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Flash Executive Summary Report

Following the terrorist attacks on Israel by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) on Oct. 7, 2023, Prime Minister Netanyahu addressed the citizens of Israel and the world, outlining Israel's strategic objectives for the war against Hamas. His speech on Oct. 9 focused on eliminating Hamas. A few weeks later, he went further by outlining Israel's top three strategic objectives for Gaza:

- Eliminating Hamas: this includes destroying its military and governing capabilities within Gaza and the infrastructure external to Gaza that supports Hamas and PIJ.
- The freeing of all hostages: Netanyahu has stated freeing the hostages as a core objective of the war.
- Ensuring Gaza does not pose a future threat to Israel: preventing the resurgence of hostile groups, including external support, namely Iran, and ensuring long-term security along the Gaza border are crucial elements of this aim.

As of last Monday, Hamas, under great pressure from the IDF's offensive and steadily growing occupation of the Gaza Strip, accepted a deal similar to a previous temporary ceasefire offer. But Hamas has not agreed to cede control of Gaza, nor to release all of the hostages. As of this writing, Israel is considering the temporary ceasefire proposal, though it does not solve the demands from Israel, which are the release of all hostages and that Hamas cedes control and governance of Gaza.

Israel's Dilemma to Achieve its Desired End State:

Since his first national address after Oct. 7, Netanyahu has consistently repeated his policy to eliminate Hamas as a governing and security entity from the Gaza Strip. In later public statements, Netanyahu affirmed his position on Hamas and went further in outlining conditionality for the future of Gaza by stating he would not allow the Palestinian Authority (PA) – the internationally recognized political body responsible for governance of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza – from having any role in the future security and governance of Gaza for, presumably, several reasons. First, the PA's track record of governance is poor, including its handing over leadership of Gaza to Hamas decades ago, as well as its history of allowing terror groups to thrive (at least in the PA's current state). Second, Netanyahu has long-standing criticism of the PA – an example is his concern about a radicalized school curriculum that he believes fans the flames of hatred against Israel. Finally, some suggest Netanyahu wants to keep the Palestinians divided to limit their influence, lessening the demand signal for a two-state solution.

Former President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken publicly advocated for an eventual two-state solution and a Palestinian state under a reformed PA. On Jan. 14, 2025, during one of his last public events, former Secretary of State Blinken outlined the Biden Administration's vision for a post-war Gaza. Like many of the think tanks, his remarks at the Atlantic Council were coherent, comprehensive, and arguably viable, if Israel, the U.S., and the Arab community led by the PA were willing to adopt the vision and develop a comprehensive plan for implementation.

To date, Israel has not supported the inclusion of the Palestinian Authority in post-conflict planning despite increasing international calls for the PA to play a role in shaping Gaza's future governance. Both the former Biden administration and the Trump administration gave the Netanyahu government a pass on his PA position, President Trump more so than President Biden.

In retrospect, the Biden administration's limited public opposition to Prime Minister Netanyahu's stance on excluding the Palestinian Authority from post-war governance in Gaza, combined with the absence of a firm U.S. demand for a comprehensive long-term security plan, may have contributed to the current uncertainty surrounding Gaza's future. So far, the Trump administration has not weighed in on how to strategically resolve the governance dilemma.

Further complicating the situation is Netanyahu's hard-right constituency, led by Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich. Both men call for Israel's enduring military occupation and ultimate resettlement of Gaza. Ben-Gvir is so resolute in his belief that Israel should reoccupy Gaza that he temporarily resigned from the government because he does not support the U.S./Israel three-stage ceasefire agreement (for a description of the stages, please see page two of [Bancroft GEOIntelligence Executive Summary on the Israel-Hamas War and the Economic Implications](#)). This agreement is intended to result in the release of all hostages still alive and those deceased in exchange for Palestinian prisoners and ultimately deliver a resolution to the conflict.

A major gap in the three-stage ceasefire agreement is the determination of which organization will be responsible for the governance and security of Gaza when the IDF withdraws to Gaza's borders. An important factor is the lack of clarity on the final disposition of Hamas' leadership and the terrorist organization's "foot soldiers" who refuse to surrender or reintegrate peacefully into Gaza civil society. These contentious and challenging elements of the three-stage agreement continue to be pushed to the side, with the intent of resolution through further negotiations. While Netanyahu may not support an enduring IDF occupation and Israeli resettlement of Gaza, he will not publicly denounce the idea for concern of losing his political coalition. Netanyahu may want to see the Arabs, the United States, and the Europeans take responsibility for Gaza post-conflict, including paying the billions of dollars necessary to rebuild.

Frameworks for Israel to Consider:

Shortly after the Oct. 7 attacks, multiple international think tanks went to work developing concepts and comprehensive reports on viable options for governance and security of Gaza after Israel's military operations created the security environment for alternative security and governance solutions. Leading this analysis within a U.S. policy framework for the "Day After" was the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem, United States Security Coordinator (USSC). Arguably, USSC is the most informed and objective authority on what security alternatives are viable for Gaza, given the decades-long role USSC has played in the Palestinian Authority security institution development. In reviewing the work of USSC, the Wilson Institute, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the Israel Policy Forum, Commanders for Israel's Security, the RAND Corporation, Chatham House, and many other experts within Israel, the U.S., and internationally, found that there are several common themes regarding Israel achieving its strategic end state:

- The U.S. leadership and broad support from the Arab and international community remain vital. President Trump's close relationship with Prime Minister Netanyahu may position him to

uniquely influence the development of a viable security and governance framework aimed at ensuring both Israeli and Palestinian security.

- An Arab-led security and governance advisory effort should extend to the West Bank to address the reforms that the PA must undertake to be seen as legitimate by Palestinians and the international community.
- A reformed Palestinian Authority (the PA in its current form is not a viable solution) and a core element of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces leadership from the West Bank is probably the best long-term option for future governance and security of Gaza.
- Egypt, the Kingdom of Jordan, and the Gulf Arab states must play an active role with boots on the ground to provide security, along with advisors and experts in governing, to support the development of a future security and governance framework for Gaza.
- The Palestinians who make up the future security forces for Gaza must be properly equipped with modern equipment to support intelligence gathering and counterterrorism operations, so that they can achieve tactical overmatch against remnants of Hamas, PIJ, and other clans and militias that will inevitably challenge the PA.
- Israel and the Gaza security forces must break the decades-old paradigm of refusing to openly cooperate to defeat threats to Palestinians and Israelis.
- Israel will insist and should be granted freedom of action against terrorist persons and infrastructure until a point in the future when Palestinian security forces demonstrate the capability and the will to deal with terrorist threats independent of political, tribal, and familial influence.
- The Hamas leadership and the leaders of the PIJ must be brought to justice, killed, or captured.
- The successful plan for the elimination of Hamas and other terrorist organizations within Gaza must include the opportunity for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of the “foot soldiers.” The current Israeli position is to Destroy, Disarm, and Deport any individual affiliated with Hamas or PIJ, but a more pragmatic approach is necessary.
- For individuals affiliated with these terrorist organizations who refuse to reintegrate, there must be a place for them to go, be it prison or another Arab state.

The final communique from the March 2025 Arab League summit held in Cairo endorsed many of the principles outlined in previous think tank reports published post Oct. 7, outlining the tenets necessary for Palestinian-led security and governance of Gaza.

Israel's Current Path:

Prime Minister Netanyahu and members of his coalition appear to be pursuing an incremental approach, operating under the assumption that the international community, led by the United States, may ultimately accept an enduring Israeli occupation of Gaza. Multiple polls of the Israeli population want to see a responsible end to the Gaza war and the release of the remaining hostages. The current Israeli government has not outlined what a post-Gaza framework is, let alone a comprehensive plan to achieve enduring security.

Since Oct. 7, 2023, the United States and an international coalition (albeit an increasingly shrinking coalition) have strongly supported Israel in condemning Hamas' actions and endorsing Israel's military response to eliminate Hamas from Gaza. Israel's leadership, however, led by

Prime Minister Netanyahu, has at times shown reluctance to fully adopt recommendations from senior U.S. military and policy experts, whose guidance has drawn on lessons learned from past U.S. counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Shortly after Oct. 7, the U.S. deployed senior military advisors to meet with the Israeli Minister of Defense, the IDF leadership, and the Israeli Intelligence Services. The U.S. advisors strongly encouraged Israeli leaders to minimize collateral damage, protect the Palestinian civilian populace to the greatest extent possible, and ultimately not let the IDF military and intelligence operations be a catalyst for increasing Palestinian support for Hamas by further mobilizing the Palestinians caught in the crossfire of the conflict against Israel and the IDF.

Certainly, the decades of actions by Hamas and arguably the IDF within Gaza did much to foment distrust and hate among Israelis and Palestinians over the long-standing conflict. But the actions of Oct. 7 were clearly an exponential level of terrorism that even the most disenfranchised Palestinians within Gaza, the West Bank, and the broader Palestinian diaspora acknowledged would result in an unprecedented response from Israel.

With the strategic objectives of eliminating Hamas, returning more than 240 Israeli and international hostages taken by Hamas, and securing Israel's sovereign borders, Israel began its military campaign, Swords of Iron, in Gaza on the evening of Oct. 7, 2023, with a full-on ground and maritime invasion of Gaza beginning on Oct. 27.

Contrary to the U.S. best policy and military advice, it was clear from the outset of the air campaign that Israel was not interested in "winning hearts and minds." Its security policy guidance to the IDF and the Intelligence services has focused on widespread targeting of Hamas-related infrastructure in Gaza, with critics raising concerns about the broad and inconsistently applied criteria used to determine "legitimate military targets."

Concerning throughout the campaign is the process used by the IDF in determining the criticality and proportionality of a ground or air attack on a target, where it is anticipated that the strike will cause civilian casualties and destruction of civilian property, is routinely disproportionate to the military advantage achieved. Throughout its military campaign, Israel's international legitimacy has eroded because of its targeting methodology, causing civilian casualties and a humanitarian crisis for the Gazans caught in the conflict. War is extremely violent, and innocent loss of life is inevitable, particularly in urban combat. But the IDF's approach to urban warfare has inflicted significant civilian casualties and destruction of infrastructure. But Israel is certainly not alone with its heavy-handed approach. It bears noting that Hamas' decisions and actions before and especially after Oct. 7 brought pain, suffering, and death to the people living in Gaza – the use of civilians as human shields is one of many examples of Hamas' disregard for the population.

While Netanyahu and many Israeli security professionals and civilians may disagree, many analysts believe the destruction of Gaza's infrastructure and inflicting thousands of civilian casualties in pursuit of terrorists has compounded the complexity of attaining any cooperation regarding reconciliation with Palestinians post-conflict. Furthermore, despite Israel's success in decapitating Hamas and PIJ leadership within Gaza and abroad, and the successful targeting of thousands of terrorists inside of Gaza, the IDF's method of operations and interpretation of

proportionality and targeting have contributed to the emergence of a new generation of militants opposed to the IDF.

In the meantime, Gaza is a war zone and will remain as one until the next ceasefire.

Latest International Reactions:

Many nations are increasing the pressure on Israel – expect this to continue.

The EU, the UK, Australia, Canada, and Japan issued a statement saying that "famine is unfolding in front of our eyes" and chided Israel to "reverse starvation." In terms of Israel's decision to occupy the whole of Gaza, a growing list of nations (at this writing, Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany, Italy, France, New Zealand, Norway, and the UK) said in a release that the Israeli offensive will "endanger the lives of hostages" and "risk violating international humanitarian law." Germany, a traditional supporter of Israel in the modern era, has placed a partial hold on military armament sales to Israel that could be employed in Gaza.

Recently, France's President announced that it will formally recognize Palestine as a nation during next month's UN General Assembly session. The UK is also considering doing the same. That said, 147 out of 193 member-states of the UN already recognized Palestine, so these additional declarations will not amount to much.

The United States:

At some point, the U.S. may decide to compel Israel to take responsibility for securing a sustained flow of humanitarian assistance into Gaza to include water, food, sanitary waste disposal, adequate shelter, and a meaningful purpose of rebuilding Gaza out of rubble. President Trump could convince Netanyahu that it is Israel's responsibility, not the international aid organizations' responsibility, to secure routes for the safe transit of humanitarian aid into Gaza and the safe movement of Palestinians to that aid.

A new approach to offensive operations in Gaza is needed, concurrent with developing a viable post-war security and governance framework for Gaza. The Arab community, led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is demanding the PA play a central role. Future Abraham Accords (a Trump Administration key foreign policy objective) are dependent on PA involvement and a path to Palestinian statehood. The U.S. President, supported by the international community, could hold Israel accountable for the security of Palestinians and for developing a future for Gazans that will work toward establishing security for Israelis and Palestinians. Perhaps only then will there be a more realistic expectation for enduring peace.

Economic Implications:

The economic implications are broad for Gaza, Palestine, and Israel. The direct economic impact in Gaza is tremendous, with the effectiveness of the region shut down from a commercial perspective. Poverty, plus the loss of infrastructure and investment, is massive. Rebuilding will require time and significant reinvestment, which could provide future stimulation.

For Israel, the impact is slowing economic growth and the redirection of financial resources to the war effort. The military call-up over the past year has led to severe labor and talent drain across all sectors of technology.

The growth in its defense budget necessary for the war (as well as military actions elsewhere against Hezbollah, Houthis, and Iran), the internal displacements, and losses in tourism and private investments have constrained Israel's economic growth. Reduced direct foreign investments in its technology and innovation sectors are factors as well.

Global markets may reflect the strategic uncertainty associated with prior conflicts in the region until a conflict settlement agreement is in place.

Monitor for impact from potential economic sanctions from the EU, and/or from individual nations, as the humanitarian crises worsen in Gaza.

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