



## **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 is thus of great importance. Below is a compilation by Mitvim experts, offering an initial regional view of the Gaza campaign.**

7.10-18.10: Early days

### **Regional Perspective**

*Dr. Roei Kibrik, Director of Research, Mitvim*

One of the key presumptions that fell apart on the morning of October 7th was the idea, advanced by Benjamin Netanyahu, to "bypass" the Palestinian issue in favor of normalization with the Arab world. The recent flare-up initiated by Hamas has illustrated to both Israel and Arab countries that sidestepping the Palestinian issue is not a viable option, and that there is a need to address the Palestinian issue and work towards its solution before turning to a redesign of the Middle East.

The absence of a solution to the Palestinian issue threatens regional stability and the ability to form a broad camp under the American umbrella, which is dedicated to stability and combating extreme political Islam. The lack of a solution to the Palestinian issue poses a potential existential threat to Jordan. The Arab street's solidarity with the Palestinian cause challenges the leadership in countries like Egypt, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, as well as other nations interested in advancing cooperation with Israel. The involvement of Hezbollah, at Iran's behest, against Israel in the context of the Gaza conflict is the last thing Lebanon needs for its recovery. Additionally, Greece and Cyprus are deeply concerned about the instability in the eastern Mediterranean and its potential consequences. In some aspects, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is intertwined with the global struggle between Western powers and the Russian-Chinese-Iranian axis.

The emerging picture from the current conflict in Gaza is that the Israelis and the Palestinians cannot manage the situation alone, and they certainly cannot resolve the conflict by themselves. Both Israeli and Palestinian leadership suffer from a lack of legitimacy and an inability to lead towards the required significant decisions. Both sides need external assistance, from the United States, Europe, and regional countries, to move away from the ongoing conflict management strategy and the cycle of violence toward a durable political solution.

If Israel had a functioning government, and if Israel chose the path of a two-state solution, there would now be an opportunity for joining forces under the leadership of the US with all those opposed to extreme political Islam and who see it as a common enemy, and to recruit them as well in the fight against Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran. This also includes the Palestinian leadership that recognizes Israel. The absence of an Israeli decision on the two-state solution represents a strategic missed opportunity and indicates that the Israeli government continues to view Hamas as an asset, preferring to sacrifice the Kibbutz surrounding Gaza for the prosperity of the settlement in the West Bank and for the settlers' desire to continue to pray at Joseph's Tomb and to build a sukkah in Hawara.

## **An Egyptian Perspective**

*Prof. Elie Podeh, Member of the Board, Mitvim*

The current war between Israel and Hamas holds the potential for deterioration of Israeli-Egyptian relations, testing the robustness of their ties yet again.

In general, Egypt shares a clear interest with Israel: destroying the military capabilities of Hamas and Islamic Jihad and, if possible, restoring the rule of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza. Quite a few Sunni countries in the region support this goal, albeit quietly. The al-Sisi regime, as is well known, crushed the Muslim Brotherhood movement from which Hamas emerged, and outlawed it. Thus, Egypt did not intervene in Operation Cast Lead in 2014, like others in the Arab world, because it had an interest in Israel crushing Hamas. Egypt also plugged up Hamas smuggling tunnels into Gaza, though apparently not hermetically.

However, the current war presents Egypt with three challenges, some which it has not faced before, certainly not with this intensity. The first challenge is the fear that thousands, perhaps more, of Palestinians (out of Gaza's population of 2.2 million) will want to flee the Gaza Strip to Sinai through the Rafah crossing. Unofficial statements from Israel calling on Palestinians to flee to Sinai were received in Egypt with concern and anger, prompting official Israeli denials.

The second challenge concerns Egypt's place and role in the current crisis. Egypt sees itself as an honest broker between Israel and Hamas, due to its geographical proximity and historic involvement in the Palestinian issue. Under Hosni Mubarak in 2009, Mohamed Morsi in 2012 and Sisi in 2014, Egypt played an important role in mediating and achieving the ceasefire in Operation Cast Lead (2008), Pillar of Defense (2012) and Operation Protective

Edge (2014), but it was forced to accept Qatar's mediation involvement since 2014 and its funneling of funds to Hamas through Israel. Egypt now faces the possibility that other countries – Qatar, Turkey and perhaps other Gulf states – will once again assume its historic mediation role, thereby dealing an additional blow to Egypt's fading leadership image in the Arab world.

The third challenge concerns the need to calm public opinion that supports the Palestinians, even if not necessarily Hamas. In other words, as the humanitarian crisis in Gaza intensifies, growing calls will be heard in Egypt (and in the Arab world, in general) for intervention to rein in Israel, and perhaps even for the suspension or severing of relations with Israel.

A deterioration in relations between the two states could be triggered by irresponsible Israeli statements, such as Education Minister Yoav Kisch's recommendation that the Palestinians leave Gaza for Egypt. It could also stem from disseminating information whose reliability is unclear, such as the report that Egypt had warned Israel in advance about a Hamas operation – which has so far been denied by Egyptian officials. A third scenario of deterioration could result from a decision by Israel to prefer another Arab mediator over Egypt; and finally, and most importantly, the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza would generate public pressure on the regime to take steps against Israel.

The relationship with Egypt is the cornerstone of Israel's relations in the Middle East, and it must therefore coordinate its moves with the Egyptians using all the liaison mechanisms developed over the years. A deterioration in Israeli-Egyptian relations risks Israel's relations with other moderate Arab states and could also significantly curb Israel's leeway to act against Hamas in Gaza.

## **A US perspective**

*Nadav Tamir, Member of the Board, Mitvim*

The American government has unprecedentedly aligned itself with Israel in the conflict against Hamas. President Biden's speech, his visit to the region, and the presence of top American officials such as the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and the CENTCOM Commander, along with deploying two aircraft carriers to the area, clearly demonstrated the unwavering commitment of the United States to Israel's security. These actions played a vital role in deterring and halting further escalation and, at least temporarily, preventing the Gaza conflict from spilling into other areas.

The United States is putting forth substantial efforts to prevent the local conflict from escalating into a regional or global crisis, averting the need for American military involvement on other fronts. These efforts are intended to curb the attempts of China and Russia to exploit the situation and enhance their influence in the region. Additionally, the US goals are to safeguard the stability of pro-American allies in the region, protect American citizens, and facilitate the release of abductees holding who are American citizens. Concurrently, the U.S. is working to ensure that, while Israel takes action against Hamas, it adheres to international

law. Another, longer term goal, after the current campaign will have brought to an end, is for this crisis to pave the way for a political resolution.

The United States has the capacity to navigate a diplomatic path in the aftermath of the military conflict and lead a regional diplomatic initiative. To that end, in addition to its support for Israel, the United States also ensures that Israel acts strategically and rationally. The American government needs to support the internal stability in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, Getting them to be Involved in efforts to contain the military conflict, engage in the diplomatic effort that will follow it, prevent the spread of violence into the West Bank, and build and reinforce the Palestinian entity that will assume responsibility for Gaza in the future. Simultaneously, the U.S. must exert its influence on Turkey, Qatar, and Egypt to intensify pressure on Hamas and its activities. Ultimately, the United States holds the power to leverage the current crisis to advance a diplomatic strategy for the implementation of a two-state solution.

At this time, given the role of the United States in the conflict and the depth of the crisis on the Israeli side, Israel must act in close coordination with the American government, taking into account the latter's interests and being highly responsive for its sensitivities. In this case, the success of the Americans will also be very beneficial for Israel.

### **A Saudi Arabia perspective**

*Shiri Fein-Grossman, Forum Dvora*

A winning and sustainable strategy for the war with Hamas must be guided by the desired end result of bringing down the Hamas regime, a goal that we must achieve at all costs. A result in which Hamas ceases to exist obliges us to deal with the broader Palestinian issue and the question of who will control the Gaza Strip after the military operation.

The severe crisis in which we find ourselves may be an opportunity to impel Saudi Arabia to take a much more active role vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip and Hamas. Saudi Arabia, under its de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman aspires to position itself as a regional leader that plays a constructive role in the international arena. This was demonstrated, for example, in its hosting of an international peace summit on the Russia-Ukraine war last August.

Saudi Arabia and Israel have many shared interests, chief among them the struggle against the radical Islam propagated by groups such as ISIS and the Muslim Brotherhood. This struggle is consistent with Saudi Arabia's desire to keep improving and strengthening its image as a country friendly to tourism, investment, and business. Saudi Arabia was by and large uninvolved in past mediation efforts between Israel and Hamas and did not take a significant part in effort to eradicate Hamas. Saudi Arabia, like Israel, thought it was possible to rein in Hamas. However, the recent tragic events have proven that Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas have identified a strategic opportunity to strike a blow against Israel – to take over the West Bank once and for all and unite the Palestinians under extremist Islamist rule.

The intense fighting in the Middle East, so close to the Egyptian border and not very far from the border between Saudi Arabia and Jordan, is projecting negatively on all countries in the region, and the risk of regional war is growing. It also presents Israel with a historic opportunity to join the moderate Arab camp against its sworn rival Iran (along with Qatar that hosts Hamas leaders and Turkey, which also support Hamas). In order to bring about the collapse of Hamas, we must work together, especially vis-à-vis decision makers in the United States and other allies such as France, Germany, England, and others.

The main obstacle to normalization with Saudi Arabia and a regional coalition to fight Islamic terrorism is the Israeli government's opposition to promoting the two-state solution. What is more, to the extent that Israel signals a desire to control the Gaza Strip, while continuing to weaken the Palestinian Authority, it distances prospects of enlisting Saudi Arabia as a partner. On the other hand, adopting the spirit of 2002 Saudi peace initiative for renewing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations under American and Saudi auspices would serve American (and Israeli) national security interests of drawing Saudi Arabia closer and distancing it from the Chinese-Russian-Iranian axis. It should be remembered that the Saudis also have important levers regarding global oil prices, which affect the fighting between Russia and Ukraine.

While residents of Arab countries do not enjoy the full freedom of expression enjoyed by residents of Western democracies, their leaderships are mindful of public opinion. The Saudi Crown Prince's supreme interest is to maintain and consolidate his rule, a goal for which he needs public support. This issue is his top priority, and he does not want to risk it, especially in light of the harsh scenes of harm to uninvolved civilians, which is an inseparable part of any war. Public opinion in Saudi Arabia, which only a few months ago reported that support for business and sports ties with Israelis had reached a record of almost half its residents, will find it difficult to accept an alliance with Israel without advancing the two-state solution.

The bottom line is that the likelihood of advancing normalization with Saudi Arabia and enlisting it in a joint struggle against radical Islam will diminish as we continue to avoid advancing the two-state solution. Choosing the components of the one-state solution, such as occupying the Gaza Strip, controlling it, and continuing to weaken the Palestinian Authority, could lead the Abraham Accords countries (which are already forced to fend off harsh criticism against normalization) to sever relations with Israel, would severely damage Israel's international legitimacy and thus limit its leeway in fighting Hamas. It would also miss out on a historic opportunity to forge a joint regional camp against Iran and its proxies.

## **An Iranian Perspective**

*Dr. Gil Murciano, CEO, Mitvim*

For the past decade, Iran has been leading a policy of "unifying arenas," coordinating and operating at least four multi-front campaigns – in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon (through Hezbollah) and Syria (through militias under its control) with the potential to mobilize the

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Houthis in Yemen and Iranian-supported militias in Iraq. Iran's relations with Hamas have strengthened in recent years (after the crisis during the civil war in Syria) and it has worked to enhance and expand the Gaza-based group's military and offensive capabilities (alongside those of the Islamic Jihad). At this stage, it is unclear whether Iran was involved in planning the October 7 attack as part of a deliberate attempt to provoke regional escalation. A meeting held in Lebanon between senior IRGC, Hezbollah and Hamas officials a few weeks ago could indicate that the Iranians at least knew about the general intention of Hamas to escalate the situation.

Escalating the war between Israel and Hamas into a regional conflict does not currently serve Iranian interests. First and foremost, because it could jeopardize the two main elements that the Iranians reserve for a planned campaign in the event of an Israeli attack on its territory – Hamas in the south and Hezbollah in the north. What is more, a regional escalation risks the process of Iran's negotiations with the United States on uranium enrichment, as well as jeopardizing its recent rapprochement with the Gulf states by demonstrating its destructive potential in the region. Accordingly, Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei has so far been careful to deny any involvement in planning the Hamas attack.

However, Iran and its affiliated militias in Lebanon and Syria are expected to take part in the escalation in one of two scenarios. The first is a broad Israeli ground operation risking the survival of the Hamas regime, in which case Iran could enlist the help of Hezbollah and/or other forces to prevent the group's collapse, while at the same time exploiting public anger in the Arab World to brand itself as a defender of Palestinian interests. The second scenario relates to an unintended escalation, similar to the chain of events at the start of the Second Lebanon War, with limited military action by Hezbollah intensifying Israeli responses and creating an escalating dynamic of actions and counter-actions culminating in all-out war.

Israel must present Iran with a double dilemma – political and military. On the one hand, clarify the destructive consequences of escalation for Hezbollah, Lebanon's future, and the Assad regime, while presenting the broadest possible deterrent coalition of Western forces. On the other hand, strengthen cooperation with regional partners, with an emphasis on Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt, in devising political solutions for Gaza's reconstruction and advancing political moves vis-à-vis the Palestinians. Their inclusion in an Israeli-Western political effort may prevent these countries from drawing closer to the Iranian axis.

### **A European Perspective**

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

European governments from Ukraine westward have stood alongside Israel since the start of the war. Foreign ministers and heads of major countries on the continent - Germany, France, Britain and Italy – have expressed broad support for Israel and conducted solidarity visits in the midst of the war. The president of the European Commission and the president of the European Parliament also flew in and been to Kfar Aza, one of the communities worst

hit by Hamas. Britain sent two Navy vessels to join the two US aircraft carriers deployed off Israel's coast.

Such strong European expressions of solidarity with Israel have not been seen for decades, if at all. Governments critical of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories, such as Ireland and Belgium, have toned down their rhetoric. In the initial days of the Gaza campaign, the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union expressed great shock and solidarity with Israel, but also underscored the need for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He is also stressing the importance of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip and the need to avoiding harm to civilians. Along with support for Israel's right to defend itself, European officials have also been reiterating that the war must be conducted in accordance with the laws of international humanitarian law. This formula is similar to the line of the Biden Administration. In other words, Israel does not have a "blank check" for the war in Gaza. The more Israel succeeds in adhering to these warnings, the longer it can count on European support. And as long as European support remains strong, the US will find it easier to provide Israel with staunch backing.

Europe is not a monolithic whole. In broad brushstrokes, it is guided by two important interests. First, Israel is perceived as a "forward outpost" of the "West" or the free world in the face of the regional threats facing the Europeans from the Russia-Iran axis (and behind it, China). Israel has valued military, weaponry, and intelligence capabilities that are attractive to NATO member states (for example, intelligence on drones Russia bought from Iran that could reach neighboring NATO countries as well). The second European interest lies in the de-escalation of the conflict between Israel, Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran, among other things in order to stem another wave of refugee migration to Europe. These considerations oblige the Europeans to preserve Israel as an asset rather than turning it into a burden. Escalation would also stretch US capabilities, potentially diverting US attention from Ukraine, whereas Europe needs the US focus to remain on Ukraine.

Europe can back the Israeli government and army in the campaign against Hamas, or try to stop them. European backing is also important to the United States. Europe will demand, and is already granting, more humanitarian assistance to the UN organizations in the Gaza Strip. Rebuilding the Gaza Strip at some future point, will require an international effort both by Arab countries and Europe. Europe is the largest aid donor to the Palestinians, both in Gaza and the West Bank. Israel relies on this assistance to help maintain calm in the West Bank and cooperation on the part of the Palestinian Authority. Neither Europe nor the EU has direct leverage over Hamas on the hostage issue, having designated Hamas as a terrorist organization 20 years ago. Europe could exert indirect leverage on Hamas through its relationship with Qatar. It should be noted that many abductees being held by Hamas have European in addition to Israeli citizenship.

Many governments on the European continent have undergone a shift in recent years, from a critical approach to a more supportive attitude to Israel. Israel must strive to preserve the spirit of solidarity and support by Europe throughout the war. Israel is better able to maintain European government support than to maintain sympathetic European public opinion. Media

portrayal of the Palestinian refugee suffering in the Gaza Strip eclipse the horrific images from the Israeli communities near the Gaza border. If these fade, so will the reason for the war.

## **Perspective from the Gulf**

*Dr. Moran Zaga, Policy and Research Fellow, Mitvim*

Public opinion in the Gulf States remains firmly in support of the Palestinian cause. In the immediate aftermath of the events on October 7, Gulf media and social media platforms were flooded with shock and heart-wrenching stories of Israeli victims and the devastation wrought by Hamas. However, as time passed, public discourse shifted back to focus on the plight of Palestinian civilians, the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, and the looming threat of an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) ground incursion into Gaza, with its potential consequences. This narrative may bear similarities to previous instances of violence, sometimes understating the magnitude of the initial attack in this case.

The prevailing sentiment in Gulf public opinion links the upsurge in Palestinian anger and violence to Israeli policies in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Additionally, it attributes these tensions to provocations by government ministers and settlers, particularly at Al-Aqsa and in West Bank communities. Meaning that they see the October 7 attack as a response.

At the leadership level within the Gulf States, there are varying approaches. Bahrain staunchly opposes Hamas, while Qatar is regarded as its primary supporter. The UAE and Saudi Arabia have adopted a more balanced stance, expressing concerns about escalation "from both sides." As the ongoing conflict continues, the messages from regional leadership increasingly align with public sentiment, showing significant support for the Palestinian cause.

The leadership of the Gulf States has a pivotal role in regional stability. Besides their immediate financial support in the form of humanitarian aid, they are all actively engaged in Palestinian politics to varying degrees. The need for a long-term political framework that ensures stability and prospects for peace is evident. A centralized Palestinian government with both regional and local credibility is the path to a brighter future for Palestinians and the peace process. Internal changes within Israel will also be a crucial aspect, likely to take place post-conflict.

The conflict imposed upon Israel reflects a broader struggle that Gulf States have been navigating over the past decade: combating terrorism and extremism while fostering stability and tolerance. The Gulf States play a pivotal role in clearly defining this ideological and moral boundary and advocating for removing the Muslim Brotherhood, including Hamas and other terror organizations, from its destabilizing influence. This collective effort has the potential to significantly shape the path towards regional stability and peace.



## **A Turkish Perspective**

*Dr. Nimrod Goren, President of Mitvim and Senior Fellow for Israeli Affairs at the Middle East Institute*

The Gaza Strip is important to Turkey, especially during the 20-year tenure of Erdoğan. Throughout this period, crises between Israel and Turkey have mostly stemmed from tensions over Jerusalem or Gaza. Events in and around the Gaza Strip have had a significant impact on the level of relations between the countries.

During previous rounds of fighting in Gaza, Turkey was limited in its ability to help advance ceasefires, despite its interest in playing such a diplomatic role. The tensions it had with Israel and its significantly close relations with Hamas disqualified it in Israel's eyes from carrying out any mediating role. The crisis in Turkey-Egypt relations disqualified Ankara also in Cairo's eyes.

The current war finds Turkey in a different situation – relations with Israel have been restored, including a meeting between the leaders last month in New York, and tensions with Egypt have also been resolved. Ostensibly, the conditions are now ripe for Turkey to play a more central role in addressing the humanitarian and diplomatic aspects of the Israel-Hamas war and in upcoming international efforts to plan the future of the Gaza Strip.

Shortly after hostilities broke, Turkey expressed a desire to help solve the hostage crisis, but as the Israeli attack on Hamas intensifies and the extent of the damage in the Gaza Strip increases, Erdoğan has been adopting an increasingly harsh tone on Israel.

This situation could lead to yet another crisis in Israel-Turkey relations and to a possible downgrade of ties, as was the case during previous rounds of escalation in Gaza. But, it is in the interest of both countries to avoid such an outcome, contain the crisis, and identify a concrete aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian issue to which Turkey could genuinely contribute.

The recent visit to Cairo by Turkey's foreign minister Fidan, a close associate of Erdoğan, indicates an attempt by Egypt and Turkey to somewhat coordinate moves. This is already evident in the transfer of humanitarian aid from Turkey to Egypt, via the al Arish airport and with the destination being the Gaza Strip.

Policy planning towards the day after the war, should include a trilateral Israeli-Turkish-Egyptian dialogue. Recent bilateral rapprochements enable such engagement, which was not possible over the previous decade and which can generate fresh ideas for cooperation and stability. This can only happen, though, if Israel-Turkey relations survive this phase of Israel-Hamas warfare, and this depends greatly on the choices that Erdoğan will make.

## **The Hellenic Alliance perspective**

*Former Ambassador Michael Harari, Policy Fellow, Mitvim*

Greece and Cyprus have stood firmly alongside Israel since Oct. 7. The two leaders, Prime Minister Mitsotakis and President Christodoulides, spoke immediately with Netanyahu and strongly condemned the murderous attack by Hamas. There is also broad public support for Israel, the result of closer relations between the three countries in recent years. The Greek Parliament lit up its building with the Israeli flag. At the same time, the Israeli bombing, the extent of casualties and damage, and especially the humanitarian crisis developing in the Gaza Strip, are increasing concern in both countries. Mitsotakis has emphasized right from the start the importance of preserving the lives of civilians in Gaza. At the same time, steps have been taken in Greece and Cyprus to deal with waves of refugees that may develop as a result of the deepening crisis.

The strategic alliance among the three countries, backed by close cooperation with the United States, is robust. The rapid and impressive American response to Oct. 7 illustrates the strategic change that has taken place in the Eastern Mediterranean in general, and in the Israeli-Greek-Cypriot triangle in particular. For Greece and Cyprus, this is of enormous importance vis-à-vis Ankara.

At the same time, it is important to remember:

- Athens seeks to advance the thaw vis-à-vis Ankara, a policy adopted over the past year and has been implemented even more intensely in recent weeks. While they are under no illusions about Erdogan, Greece (and Turkey) remains interested in continuing the talks, and perhaps even in achieving progress. Cyprus is monitoring the situation, perhaps with some (discreet) concern, but it, too, realizes the importance of stability in the region for its interests.
- The deepening crisis in the Gaza Strip and the danger of the war spreading to Lebanon are of great concern to both countries, both in terms of potentially large waves of refugees, and of the significant strategic and economic implications of a regional war.
- A humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip will require both countries, especially Greece, to urge both sides, in other words Israel, to do all in its power to prevent a broader deterioration. Both countries are mindful of Egypt's position, and the concerns over domestic instability there, certainly in view of the severe economic crisis in which it is mired. It is also not yet clear how the reduction in gas exports from Israel to Egypt will be affected by the shutdown of the Tamar reservoir.
- The domestic arena in both countries has undergone a dramatic change in Israel's favor in recent years. However, there remains basic sympathy for the Palestinian side. In Cyprus, this sympathy relies on the main opposition party, the Communist Party, and in Greece on widespread public opinion, which has traditionally and for

years been characterized by anti-American and pro-Arab sentiments. These will become more pronounced as the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip deepens, and if the situation in the West Bank deteriorates.

Ultimately, the tripartite alliance is strong, and the three countries are united in their strategic interest to maintain it. As mentioned, the American angle is of enormous importance. Continued fighting will sharpen inherent sensitivities in the domestic arena, oblige the two governments in Athens and Nicosia to balance their declarations and to convey appropriate messages to Israel in private, but it will not undermine the close relationship with Israel.

## **A Moroccan Perspective**

*Einat Levi, Policy Fellow, Mitvim*

As Morocco grapples with the aftermath of a recent devastating earthquake, the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas casts a shadow over the nation's priorities. In this challenging context, Morocco's primary objectives are centered around preserving domestic stability and thwarting the potential for unrest and radicalization. The restoration of peace and stability is imperative not only for addressing earthquake-related damage but also for kickstarting economic development.

However, Morocco faces domestic forces seeking to exploit the Israel-Hamas conflict for their own political gain. These include boycott movements and the Islamic PJD party, which, after losing power in the last elections, aims to bolster its influence by aligning with the Palestinian cause. Furthermore, there's concern that Iran may be attempting to influence Moroccan events by supporting social and political movements that run counter to Morocco's interests.

Morocco's second core interest is to maintain broad alliances within the international and regional community. This task necessitates diplomatic finesse, given the challenge of maintaining official ties both with Israel and the Palestinians. Notably, Prime Minister Netanyahu's planned visit to Morocco and the upcoming "Negev Summit" may be postponed due to the current conflict.

In general, Morocco aims to uphold a policy of "constructive neutrality." It strives to refrain from taking a firm stance while maintaining open lines of communication with all parties involved. However, the nation may be compelled to clarify its position regarding Hamas, given the group's tarnished image and the U.S.'s designation of Hamas as a terrorist organization operating with Iranian backing and utilizing methods associated with ISIS.

Many Moroccans view the Israel-Hamas war as part of the broader struggle for the Palestinian people and Islam, with the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem being prominent symbols in this discourse. Numerous demonstrations have taken place throughout Morocco since the conflict's outset, some attracting hundreds of thousands of supporters. It's important to note that Moroccan public discourse is largely influenced by social networks and Qatar-based Al-Jazeera, limiting exposure to the Israeli perspective or the harsh realities of life in communities near the Gaza Strip.

In contrast, the official Moroccan stance has been predominantly neutral and cautious. The Moroccan Foreign Ministry issued a statement on October 7 expressing deep concern about

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the situation's deterioration and the outbreak of fighting in the Gaza Strip. The statement condemned harm to civilians on both sides and called for an immediate cessation of violence, emphasizing support for dialogue and negotiations as the sole path to achieving a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue. The next day, King Mohammed VI initiated an emergency meeting of the Arab League at the level of foreign ministers, which convened in Cairo on October 11.

On October 14, a peace rally, organized by a Moroccan human rights organization in front of the parliament in Rabat, garnered significant attention and widespread media coverage both domestically and internationally. The protesters displayed the flags of both Israel and Palestine, advocating for an end to the war and the establishment of peace. There were also displays of solidarity as Moroccan citizens mobilized to aid the families of those injured in Israel, as a token of appreciation for Israeli civilian aid organizations' support following the earthquake.

Morocco's unique political, identity, and geographical attributes position it to play a facilitating and supportive role in resolving the current situation. Morocco's foreign policy, which seeks to be a neutral actor contributing to regional stability, coupled with the positive regard it enjoys from both Palestinians and Israelis, offers an opportunity for mediation. While Morocco may not provide financial or security guarantees, it can serve as a neutral venue for talks and an honest broker for communication between the parties.

Given the religious dimension of the current conflict, notably Hamas's accusations that Israel seeks to control Al-Aqsa and Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, Morocco holds significant symbolic weight. This is due to its role as the chair of the Jerusalem Committee under the Organization of Islamic States and King Mohammed VI's status as "Emir of Al-Ma'minin," a leader for believers of various faiths, including Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

The ongoing conflict is also a litmus test for the close friendship that has developed between Israel and Morocco since the resumption of official relations. Moroccan support carries great symbolic value for the Israeli public, particularly for Israelis of Moroccan descent and the Jewish community residing in Morocco.