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Intelligence Ministry

Policy Department

Policy paper: Options for a policy regarding Gaza's civilian population

Executive summary

1. The State of Israel is required to bring about a significant change in the civilian reality in the Gaza Strip in light of the Hamas crimes that led to the "Iron Swords" war, therefore it must decide on a political objective regarding the civilian population in Gaza, which should be pursued concurrently with the overthrow of the Hamas regime.
2. The objective defined by the government requires intensive action to harness the United States and other countries to support this goal.
3. Fundamental guidelines for every policy:
 - a. Overthrow of Hamas' rule.
 - b. Evacuation of the population outside of the combat zone for the benefit of the citizens of the Gaza Strip.
 - c. It is necessary to plan for and channel international aid to reach the area in accordance with the chosen policy.
 - d. In every policy, it is necessary to carry out a deep process of implementing an ideological change (de-Nazification).
 - e. The selected policy will support the state's political goal regarding the future of the Gaza Strip and the final picture of the war.

4. In this document, three possible options will be presented as a policy of the political echelon in Israel regarding the future of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip.

Each policy will be examined in light of the following characteristics:

- **Operative** — The ability to execute operationally.
- **Legitimization** — International/domestic/legal.
- **The ability to carry out an ideological and conceptual change** among the population in relation to Jews and Israel.
- **Broad strategic implications.**

5. The three options under examination are:

- a. Option A: The population remaining in Gaza and the import of Palestinian Authority (PA) rule.

- b. Option B: The population remaining in Gaza along with the emergence of a local Arab authority.

- c. Option C: The evacuation of the civilian population from Gaza to Sinai.

6. From an in-depth look at the options, the following insights can be derived:

- a. **Option C - The option that will yield positive, long-term strategic outcomes for Israel, and is an executable option. It requires determination from the political echelon in the face of international pressure, with an emphasis on harnessing the support of the United States and additional pro-Israeli countries for the endeavor.**

- b. **Options A and B suffer from significant deficiencies**, especially in terms of their strategic implications and the lack of long-term feasibility. Neither of them will provide the necessary deterrent effect, will not allow for a mindset shift, and may lead within a few years to the same issues and threats that Israel has been dealing with from 2007 until today.

c. **Option A is the option with the most risks**; the division between the Palestinian population in Judea and Samaria (West Bank) and Gaza is one of the central obstacles preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state. **Choosing this option entails an unprecedented victory for the Palestinian national movement, a victory that will come at the cost of thousands of Israeli civilians and soldiers and does not guarantee security for Israel.**

Option A

The population remaining in Gaza and the import of Palestinian Authority rule

Location and Governance

1. The majority of the population remains in Gaza.
2. Israeli military government, in the first stage; subsequently, the import of the PA and its putting in place as the governing entity in Gaza.

Operational implications

1. Requires combat in densely populated areas. Involves risking our soldiers and requires a lot of time.
2. The longer the intensive combat continues, the higher the risk of opening a second front in the north.
3. The Gaza population will oppose PA rule (tried in the past).
4. Humanitarian responsibility — at the completion of the war, Israel is fully responsible for the population with everything that stems from that.

International/legal legitimacy

1. At first glance, it appears to be a less severe option from a humanitarian perspective, and therefore it may be easier to gain broad support. However, in practice, the option that involves retaining the population may turn out to be the worst option, as one can expect many Arab casualties in the operational stage, as long as the population remains in the cities and is involved in the fighting.
2. The execution time will be prolonged, and with that the time in which photos will be published of civilians wounded from the fighting.
3. Military rule over the Arab population will make it difficult for Israel to maintain broad international support and will lead to the creation of pressure to establish a PA government.

Creating ideological change

1. It is obligatory to construct a public narrative internalizing the failure and moral injustice of the Hamas movement, and to replace the old perception with a moderate Islamic ideology. This process is similar to the de-Nazification carried out in Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Among other things, it is crucial to dictate the school curricula and enforce its use for an entire generation.

2. The inclusion of the PA in the education system poses a significant challenge as its educational materials, similar to those of Hamas, currently promote hatred and hostility towards Israel.
3. It is possible to negotiate the import of PA materials regarding Israel into the educational materials, although there is no way to ensure it will actually take place, as the PA itself fundamentally vilifies Israel.
4. It should be assumed that the PA will not act firmly to shape a public narrative of understanding the failure and moral injustice of the Hamas movement, nor will it work to promote a moderate Islamic ideology.
5. Even today, there is widespread public support for Hamas in Judea and Samaria. The leadership of the PA is seen throughout Judea and Samaria as corrupt and hollow, and it loses to Hamas in terms of public support.

Strategic implications

1. The PA is a body that is hostile toward Israel, which is on the brink of collapse. Strengthening it could potentially result in a strategic disadvantage for Israel.
2. The division between the Palestinian population in Judea and Samaria and Gaza is one of the main obstacles today preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state. It is inconceivable that the outcome of this attack will be an unprecedented victory for the Palestinian national movement and a path to the creation of a Palestinian state.
3. The current model of Judea and Samaria, with Israeli military control and civilian authority under the PA, is unstable and has an unclear future. It only endures in Judea and Samaria due to the extensive Jewish settlements throughout the entire region. This is because there is no feasibility of Israeli military control without the presence of Jewish settlements (and there is no expectation that the settlement movements will commit to the conditions of bringing the PA to Gaza).
4. There is no way to maintain an effective military occupation in Gaza only on the basis of military presence without settlements, and within a short time there will be internal Israeli and international pressure for withdrawal. This situation implies an interim state that will not gain long-term international legitimacy — similar to the current situation in Judea and Samaria, but even worse. The State of Israel will be considered a colonial power with an occupying army. Bases and outposts will be attacked, and the PA will deny any involvement.
5. **Attempted and failed** — It should be noted that the plan of handing the territory over to the PA and then removing military control was attempted in 2006 when Hamas won the elections and then seized control of the Gaza Strip. There is no justification for the Israeli nationalist war effort to occupy Gaza if in the end we repeat the same mistake that led to the current situation (an all-out war with Hamas).
6. **Deterrence** — This option will not achieve the required deterrence toward Hezbollah. On the contrary, this option points to a deep Israeli weakness that signals to Hezbollah that they will not pay a real price for a confrontation with Israel because, at most, it will execute a move similar to the one in Lebanon in the past — limited control for a while, and ultimately a withdrawal.
7. If the IDF fights to occupy the Gaza Strip, but in the end the political outcome will be the rule of the PA and a turning of the Strip once again into a hostile entity, Israel's ability to recruit fighters will be fatally damaged. Such a course of action would be a historical failure and an existential threat to the future of the state.

Option B

The population remaining in Gaza and the emergence of a local Arab authority

Location and governance

1. Most of the population remains in Gaza.
2. **Governance during the first stage** — Israeli military rule; as an **interim solution** — the continuation of attempts to build local Arab non-Islamist political leadership to manage civil aspects following the mode of the existing government in the United Arab Emirates. A permanent solution for this option does not seem to be on the horizon.
3. Humanitarian responsibility — fully rests on Israel upon the conclusion of the war, encompassing all implied consequences.

Operational implications

1. Requires combat in a densely populated area. Involves risks to our soldiers and requires a lot of time.
2. The longer the intense fighting continues, the greater the risk of opening a second front in the north.

International/legal legitimacy

1. Similar to Option A, this option will require combat in densely populated areas and will result in a significant number of casualties.
2. Its execution will be lengthy, and Hamas will seize the opportunity to use psychological warfare and publish reports of ‘civilian casualties’ allegedly caused by Israel within its framework.
3. Military rule over a civilian population will make it challenging for Israel to maintain broad international support over time.

Creating ideological change

4. In the current situation, there is an absence of local opposition movements to Hamas that could take its place. That is, even if a local leadership were to emerge in a style similar to the UAE, it would still consist of Hamas supporters.
5. This situation makes it challenging to create the necessary ideological change and the eradication of Hamas as a legitimate movement. For comparison, during the de-Nazification process in post-Nazi Germany, the new leadership was composed of individuals who opposed the Nazis.
6. In the absence of a broad local movement committed to the eradication of Hamas, achieving the necessary ideological change will be difficult.

Strategic implications

- In the short term, the overthrow of Hamas and the occupation of the Gaza Strip will constitute significant steps toward reinstating Israeli deterrence and changing the reality.
- However, it seems that the deterrence effect will not be sufficient and adequate in relation to the surprise attack. Moreover, the message conveyed to Hezbollah and Iran will not be strong enough. The Gaza Strip will continue to be fertile ground for influence attempts and the resurgence of terrorist organizations.
- It is reasonable to assume that such an operation will be supported by the Gulf states due to the severe blow that will be dealt to the Muslim Brotherhood, but the amount of casualties among the Gazan Arabs during the operation will make it more difficult.

- In the long run, there will be internal Israeli and international pressure to replace the Israeli military government with a local Arab government as quickly as possible. However, there is no guarantee that the new leadership will resist the spirit of Hamas.
- A local Arab government would face significant challenges in implementing the required narrative and ideological change, primarily because in Gaza there is an entire generation that has been educated under the influence of Hamas' ideology and now will also experience Israeli military occupation. The most plausible scenario is therefore not an ideological shift but rather the emergence of new, possibly even more extreme, Islamist movements.
- This option also does not offer Israel any long-term strategic value. On the contrary, it could become a strategic liability within a few years.

Option C

Evacuation of the civilian population from Gaza to Sinai

Location and governance

1. Due to the fighting against Hamas, there is a need to evacuate the non-combatant population from the combat area.
2. Israel should act to evacuate the civilian population to Sinai.
3. In the first stage, tent cities will be established in the area of Sinai, the next stage includes the establishment of a humanitarian zone to assist the civilian population of Gaza and the construction of cities in a resettled area in northern Sinai.
4. A sterile zone of several kilometers should be created within Egypt, and the return of the population to activities/residences near the border with Israel should not be allowed. In addition, a security perimeter should be established in our territory near the border with Egypt.

Operational

1. A call for the evacuation of the non-combatant population from the combat zone of the Hamas attack.
2. In the first stage, operations from the air with a focus on the north of Gaza to allow a ground invasion in an area that is already evacuated and does not require fighting in a densely populated civilian area.
3. In the second stage, a gradual ground invasion of the territory in the north and along the border until the occupation of the entire Strip and cleansing of the underground bunkers of Hamas fighters.
4. The ground invasion stage will be less time-consuming compared to options A and B and therefore will reduce the exposure time to opening the northern front simultaneously with the fighting in Gaza.
5. It is important to leave the travel routes to the south open to enable the evacuation of the civilian population toward Rafah.

International/legal legitimacy

1. At first glance, this option, involving significant population displacement, may present challenges in terms of international legitimacy.
2. In our assessment, post-evacuation combat is likely to result in fewer casualties among the civilian population compared to the expected casualties if the population remains (as presented in options A and B).

3. Large-scale migration from war zones (Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine) and population movement is a natural and sought-after outcome due to the dangers associated with remaining in the war zone.
4. Even before the war, there was [significant demand for emigration](#) from Gaza, among the local population. The war is only expected to increase this phenomenon.

5. Legally:

- a. This is a defensive war against a terrorist organization that conducted a military invasion into Israel.
- b. The demand for the evacuation of the non-combatant population from the area is a widely accepted method that saves lives, and it was the approach used by the Americans in Iraq in 2003.
- c. Egypt has an obligation under international law to allow the passage of the population.
 6. Israel must act to promote a broad diplomatic initiative aimed at countries that will support assisting the displaced population and agree to absorb them as refugees.
 7. A list of countries that are suitable for this initiative can be found in Appendix A to this document.
 8. In the long run, this option will gain broader legitimacy because it involves a population that will be integrated within a state framework with citizenship.

Creating ideological change

1. In this option, too, there will be a need for a change in the ideological perspective of the population. However, Israel will not have the ability to control the plan since it will be implemented outside its territory.
2. Regarding options A and B, instilling a sense of failure among the population will help create an improved security situation for many years and deter the population.

Strategic Implications

1. **Deterrence** — This appropriate response will enable the creation of significant deterrence in the entire region and send a strong message to Hezbollah that they should not attempt a similar move in southern Lebanon.
2. The overthrow of Hamas will gain support from the Gulf states. Furthermore, this option represents a significant and unequivocal blow.
3. This option will strengthen Egyptian control in northern Sinai. Care must be taken to limit the entrance of weapons into northern Sinai and not legitimize changes to the disarmament clause of the peace agreement.
4. It will be necessary to engage in a broader effort to delegitimize the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and worldwide, and to transform the organization into an outlaw group similar to “Da’esh”— from a legal point of view, around the world and especially in Egypt.

Appendix A: Countries and bodies that can contribute to solving the humanitarian crisis in Gaza

The United States

Possible contribution: Assistance in promoting the initiative with many countries, including exerting pressure on Egypt, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to contribute to the initiative, either with resources or with the absorption of displaced persons.

Incentives: Interest in a clear Israeli victory and the restoration of the overall Western deterrence that has been damaged due to the attack on Israel. Restoring its status as a global leader and a key state for crisis resolution. An interest in creating significant regional change and dealing a blow to the radical axis.

Egypt

Possible contribution: Opening crossings and immediate absorption of the population of Gaza that will leave and gather in designated areas of Sinai; allocating land for settlement; exerting diplomatic pressure on Turkey and other countries to prioritize this over absorbing a large number of displaced people; providing a security envelope to the initial organization areas outside the Strip.

Possible incentives: Pressuring the United States and European countries to take responsibility and open Rafah Crossing for exiting to Sinai; financial assistance for the current economic crisis in Egypt.

Saudi Arabia

Possible contribution: Financial aid and budget allocation for the efforts to relocate the population to different countries; non-publicly, funding campaigns highlighting the harm caused by Hamas and damaging its image.

Incentives: Pressure from the United States in addition to a commitment to use the defense umbrella of the combat groups hosted in the region against Iran as a security guarantee; an interest in positioning Saudi Arabia as helping Muslims in crisis; Saudi interest in a clear Israeli victory over Hamas.

Countries in Europe and especially the Mediterranean — Greece/Spain

Contribution: Absorption and settlement.

Incentives: Absorption budgets and financial support to Arab countries for the benefit of this process.

Additional North African Countries (Morocco, Libya, Tunisia)

Contribution: Absorption and settlement; immediate assistance in areas of organization outside the Strip.

Incentives: Absorption and financial support to Arab countries to support this process; Muslim solidarity; pressure from European countries; action through contacts that Israel has with some of these countries in a way that will allow them to maintain these ties without harming their reputation among the Arabs of the world.

Canada

Contribution: Absorption of the population and its settlement within the framework of the permissive immigration policy.

Large advertising agencies

Possible contribution: Campaigns to promote this plan in the Western world and the effort to resolve the crisis in a way that does not incite or vilify Israel; designating global campaigns that are not pro-Israel and focus on the message of assisting the Palestinian brothers and rehabilitating them, even at the price of a tone that rebukes or even harms Israel, intended for populations that won't be receptive to any other message.

Dedicated campaigns **for Gaza residents themselves** to motivate them to accept this plan — the messages should revolve around the loss of land, making it clear that there is no hope of returning to the territories Israel will soon occupy, whether or not that is true. The image needs to be, “Allah made sure you lose this land because of Hamas’ leadership — there is no choice but to move to another place with the assistance of your Muslim brothers.”