



A Regional-Political Perspective on the Gaza Campaign

The Gaza campaign is not a local conflict. Although the fighting is confined to a specific geographic area, it risks spreading and turning into a regional campaign that involves the United States and its regional allies in shaping the war and its aftermath. Understanding the attitudes, interests, sensitivities and capabilities of each country in the region regarding the campaign, as well as the actions each is taking, is thus of great importance. Below is a compilation by Mitvim experts outlining the regional view of the Gaza campaign as it unfolds, summing up events of the third week and offering guiding principles for Israel's regional foreign policy. For a broader view of our experts' insights, we recommend Mitvim's series of publications on the regional-political perspective on the Gaza campaign.

Sixth week of the war

A Regional Perspective

Dr. Roei Kibrik, Director of Research, Mitvim

In an effort to manage the tension between commitment to the Palestinian cause and geopolitical interests, providing humanitarian aid to Gaza and calling for a ceasefire have become the main policy tool for many countries in the region. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Turkey all highlighted the humanitarian aid they provide to the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. In fact, the extent of humanitarian aid each country provides has become, to some degree, a representative currency of commitment to the Palestinian cause. At the same time, it is worth noting that even as they provide aid, the countries that have normalized relations with Israel have avoided disrupting them. They have chosen, instead, to lower the profile of the relationship and stop promoting joint projects and new initiatives, while waiting and hoping that the end of the campaign in Gaza will make it possible to resume cooperation.

The countries of the region in the Middle East and Europe, as well as the European Union and the United States, have also presented general outlines of their vision for the day after the fighting, based on the conceptual framework of the two-state solution. Specifically, Europe and the United States see a bolstered and reformed Palestinian Authority ultimately assuming responsibility for the Gaza Strip, and emphasize that Israel must not remain in the Gaza Strip or even reduce its territory. Arab states presented similar positions, and expressed opposition to the deployment of foreign forces in Gaza other than as an interim measure in conjunction with a political process at the end of which the Palestinians would rule the territory. Responding to statements by Israeli government ministers, the international community made clear it would reject any proposal to resettle Gaza's population elsewhere. Israel, for its part, finds itself waging a military campaign within borders set by external forces, without yet defining its vision for the day after.

An Egyptian Perspective

Prof. Elie Podeh, Hebrew University, Mitvim Board Member

Egypt continues to concentrate its efforts in three directions: **first, the transfer** of humanitarian aid to Gaza through the Rafah crossing. The media emphasize the country's important role, while explaining that all the delays in the transfer of aid are not Egypt's fault (hence, it is Israel's fault). In a related development, a Qatari newspaper reported that Egypt is opening another crossing into Gaza - the Salah a-Din Gate a few kilometers north of the Rafah Crossing – as a result of the Arab-Islamic summit's decision to "break the siege on Gaza." At this stage, there has been no confirmation of the report. **Hostage release negotiations are the second direction** Egypt is pursuing, **simultaneously and along with the Qatari-mediated talks**. Its contribution to the process is difficult to assess at this stage. **Cairo's third focus** is on diplomatic contacts to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza. To this end, el-Sisi spoke by phone with French President Macron and met twice with the French defense minister.

The Egyptian discourse on the war can be analyzed on three levels. One relates to statements by el-Sisi's use of relatively moderate rhetoric regarding Israel and the war in Gaza, focusing on humanitarian issues, preventing the expulsion of Palestinians to Sinai, and urging a political solution based on two states for two peoples. The second level relates to statements by government officials. The Foreign Ministry, Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, and Egypt's representative to the UN have been using harsh terms, such as "aggression," "crime" and "genocide", to describe Israel's actions, language Egypt's diplomats have avoided in the past. The religious Al-Azhar Institute has mounted a particularly hostile campaign supporting acts of terrorism against Israel. The third level relates to Egyptian public opinion, as expressed in fiery, aggressive and highly critical fashion in the media and on social networks. While other voices condemning and criticizing Hamas terrorism are also being expressed, they are mostly drowned out by the noisier hostile discourse or voiced abroad.

The differences in rhetoric is presumably a calculated move by an administration that allows it to preserve national interests, including relations with Israel and the United States, but also to let off steam. To that end, el-Sisi has also allowed carefully controlled demonstrations to take place, after previously banning popular protests against the war. As next month's presidential elections approach, he is trying to maneuver between opposing constraints - so far, successfully so.

A US Perspective

Nadav Tamir, J Street, Mitvim Board Member

In the meantime, the Biden Administration continues to publicly support Israel, but upping pressure on it to agree to a "humanitarian pause" in the fighting, allow the entry of diesel fuel into Gaza, and restrict IDF activity inside Shifa Hospital. Biden said that the war in Gaza would end only when Hamas could no longer threaten Israeli citizens. He also accused Hamas of war crimes and said that US intelligence supported Israel's claim regarding the Hamas use of hospitals for military purposes.

The United States abstained in a UN Security Council vote on a draft resolution submitted by Malta calling for an extension of humanitarian pauses in the combat and the release of all hostages. The US did not support the resolution because it failed to condemn Hamas.

Regarding the negotiations for the release of the hostages, Biden said he was "deeply involved in trying to advance the deal," and cited the "good cooperation" with Qatar in moving it along. In the largest Jewish demonstration in US history, more than 290,000 marched in Washington DC in support of Israel and for the release of hostages, decrying the rise in anti-Semitism.

Concerned about the risk of opening another front in the war, Biden Administration officials have been warning that tensions in the West Bank are on the verge of boiling over and could result in the Palestinian Authority losing control of major cities. The administration believes that a significant outbreak of violence in the West Bank would undermine the legitimacy and international support Israel currently enjoys for its continued effort to crush Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The administration has faced growing criticism within the Democratic Party, as well as among lower-level civil servants who disagree with the president's policy on the war. Public opinion polling indicates that Biden has lost the support of young voters who are opposed to his support for Israel throughout the war.

Cable communication that were leaked last week revealed that American diplomats stationed in Arab countries were warning of "the loss of Arab public (support?) for decades ahead", due to Biden's unequivocal support of Israel. Assistant Secretary of State Barbara Leaf told members of Congress that the current crisis has generated enormous public anger in the Arab world against Israel and the US, adding that the US would have to address this problem. Leaf made the remarks in response to a question about the prospects of resuming Israeli-Saudi contacts after the war. Leaf has been in Israel in recent days holding talks with senior Israeli and Palestinian officials in an attempt to stabilize the PA and to examine options for integrating it into the management of the Gaza Strip in the future. Leaf has told Israeli officials that an Israeli-Saudi agreement did not appear to have been erased from the agenda but that it would require more significant Israeli concessions to the Palestinians. Leaf warned Israeli interlocutors against measures harming the Palestinian Authority. Her schedule included visits to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

A European Perspective

Dr. Maya Sion-Tzidkiyahu, Director of the Israel–Europe Relations Program, Mitvim

While European governments still express support for Israel, some face increasing political backlash. The overwhelming majority of European leaders understand that they stand with Israel on the same side in the war against fundamentalist terrorist organizations that have also struck Europe in recent decades. However, the implications of Israel's war against Hamas for domestic and party politics in Europe are far-reaching and potentially risky for these leaders' re-election prospects.

French President Macron, who called for a ceasefire (on Nov. 11), backtracked/clarified that he meant pauses/suspensions in the fighting for humanitarian purposes. German Chancellor Scholz reiterated his support for Israel's right to exist in light of Turkish President Erdogan's harsh attack against Israel at a joint news conference during his visit to Germany. UK Labor Party leader Starmer also faced a revolt from members of his own party over his refusal to join the call for a ceasefire.

Meanwhile, the EU is developing its political solution for the day after the war, and aspires to enlist Arab countries as active participant in it, together with the United States.

Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, was among the recent high-ranking visitors to Israel. Israel was its first stop, Nov. 17, of a Mideast tour that included Ramallah, Bahrain, Qatar and Jordan. At the same time, President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, visited Egypt and Jordan (Nov. 17-18).

The visits were aimed at maintaining regional stability (inter alia by increasing financial aid to Egypt and Jordan) and enlisting the Arab states' participation in the "day after the war" – both in the interim phase in which a multinational force may be deployed in the Gaza Strip instead of the IDF (although the Arab states have yet to support this idea). The visits were also intended to examine prospects of political support for the Palestinian Authority and the reconstruction of Gaza, and especially for pushing them an Israeli-Palestinian peace process in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative.

Although the Israeli government is not prepared to publicly discuss post-war scenarios, Borrell noted during his visit that the EU and its member states believe a comprehensive political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the only way to provide security and stability for Israel and the region, and said he would continue his efforts to harness the Arab Peace Initiative (in an updated version) to advance a political process.

Borrell also expanded on the five-point "day after" plan von der Leyen's presented last week, outlining three "no's" and three "yeses."

The No's:

- [a] Not to uprooting Palestinians from the Gaza Strip. It would be a human tragedy and provoke regional instability [which would also affect Europe].
- (b) The territory of Gaza will not be reduced and Israel will not remain as an occupying power there. Hamas will not regain control in the Gaza Strip, which must be free of terrorist groups.
- (c) A solution for Gaza must not be divorced from an overall solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The "yes" points focused on tapping partners for the agenda:

- (d) The return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. In his Nov. 13 remarks, Borrell spoke of "A" Palestinian Authority and not "the" Palestinian Authority. However, speaking to Prime Minister Shatya in Ramallah (Nov. 19), he backtracked and said that it would be the Palestinian Authority, which already provides Gaza Strip with health and other services.
- (e) Greater Arab involvement in resolving the Israeli - Palestinian conflict and establishing a Palestinian state, not only from an economic perspective but mainly from a political one [as per the Arab Peace Initiative].
- (f) A resumption of deeper EU involvement in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and establishing a Palestinian state.

The Irish, Greek and Cypriot foreign ministers also visited Israel. The Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs examined with Israeli officials the practical arrangements for shipping humanitarian aid from the port of Limassol to Gaza, both in order to secure the shipments during the fighting, and to ensure they reach needy Gazans rather than Hamas. The opening

of a maritime aid corridor will make it possible to significantly increase the scope of aid and allow the EU to play a more significant role than their current contribution (so far 15 planes have landed at El Arish Airport in Egypt, from where the aid is being transferred to the Rafah crossing).

Although Ireland is one of the most hostile countries to Israel in Europe, with many Irish describing Hamas terrorists as "freedom fighters", Foreign Minister Martin visited Israel (on Nov. 16) and toured Be'eri, one of the worst-hit Israeli communities, issuing an unequivocal condemnation of the brutal Hamas attack (but not calling it terrorism).

A Jordanian Perspective

Prof. Ronen Yitzhak, Western Galilee Academic College

The number of participants in daily anti-war demonstrations in Amman and elsewhere in the kingdom has declined in recent days, mainly due to protester fatigue stemming from the prolonged Israel-Hamas fighting. Organizers' arrests and disruption of Internet service have also contributed to the decline in the number of demonstrations. Past events in Jordan have proven that anti-Israel demonstrations do not endanger the Hashemite regime, which knows how to contain them as an expression of a longstanding liberal policy.

Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi reiterated Jordan's demand for an immediate ceasefire and implementation of the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Speaking on Jordanian television (Nov. 14), Safadi argued that Hamas cannot be eradicated because it is not just a military-political movement, it is also an ideology. The two-state solution, he added, is therefore the only way to end the war.

Safadi's suggestion that Israel is committing war crimes in Gaza has fueled anti-Israeli discourse in Jordan and prompted parliamentarian demands to re-examine ties with Israel, cancel the gas export agreement with it and delay the signing of an electricity-for-water deal with UAE participation. Calls are also being heard to compile incriminating material against Israel in order to support its prosecution for war crimes.

Jordanian media has also questioned Israel's military might, citing growing domestic divisiveness, a weakened economy and wavering resilience, and its reduced international standing. A front-page Hebrew-language article in the Al-Ghad (Tomorrow) newspaper (Nov. 15), headlined "The Day after Israel", predicted that Israel's plight is so dire that it is nearing its end. Therefore discussing "the day after Israel" is more relevant than debating "the day after" in Gaza, the writer argued. The article, undoubtedly intended for Israeli readers, reflects the yearning of many Jordanians for Israel's annihilation.

However, this negative attitude of the general Jordanian public towards Israel, which is regularly expressed in polls, does not reflect the position of the Hashemite regime that knows Israel is a strong country that can ensure Jordan's stability and security. The Israeli government has proven that it is willing to help and defend Jordan, (for example, during the 1970 Black September events or the threat to Jordan from ISIS in recent years), and it will do so in the future if required.

A Bahraini Perspective

Dr. Moran Zaga, Research and Policy Fellow, Mitvim

Last weekend, the Manama Dialogue 2023 conference provided an opportunity for senior officials in the Arab and Western world to outline clearer positions on the war. Addressing the conference, Crown Prince and Prime Minister Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa condemned both sides - Hamas for its "barbaric, horrific and indiscriminate" attack and Israel for the airstrikes in Gaza that claimed many lives. The crown prince proposed breaking the cycle of violence by releasing the abductees (women and children) held by Hamas, and bringing humanitarian aid into Gaza in the near term, and by implementing the two-state solution for long-term security.

The crown prince presented Bahrain's red lines, which to a large extent represent those of its Gulf neighbors: "No to the deployment of external forces (in Gaza), no to reoccupation (by Israel), no territorial erosion of the Gaza Strip and no to terrorism emanating from the Gaza Strip against Israel." He is the first leader to publicly propose elections for the Palestinian leadership after the war in order to reflect the wishes of the Palestinian people. He also urged a one centralized strong leader for the West Bank and Gaza strip.

The Bahraini crown prince's remarks come a week after the Bahraini parliament's decision to suspend economic and diplomatic ties with Israel. Tensions over the Palestinian issue between the political elites in the Gulf states and the public is well felt, but is still under control. The Gulf states are beginning to engage more openly with the "day after" scenarios while giving the US a mandate to jumpstart the political process, although the current Palestinian leadership is unlikely to agree to this.

A Turkish Perspective

Dr. Nimrod Goren, Founder and President Mitvim, Diplomeds

Turkish President Erdoğan maintained his hostile attitude towards Israel, designating it a "terrorist state" and accusing it of committing "genocide". Hamas, on the other hand, was portrayed by him as a political party that won Palestinian elections. Foreign Minister Fidan claimed in a media interview that he saw no need to discuss who would rule Gaza after the war, because whoever ruled it before (Hamas) could continue to do so. Erdoğan expressed his blunt views on Israel and its action in Gaza during a joint news conference with German Chancellor Scholz in Berlin (Nov. 17). His claim that Turkey is free of historical obligations to Israel (unlike Germany) and therefore can express itself freely aroused resentment in the German media. Scholz later stated that Erdoğan's claims were absurd and that Israel was a law-abiding country.

Erdoğan continued to emphasize Turkey's willingness to provide aid to the Palestinians in Gaza, saying that if a ceasefire is reached, Turkey will make efforts to rebuild damaged infrastructure, hospitals and schools. As part of the renewed coordination between Turkey and Egypt, a Turkish ship docked at the Egyptian port of Al Arish with equipment for field hospitals in Gaza. At the same time, repeating the Mavi Marmara flotilla to Gaza in 2010, Turkish activists announced their intention to send a new flotilla to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Meanwhile, the families of Israelis abducted by Hamas to Gaza wrote to Erdoğan in Turkish, asking for his help in efforts to free their loved ones. Erdoğan had initially expressed a desire to be involved in hostage release negotiations, but subsequently abandoned the idea, adopting instead a clear anti-Israel line. In response to the letter, Erdoğan claimed, among other things, that the appeal shows the families have lost faith in their own government. He also said that it is his understanding that Hamas has no interest in keeping the abductees.

A Hellenic Alliance Perspective

Former Ambassador Michael Harari, Policy Fellow, Mitvim

Greece and Cyprus continued to stand by Israel, but at the same time stress, including publicly, the need to respond more decisively to the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. Foreign ministers from both countries visited Israel last week, met with Foreign Minister Cohen and President Herzog, and tried to promote the idea of a maritime corridor to the Gaza Strip. The Cypriot foreign minister arrived with professional experts after the Cypriot president presented, at a conference held in Paris, a detailed 25-page plan setting out various time frames for delivering aid to residents of the Gaza Strip. The Greek foreign minister met in Ramallah with the Palestinian prime minister, stressing the need to increase aid and calling on all sides to abide by moral values.

Athens wondered whether Turkey's firm stance against Israel over the war in Gaza would affect the atmosphere of thaw between the two countries, but for the time being, it seems that the two countries – Greece and Turkey – continue to adhere to the thaw measures, ahead of the meeting of the Supreme Joint Committee in early December.

A Lebanese Perspective

Eitan Ishai, Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, Hebrew University

Hezbollah continued its cross-border escalation this week, still carefully calibrating its attacks to keep them just below the threshold of all-out war with Israel. This strategy was clearly evident in recent weeks, as Hezbollah tends to shortly restrain its firepower after the killings of two civilians and six soldiers by anti-tank missiles fired from Lebanon into Israel. This, in order to avoid an Israeli response too harsh which can lead to an undesired escalation. Nonetheless, Hezbollah soon intensifies its attacks once again.

This past week saw Hezbollah turning up the flames with rockets, mortar shells, anti-tank missiles and explosives-bearing drones sent to penetrate Israel, and introducing additional weapons from its arsenals. Two weeks ago, it debuted its heavy Burqan missiles against Israel; this past week it attempted to disrupt Israeli flights over Lebanese territory by firing a missile against an Israeli drone. The missile was intercepted by Israeli defenses, but the success of these operations is not as important to Nasrallah as their very execution, which he can present as an achievement in the campaign against Israel.

Having made a strategic decision to focus on crushing Hamas in Gaza and avoid a second front on its northern border, Israel has adopted a defensive and reactive posture vis-à-vis Hezbollah, even though it also knows to intensify its response in accordance with the unwritten “rules of engagement” between the two sides. This was demonstrated after the failed drone interception, when Israel responded by attacking Hezbollah’s advanced surface-to-air missile system. In recent weeks Israel has bombed positions and outposts in south Lebanon, military compounds, weapons depots and more. While not inflicting strategic and irreversible damage, the attacks have disrupted the organization's offensive capabilities near the border and killed dozens of the organization’s militants.

Meanwhile, official Lebanon, such as it is, kept voicing its concern about the country being dragged into war, although its representatives have been careful to avoid harsh public criticism of Hezbollah, placing most of the responsibility for the escalation on the Israeli side. Prime Minister Najib Mikati continued to serve as a conduit for messages to Hezbollah,

mainly from the Americans. Mikati, like several other ministers, said Lebanon was not interested in war and reiterated that UN Resolution 1701 must be respected. Nonetheless, "official Lebanon" knows that the decision to go to war or avoid it is out of its hands.

Public criticism of Hezbollah is much less subtle. Over the past four years, the Cedar State has been in the midst of an unprecedentedly severe economic crisis, which has also led to a social and political crisis under a weak transitional government and with no president in power. The Lebanese understand that being sucked into war with Israel could deal the foundering country a disastrous blow.

Despite assurances by Nasrallah, who prides himself on being the "defender of Lebanon," Hezbollah's recent escalation has generated a growing and increasingly harsh domestic criticism of the organization. The flight of tens of thousands of Lebanese, mainly Shi'ites and Christians, from their homes in the south to become refugees in their own country further heightens tensions in the country. This week there were even clashes, mostly verbal, between Shi'ites and Christians after the head of the Maronite Church warned of the danger of escalation and urged help for refugees arriving from the south. These voices are likely to continue serving as a deterrent against further escalation by Nasrallah.

Nasrallah faces a dilemma – he is not interested in going to war with Israel and dragging Lebanon with him, but cannot afford to sit on the fence. He has therefore chosen an intermediate path that allows him to avoid war but also to present himself as someone who stood by the resistance to Israel and the struggle for the liberation of Palestine.

Throughout its history, Hezbollah has been forced to maneuver between the interests of the Lebanese state and those of its patrons in Iran, but at least at this point in time there seems to be no contradiction between the two. Iran, heeding US threats and weighing other considerations, does not seem interested in expanding the war. Its supreme interest is to bring about a ceasefire in Gaza, both to save the Hamas regime from annihilation and calm tensions in the region.

Therefore, in close cooperation and coordination with the Iranians, Hezbollah has adopted a policy of attrition against Israel, in keeping with efforts by Iran's other proxies – in Syria, Iraq and Yemen – to exert pressure on the US and its allies to impose a ceasefire in Gaza. The purpose of this attrition is therefore not to bring on a war, but to prevent it. At the same time, miscalculation by either side could lead to an all-out confrontation in which none of the parties (except Hamas) seems interested.

A Moroccan Perspective

Einat Levi, Policy Fellow, Mitvim

In the past week, the public and media discourse in Morocco highlighted the content of a letter submitted by the Forum of Families of the Kidnapped and Missing to King Mohammed VI. The letter called for assistance in securing the release of their loved ones abducted by Hamas and held in Gaza. This citizen-driven humanitarian initiative refrains from political references and is based on the enduring civic and historical ties between the peoples of Morocco and Israel, as well as the shared family values revered in Judaism and Islam.

Although the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not participate in the drafting or transmission of the mentioned letter, and despite it being a civic initiative without political involvement, officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs deemed it appropriate to publish

the letter on their social media platforms, sparking critical media discourse around it. The families now hope for an official Moroccan response to their letter, a response that could elevate the issue of the kidnapped to the Middle Eastern and North African agenda, enabling greater Moroccan involvement in the regional crisis.

Morocco plays a pivotal role in regional stability due to the King's role as the Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, Morocco's experience in constructive mediation, including hostage releases, and the trust that Morocco holds among both Israelis and Palestinians. This trust is a unique advantage that other mediators lack.

Morocco has accumulated extensive experience in mediating conflicts, such as in the war in Libya, the crisis in Mali, the internal-Palestinian reconciliation process, and the crisis between Qatar and Gulf states. Moroccan mediation efforts were also evident in facilitating the release of hostages, as seen in the assistance provided in the release of Romani hostage held in Burkina Faso by an Al-Qaeda affiliate in August and a German aid worker held in Mali since 2018, released in December 2022.

This diplomatic strategy has been dubbed "constructive neutrality," allowing Morocco to maintain its external reputation, active relations with all parties, and a moderate image at home. However, it's essential to emphasize that Moroccan involvement is a complex event with many facets, and a thorough examination will be necessary as circumstances unfold and various players become involved in the process.

In the internal Moroccan political arena, the PJD's public expressions of support for Hamas evolved into concrete actions. On Nov. 11, PJD Secretary-General Abdelilah Benkirane spoke by phone with Ismail Haniyeh, head of the Hamas political department, expressing condolences on the death of his son and grandmother "in Israel's brutal aggression in Gaza." Benkirane stressed his party's "total and uncompromising solidarity" with the "resistance", condemned Israeli attacks and the inability of international organizations and countries around the world to "stop the aggression." Haniyeh, for his part, expressed appreciation for PJD's consistent stance on the Palestinian issue and its involvement in popular activities on behalf of the people of Gaza. Two days later, during a meeting of the party's general secretariat, the PJD expressed support for the Oct. 7 massacre, describing it as a "natural and just response" to Israel's occupation and oppression of Palestinians.