

The day before the day after in Gaza

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Since the 7 October 2023 invasion of Israel by Hamas and Israel's response the question at the fore of everyone's agenda and minds is what will happen next. Some have used the expression "the day after." However, in my opinion there isn't going to be a gong and announcement that "the war is over." So, the day after is an ongoing process that is currently underway. I call it the day before the day after because there will be no essential difference between the two.

Israel's stated military objective in this war is to ensure that there will never be a threat from Gaza; to dismantle the Hamas terrorist organization's military and administrative capabilities; and to return the abductees home.¹ That makes threat negotiation as an ongoing process of current military operations and a day after objective - to ensure that terrorist organizations never return to Gaza. One clear fact emerges is that any Israeli or international monitoring mechanism will fail in the future as it has failed in the past unless the IDF remains in Gaza to monitor and gather intelligence data. There must be intelligence operations on ground level. Intelligence gathering from afar was a one of the causes of the failures on 7 October.²

In the past under all Israel's oversight mechanisms, Hamas managed to build an unprecedented fortified and armed array. Israel failed miserably to monitor the use of construction materials in Gaza that constructed the tunnels and underground weapons stores and command posts. Israel failed miserably to enforce the demilitarization of Gaza.

Who needs to be involved in the day after?

If the world wants a day after to their liking, including the two-state solution (Israel and Palestine), then they will have to participate in making that happen. Palestinians will need to raise the flag of leadership and initiative. They will need to move beyond rhetoric to actions. The radicals need to recognize Israel rather than call for its destruction with expressions such as "from the river to the sea".³ The moderates need to stamp out corruption that has had a detrimental impact on the peace process for decades and manage their own affairs for the population at large.⁴

The Palestinians have never been able to manage their own affairs. The United States and European states have been helping various Palestinian leadership try to achieve a peaceful path to statehood

more than any Arab state has. They were offered a state in 1947 by a United Nations resolution and turned it down. Israel Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered PLO leader Yasser Arafat most of the 1967 borders, with compensations and East Jerusalem, at the Camp David Summit 2 in 2000. Instead of accepting Arafat started a violent civil uprising with suicide bombers, the Second Intifada.⁵ President Bill Clinton wrote in his autobiography that Yasser Arafat had ruined his presidency and I quote “I’m a colossal failure, and you made me one.”⁶

That leaves an actual day after in Gaza as a direct call to the Arab world. The more they help and the quicker, then the sooner there will be a day after with less or no Israeli and more Muslim participation. However, Israel knows that the Arab world isn’t going to actively participate with great haste and intensity.

The United States is the most likely partner, and it is now going into election year. That puts an actual day on hold for at least the next 14 months. Israel knows, and has always known, that it will have to look after its own future. Yes, assistance does come from others, but the bottom line is Israel must look after itself. That means the day after in Gaza will resemble what it does in Judea and Samaria (West Bank). There is a section in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) that does this. The Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) implements the government's civilian policy within the territories.⁷

Before the day after in Gaza

At the time of writing of this article, it was the 94th day of the war where Israel was being attacked from eight separate theaters on seven fronts - Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Iran, Iraq, in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) and in Cyber.⁸ The main front was the fighting in Gaza that was continuing 24/7 in full force above and below ground. It seems that no army in the world has faced such a challenge.

A system of civil governance cannot emerge in Gaza while there are still ongoing battles and until all the terrorist infrastructures are completely purged. Complicating the battle is that Gaza was built by Hamas as one of the most fortified battlefields in the world with huge foreign assistance allegedly financed by Qatar. That fortification is an infrastructure above and below ground.⁹

There should be no illusions that it may take a substantial number of months if not years to cleanse all the tunnels and stockpiles of weapons, missiles, rockets, and drones held in subterranean locations. Until that is achieved just one or a few terrorists could continue to launch missiles against Israeli civilian targets including major urban areas. It would appear then, that the timeline of the international request for the day after is inherently dichotomous.

Whilst the IDF purging of Hamas is in progress diplomacy and planning during the day before the day after will be in accordance with Israel’s principles. That is neither Hamas or Israel will remain in control of Gaza. This is not a war of conquest and occupation, or one of colonization of establishing Jewish settlements.

The stated Israeli political objective is for the responsibility of life in Gaza to be in the hands of those who are not hostile to the existence of a Jewish National Homeland, the State of Israel or have any capability to act violently against Israel, Israelis or Jews worldwide. Hamas doesn’t meet these criteria. Hamas has refused to recognize Israel and has committed terror attacks against Israel, Israelis, and Jews worldwide.¹⁰

Stage One of any plan for life in Gaza without Hamas and Israel

Prudence of daily life requires a logistical plan for ensuring the responsibility of life in Gaza to be in the hands of the Palestinians. I suggest a potential first step is for Israeli-Egyptian cooperation. That is to prevent the smuggling of weapons into Gaza. There will also be cooperation on the border crossings between Egypt and Gaza for the transit of goods and people. Both these steps are well within the realm of normal feasibility as they have successfully been achieved previously.¹¹

The challenge is the next steps within Gaza for the management of daily functions. One option I can suggest is for educated and competent Palestinians, by establishing local committees or councils, to assume management of utilities such as water, electricity, education, and health together with the IDF. That could eventually build within years or decades to municipal-wide management capability. Hamas never undertook this step in the 16 years it was in control of Gaza. For example, it had the United Nations run primary and secondary schools.¹² This process will require assistance from a wider international task force. No Arab states have stepped forward to offer to join this.

Before the day after in Israel

The day before the day after would be a good time to coordinate expectations regarding the long road ahead. The significant stakeholders include the public in Israel. This war is not existential for Israel, yet it has changed the Israeli way of life. Public trust in the IDF's capability to defend and deter and even to come to the rescue was shattered on 7 October.¹³

There are still Israeli and other non-Israeli hostages in Gaza held by Hamas and allegedly other terror groups. After 94 days of fighting rockets, missiles and drones are still being fired at Israel's civilian population across the border from Gaza. Around 3% of the total Israeli population are internally displaced people (IDP) as they were evacuated from southern and northern border areas.¹⁴

There will be numerous inquiries and numerous people, be they political or military or advisors who will be held responsible. All these know from the experience of the 1973 Yom Kippur war that the population could only forgive them if Israel lives on. That means oversight mechanisms and intelligence data gathering to ensure that such attacks that took place on 7 October, never happen again.

The expectations that Israelis have of the IDF now before the day after in Israel, is that Israel will always monitor what is happening in Gaza. Israeli security and intelligence monitoring is a cornerstone of any future arrangement. The world should come to grips that this cannot be possible when the IDF is outside the Strip - it requires a continuous presence of IDF units inside Gaza.

At the fore of the concerns of Israelis is that the same could happen in the West Bank against Israeli cities. The distances are similar, less than 5 km. So, a two-state solution is further from the agenda for the West Bank to be a State of Palestine until Gaza is resolved, and indeed it could then join the West Bank under a singular Palestinian government.

Bridging the gap from the desirable to the practical

The desirable objectives of the Israel government that has tasked the IDF is the complete purging of Gaza from surface and underground infrastructures, the destruction of Hamas as a governing body, and the return of all the abductees.¹⁵

This minimal desirable de-Hamasization of Gaza in the day before the day after will inevitably lead to a state of disorder. Whilst it is desirable to dismantle all Hamas governing bodies, individual local Hamas supporters will try to return and take control in any form of new structure. This resembles any post-conflict challenge be it Germany 1945 or Iraq 2003.

Conclusions

It is fair to assume, and I do so in my conclusions, that the most likely process from the day before the day after until the responsibility of life in Gaza is in the hands of the Palestinians will be a form of IDF military governance.

The quicker Palestinians show initiative to recognize Israel, renounce violence and lay down weapons, and raise the flag of leadership will be the quicker that they have an independent state in Gaza and the West Bank. Until then there will be a transition period from the day before the day after until the day after where the IDF will undertake the removal of Hamas and other terrorist organizations, the return of the abductees and the destruction of the surface and subterranean infrastructures. As in the Gaza as in the West Bank, the IDF military governance will handle a judicial system as well as a tax collection system, and act on the prevention of incitement in education content. A situation of normalcy can only emerge from a strong economy and a sound education.

All of this will result in a certain economic burden on Israel, but this burden is negligible compared to the burden that will be caused by the need to go once again to war with large scale mobilization of reserves that has impacted the Israeli economy.

This transition period can only succeed if others in the international community including other Arab states help to work for the rehabilitation of Gaza. It can only work if the international community supports rather than criticizes Israel. Such supports must be more than just financial but also in active daily participation. Perhaps they can start with a dream, a vision that Gaza will be a city-state like Singapore or even another Dubai on the Mediterranean.

If they have a different opinion on such matters, then they should stand up and speak up. Perhaps they haven't yet and maybe never will is because it is not only Gaza that needs rehabilitation. The entire Middle East and North Africa is conflict torn and needs rehabilitation. Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Libya, and Sudan are in a no different situation to Gaza. Indeed, they are in an even worse situation because they don't have a state like Israel that cares about the future of others. Israel has constantly shown care for its own citizens of all religions that is unique to the Middle East. To be sure, Hezbollah needs to be purged from Lebanon and Syria and the Ayatollah regime from Iran.

It is fair to say that when the day after arrives it will not be within this generation. There is a day after for the governance of Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere. There is also a day after for Jews worldwide. Both will be in the day before the day after resulting from the massacre of 7 October until a new generation is born that hasn't experienced terror, violence, and war, as only such a generation can truly be at peace.

Notes:

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