



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 11th 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.

11th week of the war

A Regional Perspective

Dr. Roei Kibrik, Director of Research, Mitvim

Israel came under growing international pressure, primarily from the United States and Europe, to allow increased humanitarian aid into Gaza and minimize civilian casualties there. The pressure was reflected, inter alia, in a Security Council resolution (12.12) calling for expanded humanitarian aid into Gaza. The language of the resolution, as well as of other statements by western allies, which called for increased humanitarian aid and humanitarian fighting lulls rather than an immediate ceasefire gave Israel a de facto green light to keep fighting Hamas under these conditions.

While Israel responded to these pressures, in part, it maintained its adamant refusal to present long-term postwar plans, repeatedly rejecting ideas presented by international community and countries of the region. On the record, Israeli officials would only say that Israel would retain security control in Gaza once the fighting ends, without assuming responsibility for the enclave's civilian affairs.

Seeking a more dominant role in administrating the situation of the Gaza Strip, Egypt presented its own outline for ending the war and shaping the day after. Its role in promoting a hostage exchange has also grown compared to the previously Qatar's exclusive dominance. In this context, it is important to note that Israeli and Egyptian officials have avoided public communications, and Netanyahu and a-Sisi have not spoken since the start of the war.

Various countries broached the idea of convening a regional or international peace conference to promote a Gaza ceasefire and outline a postwar future for the enclave, but this proposal has not been formulated into a concrete plan as yet.

The fighting between Israel and Hezbollah continued according to the unwritten rules of the game, with both seeking to inflict maximum damage to the other without being dragged into an all-out war. With the fighting in Gaza expected to shift to lower gear, more attention will be directed to Israel's northern border. In the meantime, Israel is monitoring the diplomatic efforts by France and the United States to implement UN Resolution 1701 that would distance Hezbollah from the Israeli border to the Litani River.

The Houthi attacks in the southern Red Sea, launched in the context of the war in Gaza, have turned into a connected-yet-separate arena of keen international interest. The United States put together multinational coalition to address this threat to international shipping lanes, which also affects Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Horn of Africa countries. In the meantime, Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, each for its own reasons, have refrained from assuming a dominant role in the anti-Houthi campaign.

A US Perspective

Nadav Tamir, J Street, Mitvim Board Member

President Biden maintained staunch public support for Israel, while his administration pushed for a rapid transition from a "high-intensity" to a "low-intensity" conflict in Gaza in order to lessen harm to civilians and ease international criticism of the US. Biden underscored his commitment to Israel and to the generous supply of US military aid, while his top aides explained to Israeli decision-makers the need to scale down the scope and duration of the war. The messages were conveyed during an unprecedented flurry of visits to Israel by senior American officials – the secretaries of state and defense, CIA director and national security adviser. The US believes the current course of the war has exhausted itself, but Biden is not seeking a public confrontation with Israel. He is unlikely to exert public pressure on Israel in the coming weeks or issue unequivocal demands for changes in the war, but the US could exert certain military and political pressure to advance its goals.

UN Security Council negotiations on a proposed Emirati resolution calling for a Gaza ceasefire reflected the challenges to US foreign policy stemming from its ironclad support of Israel. US diplomacy resulted in a softened resolution calling for increased humanitarian assistance to Gaza and "urgent steps to create sustainable conditions for the cessation of hostilities." The resolution also called for the "release of all hostages, as well as ensuring humanitarian access to address medical needs of all hostages". The United States agreed to go along with the resolution after several changes that Israel regarded as achievements: the language did not include a call for a Israel-Hamas ceasefire, stipulated that humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip be restricted to the civilian population, and called for a mechanism to monitor the aid (meaning that Israel should be included in the monitoring). Thirteen of the 15 council members voted in favor and two abstained – the United States because the resolution failed to include condemnation of Hamas, and Russia because it failed to call for a ceasefire. Shortly before the vote, the United States vetoed a Russian proposal to change the resolution's wording in order to call for an "urgent cessation of hostilities."

The United States announced the formation of a coalition to preserve freedom of movement in the Red Sea but encountered difficulties in recruiting Arab participants other than Bahrain. In confronting the Houthis, the US is constrained by the prolonged Saudi-Houthi negotiations on a settlement of the civil war in Yemen.

The United States accused Iran of deep involvement in planning the operations against commercial shipping, claiming that Iranian intelligence allowed the Houthis in Yemen to carry them out. The US Central Command continued to intercept missiles and UAVs launched by the Houthis.

Meanwhile, US envoy Amos Hochstein continued his efforts to put together a deal for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 in exchange for a compromise with Hezbollah (apparently over control of the Shebaa Farms on the Israel-Lebanon border).

A European Perspective

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

Meetings of the EU's 27 foreign ministers at the [Foreign Affairs Council](#) (11.12) and of the Heads of State at the European Council (14-15.12) did not lead to the adoption of new decisions despite [a letter from the](#) prime ministers of Spain, Belgium, Ireland and Malta to Charles Michel, the European Council President (9.12), calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and for a peace conference. This ostensibly means that the EU's position on the Gaza war remains unchanged since Oct. 27 when it called for "humanitarian pauses" in the fighting.

However, the EU votes on UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions reflected internal EU dissent, **to Israel's detriment**. A Security Council resolution (12.12) calling for a ceasefire in Gaza was only rejected due to a US veto. The UK was the only country to abstain. France and 12 others voted in favor.

In a UN General Assembly vote (12.12), the 27 member states of the European Union split into three camps. The vast majority, 17, voted in favor of calling for a ceasefire (nine more than the previous UNGA vote on 27.10), including France, Spain and Poland, while eight abstained (seven more than in the previous vote), including Germany and Italy. Only two opposed the resolution, Austria and the Czech Republic, compared to four in the October vote.

[Writing jointly](#) in The Times (17.12), **British and German foreign ministers** David Cameron and Annalina Baerbock called for a "sustainable ceasefire", a new term devoid of new ideas. While expressing a desire to bring the Gaza war to an end in such a way that would enable lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace, they also noted that such an outcome would require the military collapse of Hamas. In other words, the two foresee continued fighting, and therefore only urged humanitarian pauses. The fact that France's foreign minister was not a signatory to the article, and the UK is no longer an EU member, reflects the differing European attitudes vis-à-vis the Gaza war.

Gaps regarding the stand on the war in Gaza can also be found within **France** between the president and foreign ministry. However, France is working with Lebanese groups and officials on a plan that would push Hezbollah out of southern Lebanon to the Litani River in accordance with UN Resolution 1701. France also convened representatives from some 20 Western countries to discuss an international economic crackdown on Hamas by identifying its funding sources and shutting them down.

European countries are also mobilizing alongside the United States to confront the accelerating Houthi attacks and their growing threat to international freedom of navigation.

EU foreign minister Josep Borrell condemned the Israeli government's adoption of a budget **that includes funding for settlements**, which are illegal under international law. He also condemned **extremist settlers** for carrying out violent attacks against Palestinians, and **recommended that member states take measures against them**, such as banning their entry.

An examination of EU funding to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Palestinians did not find that this money was diverted to terrorist groups or used for incitement to terrorism and anti-Semitism, despite several warnings about misuse of the funds. It was therefore decided that the funding would continue. In addition, the European Commission decided (22.12) to transfer €118.4 million in emergency payments to the PA to cover the shortfall created by Israel's government, under the pressure of Finance Minister Smotrich, who refused to transfer Palestinian tax money of the Gaza Strip. The money is intended for the salaries and pensions of PA employees in the Gaza Strip. The funds (which are not paid to Hamas) allow the EU to maintain its role as a payer, without setting conditions that would turn it into a significant player (unlike the UAE, for example, which conditioned funding for Gaza's rehabilitation on a political horizon for the Palestinians).

A Jordanian Perspective

Prof. Ronen Yitzhak, Western Galilee Academic Colleg

Marking the annual UN Human Rights Day, Queen Rania published a post (10.12) about "the denial of human rights to Palestinians" in Gaza. She argued that human rights cannot be applied selectively and must be enjoyed to their fullest by Palestinians just as Jews and other peoples do.

Three days later, at the World Refugee Forum in Geneva, King Abdullah spoke about the 1.9 million Palestinian refugees in Gaza forced to flee their homes amid the war with Israel, accusing the international community of failing to help them. Jordan, Abdullah said, is the only country that has consistently helped Palestinian refugees since 1948. Today, about four million refugees (Palestinians, Syrians, Iraqis, Egyptians and others) live in Jordan, constituting about a third of its population, he said. To enable them to enjoy well-being, adequate education and advanced services, Abdullah demanded increased aid to humanitarian organizations operating in Jordan and the Palestinian territories.

Jordanian Information Minister Muhannad Al-Mubaidin declared that Jordan had, in fact, also taken the lead in international humanitarian aid to Gaza. For the first time since the beginning of the war, Jordan sent (20.12) aid by land to the Gaza Strip through Israel. The aid, organized by the Hashemite Charity and the World Food Program, consisted of 750 tons of food. The 46 Jordanian trucks arrived in the Gaza Strip after making their way from the Allenby Bridge through Nitzana to the Kerem Shalom crossing.

Jordanian aid airlifts to Gaza also continued, with Air Force planes delivering emergency medical supplies to the Jordanian Hospital in Khan Yunis (14.12 and 20.12). According to Jordanian media, King Abdullah's daughter Princess Salma, Jordan's first female military

pilot, participated in the Dec. 14 airlift. The media praised Jordan's role in "breaking the siege on Gaza". Since the hospital was opened in Khan Yunis on Nov. 29, it has treated over 10,000 Palestinians and performed some 2,000 surgeries.

Jordanian leaders also continued their diplomatic efforts to end the war, while accusing Israel of committing war crimes against the Palestinian people in Gaza. In an interview (11.12) on the sidelines of the Doha Forum, Jordan's prime minister urged an end to "the immunity given to Israel from applying the rules of international law." About a week later (19.12), Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Al-Safadi met in Amman with a European Parliament delegation and accused the international community of failing to impose a ceasefire on Israel and thus allowing it to violate international law. Al-Safadi also accused Israel of weakening the Palestinian Authority and committing war crimes.

King Abdullah met with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez (12.12), British Foreign Secretary David Cameron (20.12) and French President Emmanuel Macron (21.12), stressing the need for an immediate end to the war and humanitarian aid. Unlike his prime minister and other top officials, the monarch did not accuse Israel of war crimes, instead highlighting the need to restore security, peace and stability to the region.

Public opinion in Jordan continued to attack Israel. In addition to the routine demonstrations in Amman and elsewhere in Jordan, a strike was held (11.12) in solidarity with the Palestinian cause, with dozens of businesses closing their doors to customers. The strike in Jordan was part of a regional Arab strike announced a few days earlier in solidarity with the Palestinians, which included all UNRWA facilities in the West Bank, Syria and Lebanon. About a week after the strike, Jordanian radio stations consolidated their broadcasts (18.12) to collect donations so that 250-300 cancer patients from Gaza could receive treatment at the Amman Cancer Center.

Rumors that following the Houthi threat to close the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, dozens of trucks were making their way to the port of Haifa via Saudi Arabia and Jordan generated angry reactions on the Jordanian street. Prime Minister Khasawneh denied that Jordan was providing a land bridge for goods to Israel, claiming that "the transportation arrangements passing through Jordan have not changed over the years." However, following the closure of Syrian ports to Jordanian exports during the Arab Spring, Jordan transferred exports to Europe through Haifa on hundreds of Jordanian trucks.

The Jordanian interception (21.12) of a UAV launched from Iraq at Eilat also sparked public anger. Arab media, including Jordan's, condemned the action and accused Jordan of collaborating with Israel in defending it "from an attack aimed at supporting Gaza."

A Red Sea Perspective

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Houthi attacks against Red Sea shipping have escalated since Dec. 9, when the group threatened to prevent the passage of any vessel en route to Israel, whether wholly or partially Israeli owned. Starting on Oct. 17, the Houthis attacked 15 merchant ships and tankers, most of which were not Israeli-owned. They also launched drones at American warships and a French frigate patrolling the Red Sea, which were intercepted.

Responding to this escalation, the major shipping companies -- including Maersk, BP, Hapag Lloyd, CMA CGM, MSC, Euronav, Equinor, Frontline, HMM, Yang Ming Marine Transport – diverted their ships from the Red Sea to the waters around Africa via the Cape of Good Hope. Several shipping companies, such as Chinese goods carrier OOCL, Evergreen Line and Singaporean shipping company One, announced that they would stop transporting goods to and from Israel, working with Israel or receiving Israeli cargo. The move resulted in an 85% plunge in Eilat Port revenues within a month and in rate hikes by ZIM and other companies for shipping containers from the Far East to Israel.

The shipping suspension poses a dire threat to the Egyptian economy, whose monthly revenues from transit fees through the Suez Canal amount to NIS 3 billion. Jordan, whose port of Aqaba is its only outlet to the sea, is also highly dependent on Red Sea maritime traffic. Shutting down ship traffic in the Red Sea would amount to a total naval blockade and force it to depend on imports through Israeli ports. Sudan, Eritrea and the Houthi-controlled territory of Yemen are also at great risk being completely dependent on Red Sea traffic.

Israel has a partial solution to the problem in the form of a new truck transport line from the Dubai and Bahrain ports to Israel via Saudi Arabia and Jordan, which was launched just before the war. The transportation is managed by Israeli transport company Trucknet, which announced in early December that it had signed an agreement with UAE-based logistics company Puretrans FZCO and Emirati port management company DP World to transport cargo from the Persian Gulf to Haifa Port and back. The overland journey from Dubai takes four days, compared with 14 days by sea, and from Bahrain two days and seven hours.

The United States, for its part, launched (18.12) a multinational coalition to confront the challenges in the southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden and moved the US aircraft carrier Eisenhower from the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Aden. The newly formed coalition is based on Joint Task Force 153, which is charged with combating piracy in these waters. The task force from 39 countries was established in 2022 and subordinated to the US Fifth Fleet. US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced that the new coalition would include Bahrain, Britain, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and other countries, which preferred anonymity. Arab states are conspicuous by their absence, with Egypt announcing that it would not join a military alliance against the Houthis, and Saudi Arabia reluctant to undermine negotiations it is conducting with the Houthis on a settlement in Yemen.

On Dec. 22, the Wall Street Journal reported that an Iranian surveillance ship deployed in the Red Sea was transmitting real-time intelligence to the Houthis, enabling them to attack merchant ships. White House National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson said Iran was "deeply involved in planning Houthi operations in the Red Sea" and that "Iran's intelligence is critical to the Houthis being able to attack ships in the Red Sea."

Responding to the launch of the coalition and US accusations of Iranian involvement in Red Sea attacks, the Houthis claimed they had rejected an American proposal that they cease their attacks on Red Sea shipping in return for US non-interference in their efforts to achieve a peace agreement with the Saudis. They also threatened to attack US ships and their interests if the US attacked Yemen, and warned other countries not to intervene. The Houthis rejected reports of their reliance on Iranian intelligence, saying they had good intelligence capabilities of their own.

At the same time, Iran launched a direct attack on shipping in the Indian Ocean. The Pentagon announced (23.12) that a drone launched from Iran hit the partly Israeli-owned merchant ship Chem Pluto off the coast of India, causing extensive damage but no casualties. This was the first time the United States had accused Iran of attacking vessels from its territory. A senior IRGC official warned in response that continued Israeli and US aggression would lead to the closure of additional sea lanes, possibly alluding to the Mediterranean. Iranian Defense Minister Ashtiyani previously (14.12) warned that forming a US-led coalition to protect Red Sea shipping was an illogical step, claiming that no country could operate in the Red Sea, which is under its influence.

In addition to the Houthi threat, Somali pirates resumed operations in the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean, and off the coast of Somalia, hijacking two merchant ships and a Yemeni fishing boat.

A Hellenic Alliance Perspective

Former Ambassador Michael Harari, Policy Fellow, Mitvim

Greek and Cypriot political activity and public rhetoric vis-à-vis the Gaza war focused on the humanitarian level, and in concrete terms on a Cypriot proposal to establish a maritime corridor for aid transfers from Larnaca to the Gaza Strip. In this context, Foreign Minister Cohen visited Cyprus (20.12), met with his Cypriot counterpart, and even visited the Larnaca port and the city's search and rescue situation room. Cohen expressed support for the Cypriot proposal and stressed the need to ensure proper supervision of the shipments. The Cypriot foreign minister said his government was "waiting for a green light from Israel."

The Greek foreign minister spoke extensively about the war in Gaza in a speech (20.12) to the Hellenic Society for Law and International Relations. He again condemned the massacre carried out by Hamas on October 7, insisted on Israel's right to defend itself, but devoted most of his remarks to the humanitarian crisis and the obligation to adhere to the rules of international law. He refrained from directly criticizing Israel, and even called it "our strategic partner," while stressing the need to strengthen the Palestinian Authority as "the only legitimate dialogue partner for the next stages of resolving the conflict in the Middle East." He also expressed support for an immediate international conference dealing not only with immediate humanitarian issues, but launching talks on a sustainable solution in the region.

The growing Greek and Cypriot emphasis on the need to address Gaza's humanitarian crisis and the central role of the Palestinian Authority in the immediate term and down the road is clearly evident.

A Moroccan Perspective

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Israel and Morocco mark three years this week since renewing their relations, but the war between Israel and Hamas leaves no room for celebrations. For the time being, bilateral

cooperation on the governmental level is limited and low profile, focusing mainly on security matters. Despite high expectations from the numerous visits by Israeli ministers and officials to Morocco these visits have not led to substantial cooperation beyond statements and memoranda of understanding. The lack of focus and the inability to materialize the dozens of signed agreements is evident these days, emphasizing what has not yet been implemented. For instance, an agreement for employing Moroccan migrant workers in Israel has not been signed yet, despite the statement made by the former Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked in July 2022. The economic infrastructure for doing business between the countries has not been completed as well, including agreements such as a customs, double taxation avoidance, promotion and protection of investments, and other agreements that would enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of the trade channel between Morocco and Israel.

Moroccan decision makers, for their part, appear to regard the ongoing war with Hamas, and no less so the current Israeli government, as detrimental to the resumption of relations between the countries to its positive course. Statements by senior Israeli officials calling for the destruction of Gaza, while vehemently opposing the establishment of a Palestinian state, echo in the Moroccan media, damage Israel's image, and mainly serve opposition parties who wish to harm the special relations between the two countries. Nevertheless, Morocco's official position regarding relations with Israel as a strategic interest remains intact. This was evidenced in the results of the extraordinary Arab Islamic Conference held in Riyadh last November, in which Morocco alongside other key Arab and Islamic countries were reluctant to embracing actual decisions or actions against their relations with Israel. Morocco's decision to keep the Moroccan ambassador in Tel Aviv, despite the fact that the Israeli mission staff was evacuated from Rabat, is a significant statement in itself.

In the economic field, businesses more or less continue as usual. Israeli companies come to Morocco or meet their partners in third destinations such as France and Spain. This arrangement seems convenient for everyone, saving Israelis the flight to Morocco with its associated costs, and allowing the Moroccans relative discretion in their meetings with Israelis. However, the bilateral spaces for doing business have diminished, making economic connections more challenging, given Israeli concerns visiting Morocco and decreasing readiness to include Israeli speakers in conferences or set up pavilions for Israeli companies at exhibitions in Morocco.

Tourism is the most affected sector, with direct flights still on hold, and a travel warning in effect with a rating of three out of four, advising Israelis to avoid non-essential travel to this destination. As a result, Israeli tourism to Morocco, including Jewish tourism from around the world, has almost stopped entirely. Those who mainly pay the price are Israeli tourism agencies and Moroccan hotels and service providers that relied on the Israeli and Jewish market segments.

While tourism is a key to people-to-people connections, most civil and cultural partnerships are currently on hold and in a "waiting" situation until the end of the war. Despite the challenges, some joint initiatives can be preserved, finding creative ways to sustain them, such as transferring them from a bilateral framework to a multi-sided one under an American, European, Emirati or other umbrella, or conducting activities online whenever possible.

One of the main challenges in the civil context is the sentiment among Israelis of Moroccan descent regarding Morocco. It ranges from disappointment to astonishment and

a lack of understanding in light of images of mass protests from Rabat and other cities in Morocco and even anti-Semitic incidents that do not receive official condemnation from Morocco. Here, it should be noted that Israeli frustration is partly due to cultural and behavioral differences between Israel and Morocco, despite their close cultural connection.

In the Moroccan perspective, including that of decision-makers in Morocco, it is preferable to avoid conflicts, make explicit statements, and deal with matters quietly behind the scenes. In their view, the secrecy of action is a key to success, preserving internal stability and advancing a wishful agenda. Because, according to their understanding, one cannot resist what one does not see or know, so ultimately, maintaining quiet preserves the status quo as if nothing has been done. In Morocco, non-action is considered, in practice, equivalent to any action, and perhaps even the most proper and challenging action to execute.

Three years after the resumption of official ties and in the shadow of the Gaza war challenges, the crisis also provides a new opportunity for regional and bilateral cooperation between Israel and Morocco. Morocco's relatively neutral position may in fact enable it to play an important role in the aftermath of the war as part of a broader coalition dedicated to rehabilitation and reconstruction processes. Morocco could help in the reconstruction and in implementing local and regional programs to deal with and prevent extremism and violence. It can assist the training of Palestinian public employees deployed in Gaza. Morocco could also host forums, meetings and conferences to support and promote a sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The good relations that Morocco maintains with both sides—Israeli and Palestinian—and the religious authority of HM King Mohammed VI, including his role as the chairman of the Jerusalem Committee in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, are just some of the assets Morocco can bring to this complex task. The connection with Morocco is a significant asset for Israel in times of peace and war alike. It is important that we learn from and derive insights from the past three years towards the new chapter in relations that will unfold after the war will be over.