavors, progress has been stymied by the Palestinian factions' noncompliance with the agreements signed in Cairo and by Israel's ability to use that division as an excuse to halt the political settlement process, citing the lack of a Palestinian negotiating partner. Perhaps the lack of progress in the political settlement contributed to the creation of favorable conditions for additional Israeli-Palestinian clashes in Gaza, depleted the infrastructure there, and made life difficult for the Palestinians living under the occupying force's siege.

Crossing Rafah following the War

Given the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, Egypt appeared to be the key player in delivering humanitarian assistance to Gaza via the Rafah crossing, the only route that connects Gaza Strip to the outside world. Even though the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access required that the crossing only function when three parties—the Palestinian National Authority, Israel, and the European Union—are present on the Palestinian side, Egypt committed itself to keeping the crossing open for Palestinians.

Following Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip, European Union and PA personnel

withdrew. As per the agreement, this would result in the closure of the crossing, an outcome that Egypt had diligently sought to prevent for several years. The flare-up of the current Israeli-Palestinian confrontation has transformed the crossing from a means for individuals to pass through to a critical route for delivering aid trucks. Egypt, notwithstanding the numerous obstacles erected by Israel, has managed to accomplish this mission successfully.

Considering Rafah's crossing significance, it is important to present post-war scenarios for it within the context of a holistic approach to the Palestinian cause. Western perceptions that attempt to absolve Israel of its responsibility to the Palestinians imply, in one way or another, the termination of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access and Israel's disconnection from the operation of the crossing. So, whatever the outcome of tomorrow's expected events in Gaza is, the crossing will become wholly Palestinian-Egyptian, with all that this implies in terms of complete Palestinian sovereignty over the Palestinian side of the crossing.

A Palestinian Solution Scenario

Given the current Israeli-Palestinian escalation and the biased Western perceptions and scenarios concerning the post-war state of the Gaza Strip, any proposal for a more comprehensive and equitable reso-

lution to the Palestinian cause that takes into account the reality and Palestinian rights can only be predicated on a "Palestinian solution" scenario that precludes regional and international interventions in the Strip. This solution can solely be realized through a single entry point: the reinstatement of the PA to manage Gaza, with the goal of restoring the pre-2007 state of affairs. This is the only feasible way to deal with the underlying causes of the current situation in Gaza and find a practical solution for the Palestinian cause.

This scenario posits that the Gaza Strip will be administered politically and socially by the PA, while Hamas and Jihad transform into two Palestinian factions akin to all other Palestinian factions, bound together by a shared commitment to the Palestinian right to establish a Palestinian state, notwithstanding their political divergence in approach towards this objective. The subsequent admission of Islamic Jihad and Hamas into the Palestine Liberation Organization will be sufficient to grant legitimacy to every constituent of the Palestinian people. Nonetheless, this scenario necessitates certain fundamental requirements, the most notable of which are:

1. Getting the PA's popular incubator in Gaza ready for its return in order to prevent an uncontrollably explosive inter-Palestinian con-

flict. Put another way, Gaza's day-after has a better chance of succeeding if it is dominated by entities or personalities that are exclusively Palestinian and over which there are no popular or factional disagreements.

2. The reestablishment of the PA's presence in the Gaza Strip must be accompanied by Arab and international support, guarantees, and commitments that are principally focused on resuming the political process in accordance with the two-state solution, which would provide the Palestinian people with a political horizon and a glimmer of hope.

3. Supplying the PA with institutional and financial support to help it deal with the challenging circumstances brought on by the Israeli bombing, which destroyed Gaza's housing, business, and medical facilities, among others. This assistance will facilitate the reestablishment of the Palestinian position as a nationally recognized Palestinian one, alter the map of factional balances, and lend the PA renewed popular legitimacy for its presence in the Gaza Strip.

In effect, the proposed scenario of the PA's return to the Gaza Strip the day after the war serves to prevent the Palestinian-Palestinian split from becoming permanent,

protects the Palestinian cause from regional and international enticements, and maintains a level of control over the relationship management with Israel that prevents it from exploding and causing the outbreak of confrontations that destroy the lives of the Gazan population. This could ultimately open the door to the Middle East's path towards peace and settlement.

Furthermore, this scenario spares the Palestinians the terrible outcomes that might arise from perceptions centered around the need for an international, regional, or global presence to oversee the Gaza Strip after the war. While there may be some theoretical merit to the Western perceptions regarding this presence under the guise of aid or facilitating the PA's reestablishment and Gaza's management, it carries the potential to completely eradicate the idea of a Palestinian state. Indeed, the notion of a Western-backed return to the Gaza Strip in opposition to Palestinian factions is not welcomed by either the PA or the Palestinians residing in the West Bank and Gaza.

Significantly, the West's failed experience of restoring certain political parties to positions of authority in a similar fashion, as occurred in Iraq approximately two decades ago, is adequate to dissuade

the public from accepting this Western-backed return, especially considering the absence of assurances regarding the timely cessation of the transitional phase and the restoration of the normalcy that is conducive to the Palestinian cause and the path to settlement. Indeed, the potential, or at the very least the apprehension, that the transitional phase will evolve into a stable state that is resistant to modification or alteration continues to exist and serves as adequate grounds to dismiss the notion of Western-backed return at its core.



In short, while the current state of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Gaza Strip exposes biased Western perceptions and scenarios to absolve Israel of its responsibility for what transpired in Gaza and attempts to export the crisis to other regional and international parties without interest in a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian cause, it also makes it necessary to consider putting the “priority of a Palestinian solution” front and center through the post-conflict return of the PA to Gaza, backed by assistance from Arab countries that had previously contributed and been involved in the specifics of the Palestinian cause, as the sole way to express the justifiable needs and rights of the Palestinian people, protect Gaza from the atrocities of violence once more, and open the door to a two-state solution in line with international legitimacy resolutions.



The Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies (ECSS), established in 2018 as an independent think tank, seeks to introduce different perspectives and alternatives regarding strategic shifts taking place on the national, regional and international levels. The ECSS is particularly focused on incidents important to national security and Egyptian interests.

The ECSS targets decision-makers, by providing choices and alternatives when dealing with domestic, regional and international challenges, as well as researchers and experts specialized in the political, economic, social, and security fields, in Egypt and abroad. Through its wide array of services, the ECSS aspires to contribute to enlightening and guiding debates and public opinion in Egypt and the Middle East, as well as to enrich the principles of thinking and scientific research. The ECSS does a variety of tasks, activities and provides services such as assessments, political analysis, workshops, forums, and conferences, in addition to monthly publications in Arabic and English. The ECSS website publishes analyses of the different developments taking place on the Egyptian, regional, and international fronts, as well as the production of different research programs.

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