



## **Urgently needed: Agreed Principles for Initiating a Political Process**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The war in Gaza has now been going on for six months, yet to this day, there has been no effort whatsoever toward a long-term political process. Without such a process it will not be possible to formulate an agreed plan for the "day after". The only political process so far is related to the negotiations to Israeli hostages, and temporary ceasefire, clearly much needed agreement sooner than later. The impression this conveys to the international arena is that Israel is not interested in discussing alternatives towards ending the war and adopting steps for stabilizing the situation in the Gaza strip and beyond. Tremendous damage is being caused by this omission. A move towards a political process, based on the main principles suggested in this article, may reduce the damage and serve vital Israeli interests.

The damage caused by the absence of any political process in the current war is clear. The alarming signs of the crisis in relations between Israel and US are most acrimonious. The lack of trust about Israel's intentions, and abilities, and the fear of wider escalation in the region, are seriously detrimental to Israel's ability to achieve its war goals (which are not clear at all). This is occurring despite the common interest shared by Israel and most of the relevant actors in the region and beyond – that Hamas must be prevented from ending the war in a position of an achievement, a prospect that would have negative implications in the region and beyond.

This paper lays out a number of general principles we believe could be acceptable to both Israel and the relevant actors in the region and the international arena.

**Massive humanitarian aid to Gaza's residents:**

This is now a clear strategic need, beyond moral or human aspects, which are absolutely important and critic by themselves. The perception created by an ineffective Israeli mobilization to transfer aid is fatally damaging to Israel's interests and image. At this stage the international train has left the station and started initiating its own efforts to mobilize aid to Gaza.

**The Gaza Strip will not be controlled by Hamas:**

The horrible attack of October 7 proved, for those who had any doubt, that Hamas cannot be a legitimate political player in the Palestinian arena. Its refusal to recognize either the state of Israel and previous agreements signed by Israel and the Palestinians, and its continuation with armed struggle, and reiteration of its genocide intentions for Israel, render it totally unacceptable that it will be allowed to continue controlling the Gaza Strip. Actually, this is a shared interest for most of the moderate players in the region (Arab countries) and beyond.

**The Palestinian Authority is the only legitimate address for the Palestinians:**

It is vital to reiterate that the PA is the only address for any political-economic-security discourse between Israel and the Palestinians and the International community. This is despite its known flaws. Obviously, the PA needs to implement comprehensive reforms in multiple areas, and should hold elections soon, in order to regain trust among the Palestinian people. The absence of an alternative to the Hamas regime in Gaza makes it very difficult to create enough pressure to bring about its overthrow in Gaza.

**Israel does not intend to remain in the Gaza Strip:**

Israel needs to make a clear statement regarding its commitment to withdraw from Gaza Strip. Doing so will end speculations and even some statements by an Israeli politician regarding Israel's intention remaining in Gaza, and even to resume settlements there.

## **Israel does not intend to carry out a forced transfer of the Palestinians from Gaza Strip:**

Irresponsible Israeli statements, including by officials, have caused irrefutable damage to the relationship between Israel and its neighbors, especially Egypt and Jordan. Even if there are elements in Israel that entertain with such ideas, it should be made perfectly clear that those voices do not represent the Government policy. The damage that has already done is heavy and severe.

As noted, this is not a detailed "working plan". Disagreements will likely arise between Israel and the regional and international community over the ways those principles should be manifested. However, in the current circumstances, they can drive a political process, that is so much needed, and will serve vital Israeli interests.

It is important to reiterate:

Israel and most of relevant and moderate Arab countries, as well as the international community, share a strategic interest of preventing Hamas from surviving the war as a military and winning political force. Should Hamas end the war on its feet, would be perceived as a major achievement for the terrorist group, and could seriously diminish the status of political Islam in the region. It would boost the image of radical Islamic stream in a long line of Arab states with which Israel has common interests and strategic relations.

Great damage is being cause by the impression Israel gives that it has neither the interest nor the desire to discuss an alternative about the Gaza strip and the whole Israeli - Palestinian conflict. This impression is constricting Israel's maneuvering space. Initiating a political process may reduce the damage already done and enable Israel to push for achieving its interests.

The deepening crisis between Israel and the US is making the Israeli position suffer more difficultness and has a negative implication on its diplomatic and military considerations. The voices heard from Washington questing the close relationship between both countries should trouble the sleep of the decision - makers in Jerusalem. The distinction the Biden administration has been recently between keeping supporting the state of Israel, and the lack of confidence with the

Government has an immediate implication, as well long term. It is worth paying attention to the statements by the Republican candidate, former President Trump, about the need for Israel to end the war. In a way, there is a kind of "consensus" in Washington on Gaza war, and this is few months before the Presidential election.

Some comments regarding the Political arenas:

**In the American arena:** The growing pressure on the Biden administration to distance itself, or pressuring harder, Israel should not be ignored in Jerusalem. The Israeli government must take into account, regardless of who wins the elections, to avoid a "political gambling" in the American Politics. The Biden administration has still enough months to influence substantially the developments through the war. Moreover, any maneuvering in American politics does have long term implication (as we all know now).

**In the Palestinian arena:** The absence of elections since 2006, high level of corruption, and loss of confidence in the ability of the PA, and of its President Mahmud Abas, to lead a real political process, have brought the status of the Palestinian Authority to a low ebb. Elections need to be held sooner than later, but not under a war and crisis circumstances. The PA position as the only acceptable address to all players, including Israel (despite its having contributing quiet a lot to its weakening in recent years), is an asset in the current circumstances. The PA must receive a more central and positive emphasize. An intensive PR process should be promoted in order to improve its political and public image.

**In the Israeli arena:** The differences of opinions and divisions in the coalition, and more seriously within the Israeli society deeper than ever before. While it is not the purpose of this paper to tackle political issues in depth, the principles outlined above should be acceptable to most players within the coalition, and the society as well. There is no reference in this document to the nature of the desired solution of the Israeli - Palestinian conflict (Two State solution? Autonomy? Annexation?). In the current circumstances there is not necessary an expectation, in Israel or within the international community, for Israel to adopt ambition goals. Still, it is more necessary than ever to apply such principles suggested above to drive a political process that will serve the Israeli interests regarding the Gaza strip and beyond.

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