

Regional Conference on the Infrastructural- Environmental Rehabilitation of the Gaza Area

Simulation Summary¹ Bar Rapaport*

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The prolonged Israel-Hamas war has resulted in grave human and physical damage to the Gaza Strip. The Mitvim Institute has been engaged since the start of the war in strategic thinking to promote Israeli policy beneficial to its security, the Gaza Strip, and the region. This has resulted in the formulation of a "humanitarian strategy" to serve as the basis for future reconstruction and rehabilitation processes of the Gaza Strip. To further this strategy, Mitvim conducted an exercise simulating a regional conference on the rehabilitation on Gaza's infrastructure and environment to learn about the Israeli preparedness required for reconstruction, the processes that can be advanced through a regional political framework, and the challenges and opportunities inherent in them. The simulation illustrated the gap between current Israeli policy and one that would enable Israel to make the most of a regional rehabilitation conference and highlighted the need for new paradigms of thinking. The discussions emphasized the importance of addressing the different time frames in the rehabilitation process, and of linking the humanitarian act to the rehabilitation process. It also illustrated the tension between detachment and independence and dependence and connectivity in thinking about the region's future, underscoring the vital need to immediately initiate the planning of professional alternatives for the Gaza Strip's infrastructure and environmental rehabilitation.

A. Introduction

At the time of this writing, the war in Gaza appears endless, as does the deep sadness it engenders. However, the war will end one day, heralding a process of reconstruction and rebuilding. The process must begin even while fighting continues since it can and should form part of the mechanism for ending the war, serve efforts to build a sustainable reality, and help advance the political processes necessary to establish peace and security. Planning and preparing current and future moves are crucial to linking humanitarian and

¹ This document sums up a simulation exercise conducted by the Mitvim Institute in June 2024. The document does not present the participants' views, but rather the insights we gleaned from the simulation. We thank the participants and hope these insights serve the shaping of Israeli and international policy.

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future reconstruction efforts with political moves, thereby helping to shape them and being ready to carry them out.² With this in mind, Mitvim convened a simulated regional conference in early June 2024 to discuss the infrastructural and environmental rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip.

The simulation, held in Tel Aviv, brought together professional teams from various government ministries, and civil society organizations, and experts on foreign policy and the countries of the region. Its purpose was to train the participants and prepare them for rehabilitation processes in the Gaza region, in general, and in the Gaza Strip in particular, so that they could represent Israel in a multinational regional conference after the war. The simulation also sought to identify the challenges and opportunities inherent both in the political process and in the reconstruction efforts.

The simulation was based on the assumption of ceasefire agreements ending the war and a decision to begin the process of rebuilding the Gaza Strip with regional support. The exercise simulated a sub-conference on the environmental and infrastructure rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip as part of a broader Middle East peace conference on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The proceedings took place in the shadow of the ongoing war and the expected political opposition in Israel to the proposed measures, but participants were nonetheless asked to assume Israeli political willingness to take part in a regional process. The actors' emotional involvement and their engagement with such present and fundamental issues challenged their ability to assume their assigned roles in the simulation's multi-optional scenarios.

The conference set out two goals: (1) creating a political-professional mechanism to lead and integrate the rehabilitation of the region, with the planning and design of the mechanism to be carried out by the participating countries; and (2) presenting urgent and important infrastructure and environmental projects required in the medium and long term, and finding the relevant political partners to carry them out.

B. The course of the simulation

The structure

To prepare for the simulation, participants were asked to hone the goals they wished to achieve through the exercise. Israeli actors, both from the professional and political echelons, were asked to coordinate internal Israeli positions. The participants were divided into three working groups: a political group whose purpose was to discuss and decide on the design of the political-professional mechanism for the rehabilitation process, and two professional groups that were asked to propose critical or significant projects for the

² Einav Levy (July 2024), [Humanitarian Strategy in the Israel-Hamas War](#). Mitvim Institute.

rehabilitation process. One professional group dealt with critical water and energy infrastructure, and the other with health, the environment, and residential spaces. Each group briefly presented its key insights following this phase of the simulation. Participants were then given time for free discussions to examine the interest of state actors in the projects suggested by the professional teams. This was followed by two roundtables between coalitions of countries and professional representatives, which were asked to present two selected projects. The final stage was a discussion designed to compile the participants' insights.

The stages and key issues

Preparatory meeting of the Israeli teams: The Israeli political, professional, and civil society representatives met initially to formulate their goals and professional boundaries. Their discussions yielded several working assumptions: (1) Gaza and Israel are linked by *asymmetrical dependencies*; Gaza depends on Israel for almost every aspect of life (water, electricity, aid, and food), and Israel's environment and health are affected by the situation in Gaza. (2) The State of *Israel has an interest in being involved in* the rehabilitation, but not in leading it. (3) *The rehabilitation process is lengthy* and requires planning, while at the same time, *immediate essential services are urgently needed*. (4) Hamas and its ideological supporters will remain in Gaza in one form or another *and are expected to mount political opposition* (although the simulation scenario assumes the departure of the organization's leadership from the Gaza Strip). The Israeli representatives also stressed the importance of ensuring Israeli security, destroying Gaza's terrorist infrastructure before reconstruction, the gradual construction of civilian management and coordination mechanisms, and the need for international support. While expressing Israel's desire to disengage from Gaza and to free Gaza of its dependence on Israel, they also called for continued Israeli supervision of goods entering the enclave. Finally, they called for delinking discussion of the West Bank's future with that of Gaza, and conducting it only after Gaza's reconstruction has proven successful.

Key points of the political discussions: Representatives of the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, a local Gaza delegation, the European Union, Germany, and the United Nations convened to discuss the reconstruction mechanism and their roles in the reconstruction efforts. The discussions on the design of the integrating mechanism raised several fundamental issues: (1) The *relationship between the immediate humanitarian response and the long-term rehabilitation process* must be examined to determine how these mechanisms (humanitarian and reconstruction) are interrelated and complementary. (2) The United States, the countries of the region, and the Palestinian actors will assume that *the regional process must also serve the construction of a future Palestinian state*, hence the importance of relating to both areas together. (3) To conduct an informed political discussion, a *professional work plan* or various professional alternatives are required to serve as an anchor for the political discussion. (4) An international reconstruction effort should be based

on *principles of sustainability*, and the UN's SDGs³ should and can serve as its anchor. Ultimately, the participating countries, with their multiplicity of interests, were unable to formulate a proposal for an organizing mechanism, clearly pointing to the importance of superpower leadership to guide the organization and administration of political and professional processes.

Key points of the professional working tables: The professional teams were able to present concrete and tangible solutions, mainly because their point of reference was a real disaster affecting all of them rather than a simulated one. Some of the projects presented were more detailed, having been planned or executed in the past (for example, "Water for Energy,"⁴ planned over the years by EcoPeace, which underwent planning processes in government ministries and joint training for professional teams in the fields of health and water). Others were ideas that illustrated the need for mapping, planning, and feasibility studies to examine their potential impact (for example, treatment of construction waste based on a circular economy and removal and rehabilitation of land in preparation for rehabilitation processes). At the professional table dealing with critical infrastructure (water, energy, and sewage), much was said about the need for short-term solutions alongside long-term infrastructure solutions of regional dimensions. The projects included the introduction of off-grid systems,⁵ the construction of a large desalination plant in Gaza as well as alternatives of a desalination plant in Sinai or an "infrastructure island" ⁶ of the Gaza Strip, rehabilitation of the water and energy sectors, and capacity building of administrative and professional bodies. Participants of the professional table devoted to human health, the environment, and residential spaces discussed sustainable and independent communities on both sides of the border, mapping "waste" to create a blueprint for a circular economy, with an emphasis on recycling construction waste and reclamation for construction processes, cross-border environmental health monitoring and land rehabilitation. Both groups repeatedly wondered about Israel's role in projects taking place in Gaza and discussed which projects should be cross-border in nature.

³ The SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals – are 17 objectives set out by the UN in 2015 to serve as key milestones in countries and global development. They address social, environmental and economic issues such as access to energy, sustainable industry, maintaining life underwater, and more.

⁴ The "Water-for-Energy" or "Green-Blue Prosperity" project proposes that Israel desalinate water specifically for export to the Kingdom of Jordan, and Jordan produce renewable energy and transfer it directly to Israel. Two related memoranda of understanding were signed at regional climate conferences but the project is currently on hold due to the war.

⁵ Off-grid systems are able to operate independently without connecting to a central transmission infrastructure. They include solar panels, mobile wastewater treatment and desalination plants.

⁶ "Infrastructure Island" refers to creation of an artificial island off the Gaza coast for the construction of infrastructure, with an emphasis on water and energy.

C. Key insights

1. *Israel's role and policies*

The simulation was primarily designed to train Israeli teams in preparation for a regional Gaza rehabilitation conference. Even if such a conference does not materialize, Israel will have to deal with issues related to the Gaza Strip's reconstruction and clearly define its interests and positions on the reconstruction process.

Israel is torn between a desire to keep controlling Gaza and to disengage from it. The guiding principles formulated by the Israeli simulation participants reflected the clashing positions of Israel's military and defense agencies as of June 2024, chief among them a desire to disengage from Gaza and sever its dependence on Israel, alongside a desire for full control of events on the ground and of goods entering the enclave. These two desires are contradictory – one cannot maintain control while disconnecting; control must be fully or partly relinquished to disconnect.

Israel is trying to separate the inseparable. The Israeli position demonstrates an inclination toward a desire to deal with things gradually – first to destroy terrorist infrastructure, and then to deal with humanitarian aid; first to prove the rehabilitation of Gaza and then to talk about the West Bank – when in fact it is one intertwined discussion whose components cannot be severed.

Israeli disagreement with the other players. The simulation exposed a major gap between Israel's positions and those of the other participating countries. The gap reflected the current political-political reality (but was found difficult to bridge even under the simulation assumptions that the Hamas leadership had been expelled from Gaza and Israel had agreed to take part in a regional process). Israel feared Hamas's continued presence on the ground and did not believe moderate regional or Palestinian actors would be able or willing to control the territory. The Israeli representatives wanted regional partners in the reconstruction process but opposed regional projects or broad regional processes that create interdependence between Israelis and Palestinians under the auspices of other states. While the countries of the region and the Palestinian actors insisted on the introduction of Palestinian civilian rule and a political horizon for the Palestinians as basic conditions for any discourse on regional involvement in the Gaza Strip, Israel's representatives found it difficult to commit to such terms, certainly not directly.

Absence of clearly defined Israeli interests in various aspects of postwar rehabilitation and reconstruction. Israel's representatives were at ease discussing environmental monitoring or preventing sewage leaks into the sea, that is, cross-border environmental and health aspects, and defining the Israeli interest – for example, preventing pollution and monitoring diseases in Gaza and the region. The Israeli delegates were also

clear about their country's interest in infrastructure projects with the Palestinians as a means of easing Gaza's dependence on Israel, increasing its share of regional resources, and creating complementary resource exchanges such as the Israeli-Jordanian "water for energy" project. However, the Israelis stumbled in trying to formulate their country's interest in cross-border projects, such as rehabilitating nature and land in combat zones on both sides of the border. The Israelis agreed that cross-border rehabilitation would help mobilize international resources for reconstruction on the Israeli side, as well, promote international recognition of the damage inflicted on Israel by the war, and offer an opportunity to adopt new principles of sustainability and sustainable rehabilitation practices for Israeli spaces. However, they also noted that rehabilitation of the Israeli side independently of Gaza would be easier and faster and provide Israel with greater freedom. Discussion of Israel's interests in projects designed solely for the Gaza Strip generated even deeper disagreement among the Israeli delegates. For example, the professional environmental issues group was handed a mandate to discuss the planning of residential spaces, but refrained from doing so, arguing that it lacked the knowledge and tools to do so. The issue was resolved through a proposed planning project of neighborhoods or sustainable residential spaces on both sides of the border by similar principles and with the support of a third party. Designating it as a cross-border project also gives Israel a legitimate say in shaping its principles of operation. Another project that intuitively seems solely relevant to Gaza – the use of building demolition waste for reconstruction – also brought up many issues relevant to Israel, such as the entry of dual-use materials into Gaza, and the location of construction waste recycling plants. The project highlighted the dependence of both sides on each other even in projects designed solely for Gaza.

Israel has an interest in the Gaza Strip's rehabilitation and prosperity. Israel's fundamental interest lies in achieving stability and security, which can only be realized by increasing the resources available to Gaza and ensuring decent human life for its residents. On the other hand, chaos, destruction, and lack of resources – especially in the absence of hope or anything to lose – are fertile ground for terrorist forces harmful to Israeli interests.

The importance of an internal preliminary process to define Israel's role and actions in the reconstruction of Gaza and the region. The difficulties that emerged during the simulation in defining Israel's various interests, operating principles, and general role in the Gaza area's reconstruction and rehabilitation pointed to the need for preliminary discussion and agreement among the relevant Israeli actors regarding these issues.

The Israeli challenge of "weaning" it from control of Gaza. Israel has become accustomed to controlling the Gaza Strip and enjoying full freedom of action there for decades. To bolster prospects of a Palestinian state and allow the involvement of regional forces, Israel will have to "wean" itself psychologically, physically, and politically from its dependence on absolute control of Gaza and complete freedom of action there. This challenge is likely to be evident, for example, in Israel's continued control of materials brought into Gaza, which it regards as essential to its security. However, the cumbersome

border checks are likely to significantly hinder reconstruction efforts. Devising a mechanism to process and balance the risks versus the advantages of eased border controls is critical to rebuilding efforts. The solution may lie in the formation of an international coalition to address this challenge. While requiring Israel to relinquish control and place its trust in regional actors to protect its security interests, such a mechanism would also be more conducive to the rehabilitation process and, ultimately, contribute to a safer environment for Israel.

2. *Structural features of the rehabilitation process*

Immediate and long-term thinking and actions are intertwined and must be shaped according to the concept of sustainability. Rehabilitation and construction planning should be forward-looking. However, the population may have to rely on "temporary" solutions for several years, and therefore these ad hoc measures must be sustainable and independent of external aid. The sides must also realize that although temporary, these solutions shape current and future reality. Water supply is an important example in this context – a temporary solution of water distribution in the absence of operating water infrastructure will result in collateral damage by massive amounts of plastic and create permanent dependence on aid supply. At the same time, more sustainable action, such as installing a local desalination plant or a water pipeline to a distribution point, would likely shape the organization of housing in the area in the short to medium term, a result that must be taken into account.

Linking humanitarian and rehabilitation efforts at the mechanism level. Although the political table was tasked with addressing the rehabilitation mechanism, much of its discussions dealt with the humanitarian aid mechanism – demonstrating that these two mechanisms must not be delinked. The complex reality in Gaza requires gradual processing, both in providing initial responses and carrying out concurrent longer-term planning, and in devising a mechanism to include the humanitarian response. Namely, immediate assistance may need to be provided through one mechanism, followed by humanitarian assistance and long-term rehabilitation by another. At the same time, it would be wrong to sever the immediate act from the long-term one. These efforts can be differentiated, and their mechanisms can differ, but they must be fundamentally linked so that the immediate effort serves the longer time frames. What is more, all players must realize that these efforts will take a long time.

Conflicting dynamics must be recognized and addressed. Tensions emerged throughout the simulation between the desire to control Gaza and disconnect from it, between its deep dependence on Israel and others, and the promotion of Palestinian independence, and between Gaza's isolation and the advantages of its regional integration and connectivity. These attitudes and perceptions contradict each other to some extent, but also affect each other, making it incumbent on the actors to understand the tensions and

address them. Previous Mitvim Institute policy papers have pointed to these tensions.⁷ Most can be addressed by understanding that these perceptions are not necessarily contradictory and can be mutually inclusive both currently and in the future. For example, connectivity need not mean impaired control; rather it can foster effectiveness and security. Dependence does not necessarily impair independence; rather, the task is to build reciprocal dependency benefitting both sides rather than a one-way dependence.

Gaza's reconstruction is a regional and international task. The simulation of regional involvement in the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip drew on the assumption that such involvement is part of a package deal that includes both rehabilitation and regional guarantees and support. However, rehabilitation will not occur unless Israel signals its willingness (even if reluctant) for a broad political process, prompting the question of whether Gaza's reconstruction is feasible without Israeli consent. Given that Israel currently controls all movement of goods and people into and from the enclave, many aspects of Gaza's rehabilitation will not be possible unless it supports the task.

The multiplicity of Palestinian voices. Two types of Palestinian actors took part in the simulation's political discussions. One represented a local Gaza rehabilitation committee, composed of trade unions, municipal representatives, and academics not affiliated with Hamas – based on the perception that a local perspective must be connected to the area's planning needs and rehabilitation. A second Palestinian actor represented the Palestinian Authority, which would have to undergo reform as part of an overall political process. Many questions arose regarding the role of these actors. For example, how do they interact? Who conducts the political negotiations and who is tasked with discussing the planning and execution processes of rehabilitation? How can the activity of these actors push out Hamas's presence? These actors will be joined along the way by additional Palestinian players, whether from the West Bank or the various diaspora. The Hamas voice will also have to be considered given that it may continue to play a role in the Palestinian arena.

What about Hamas? And who will lead Gaza's reconstruction efforts? Further to the above-mentioned issues, one of the main questions that emerged in discussing the reconstruction efforts concerned Hamas's presence in Gaza and the identity of the body that will assume practical and declarative responsibility for the territory. Both the professional and political teams questioned the ability of a local Palestinian force to take over the reconstruction process, as well as the feasibility of a regional force that would take full responsibility and lead the process. Israel's delegates rejected flat out the idea of leaving Hamas in charge of Gaza. The Palestinian discourse, meanwhile, seeks to legitimize Hamas as part of the Palestinian political system, a role that would ensure broader acceptance of the political process on the part of the Palestinian public. Israel, for its part, also rejects the Palestinian Authority as the Palestinian entity that can provide an envelope and legitimacy

⁷ Bar Rappaport, "[Energy as a Tool for Advancing Israeli-Palestinian Peace](#)." *Mitvim Institute*, March 2020 (in Hebrew).

for regional action. Ultimately, alongside the desire to defeat and exclude Hamas from the control of Gaza, Israel has found no substitute for the civilian and governmental administration of the territory, and the vacuum allows Hamas to reconsolidate its power.

Conservation, renewal, or new construction? It is wrong to regard the Gaza Strip as a "clean slate" on which to redraw its future. The enclave presents an existing situation, not only of harsh humanitarian and physical conditions but also of organizations, institutions, actors, processes, and even resources. One of the main tasks of the rehabilitation and reconstruction processes will be to examine the existing elements, decide which of these mechanisms and resources should and can be used, and what must be completely rebuilt.

The challenge of adopting a regional perspective. The professional Israeli participants tried to examine the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip within the framework of a broad regional process, but the influence of the political directives which served as their reference point impaired their input in this regard. They found it difficult to adopt cross-border regional thinking and examine regional projects that create interdependence. In contrast, players oriented toward a regional perspective, such as EcoPeace⁸ and the Arava Institute, proposed cross-border projects addressing the interests of the sides as well as climatic and environmental interests. These organizations are at ease in the regional arena and have for years played key roles in this regard.

Deriving actions from desired future scenarios. Planning political, diplomatic, or humanitarian action based on past or current reality undermines agreement among different actors, as well as coordination and integration of various measures into an effective and efficient effort. The alternative offered by political-climate sustainability thinking is to derive present action from a desirable picture of the future. Simulation participants adopted this thinking by conducting a joint dialogue about the specific current interests of each country based on which an attempt was made to connect the various interests and put together an agreed-upon future picture. An alternative option is to draw a desirable picture of the future, and from there derive the actions that can lead there, connecting them to the various interests of the countries. Such dynamics can help shift away the focus from contentious national interests and foster a collaborative environment where agreement is more easily achieved.

3. *Required processes and actions*

A professional planning process must be initiated in the immediate term. To plan for the long term, some preliminary planning actions are best started immediately given the

⁸ EcoPeace Middle East is an Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian organization that works across borders on common environmental issues, with an emphasis on water and energy. The Arava Institute engages in academic environmental studies and research and is attended by Palestinian, Israeli, Jordanian and international students. The Institute is also engaged in promoting cross-border environmental projects.

highly complex and time-consuming nature of such projects. Ensuring they are feasible and adopted by the political echelon requires a serious planning process, examination of alternatives, setting standards and indices, integrating technologies and scientific knowledge, and conducting economic feasibility assessments. The planning must start now to create clear anchors for the political discussions that will follow. Thus, when representatives of the various countries and organizations convene, they will be informed by various alternatives – the meanings and implications of which are clear. The planning must consider various time frames, the extent of each project's necessity, the possible executing factors and potential partners, the desired degree and nature of Israel's involvement, and the evaluation of the required resources.

Building Palestinian independence through connectivity. Along with developing independent capabilities with the help of local resources in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian independence must also be fostered by promoting connectivity to its surroundings. For example, life-sustaining infrastructure must be built within the framework of promoting Palestinian statehood. But it must also be connected with regional infrastructure and enjoy broad international support for independence to develop along with interdependence and regional connectivity serving shared regional interests.

Promoting security and establishing Israeli independence through connectivity. Independence is a key issue for Israel, accustomed as it is to operating as an "island" isolated from its neighbors. The simulation's Israeli representatives found it difficult to cooperate with regional projects that created connectivity and dependence, pointing to the need for a change and updating of Israel's post-October 7 security doctrine. Along with the emphasis on infrastructural independence – and certainly that of military action – Israel is increasingly aware that it cannot realize its interests alone, not even military ones. Consequently, it should aspire to promote cooperation connectivity, and even interdependence, to create balanced interests, enhance the ability to influence politics, and contribute to its vital security needs.

Devising an international mechanism to manage humanitarian aid and Gaza's rehabilitation by a leading power. The state actors' table was primarily tasked with proposing a political-administrative mechanism to lead Gaza's reconstruction in the absence of a local Palestinian actor capable of undertaking it. Hamas is deemed an illegitimate actor, and the Palestinian Authority in its current form is too weak and does not enjoy domestic or foreign legitimacy, certainly not from Israel, to lead the reconstruction. The discussion on the mechanism for environmental infrastructure rehabilitation took place within the simulation as part of a peace conference with regional support. The basic premise for planning the mechanism was the recognition that Israel and the Palestinians are entering a long-term political process and therefore will be part of the rehabilitation mechanism and that rehabilitation, alongside a political process, can and should be sustainable.

The discussions reflected all the actors' multiple interests and efforts to advance their regional status by positioning themselves as leaders in Gaza's reconstruction process. What is more, although other countries expressed support for UN leadership of the process based on its record of such activity elsewhere in the world, Israel does not trust the organization in keeping with its long history of discord with the world body. Accordingly, it was proposed that the administrative apparatus be defined in advance by the forces leading the political process, and would not be subject to open discussion about its design. In other words, the leading country and the partner countries would be determined in advance, as would the manner of decision-making, the role of the UN, the relationship with financial institutions such as the World Bank or the European Development Bank, veto powers, management of the economic fund, the nature of the planning and steering committees' professional guidance, the identity of the Palestinian players, and more.

Regional/international management mechanism with enforcement authority. The discussions about the management mechanism dealt with the conditions that would make it effective. One important element brought up by the participants was the need for policy and decision-enforcement tools. In this context, they emphasized the connection between the humanitarian aid and rehabilitation mechanism and the general mechanism leading to the overall political act.

Professional capacity building and maintaining existing capabilities. The need to build the capabilities of professional teams operating infrastructure systems and providing services was also highlighted. Participants agreed that a functioning professional workforce is required in all areas: health, water, energy, waste, sanitation, welfare, and more. Since many Gaza professionals are considered members of the central Hamas government, an amnesty for those who have not engaged in terror activity should be examined to enable the territory's professional administration on the day after the war. Experience in Iraq, where the entire professional echelon identified with the Baath was ousted, shows that such wholesale "cleansing" results in chaos and is best avoided. Also, the operation of infrastructure and technological systems, as well as the construction of shelter areas, monitoring of vaccinations, and provision of medical and mental health services require orderly training of a large number of personnel. Experience in the Israeli-Palestinian context in Gaza of health and water resources training demonstrates its importance, even if conducted through a third party.

Rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts must be sustainable. The extensive destruction in the Gaza area also creates opportunities to rebuild systems more resilient to cope with future crises. Even without a political or security crisis, the climate crisis is expected to present many challenges to life in Gaza and its environs. Damage to agriculture, water shortages, rising sea levels, pollution, reduced resources, and the piling up of waste on an unprecedented scale in such a densely populated area will all threaten the fabric of life in the Gaza Strip and its environs in the near and distant future.

Sustainable rehabilitation must establish conditions to prevent another war that would void the investment in construction and infrastructure. To that end, it is not enough to destroy Hamas's governing infrastructure and military capabilities. It is also necessary to propose a political alternative that guarantees a future for the residents of Gaza, and a government that cares about civilians rather than engaging in terrorism, thereby providing an opportunity to build trust between Israel and the Palestinian authorities over time. The proposed principles for sustainable rehabilitation include inter alia, emphasis on connecting Gaza to the world through a maritime corridor to Cyprus, through the West Bank to Jordan and other Arab countries, thereby strengthening its trade, civil, cultural, and other ties. Sustainable rehabilitation also seeks to strengthen various levels of community activity, for example, training women can play a key role, through urban spaces, to self-management and ownership of infrastructure, residential areas, and public institutions. New technologies, such as renewable energies, water desalination, water recycling for agriculture, or hydroponic agriculture, can also make an important contribution, increasing available resources and productive capabilities. In general, the SDGs should be adopted as guiding principles for rehabilitation, which would also facilitate fundraising from Western countries.

Designing a key role for civil society. Under existing conditions, civil society enjoys unique power in establishing continuous Israeli-Palestinian ties in the field of rehabilitation that cannot exist at the intergovernmental level under current conditions. While the political echelon is clueless in this regard, the professionals entertain many ideas about what can be done and how. Civil society thus has an opportunity to introduce new ideas given the openness to connecting its organizations with the professional echelons. This is an important connection that can be utilized in both the administrative apparatus, at the level of inclusion, in professional planning institutions, and activity in the field. This should involve collaboration among governmental, civil, and business sectors in both Israel and Palestinian society, as well as within multilateral and regional frameworks. Ties between professionals from both societies and countries of the region should be encouraged, supported, and strengthened, and epistemological communities should immediately be built. This network of contacts is of great importance for supporting the next stages – building trust, effective implementation of the programs, and political and professional support for them.

Promoting the construction of an international university in Gaza. The Portland Foundation, engaged in an initiative to rebuild the Gaza Strip (a plan written and led by the Palestinian business sector) has proposed the construction of a unique international university in Gaza to serve rehabilitation and the development of statehood capabilities. The Israeli teams expressed objections to the idea, raising concerns about the exploitation of academic and technological knowledge to carry out terrorism. Their attitude demonstrated once again the need to examine the political backdrop of the rehabilitation processes and, accordingly, to understand what security concepts can be updated, and how.

D. Conclusion

“If not now, then when?” (Hillel the Elder)

This document, based on a simulation exercise, presents insights and recommendations regarding Israeli preparedness for long-term rehabilitation processes in the Gaza Strip. The document directly relates to the above-mentioned May 2024 Mitvim policy document on humanitarian strategy for the Gaza Strip that links the design of the immediate humanitarian act to the process of the Gaza Strip’s reconstruction and the region’s stability and security. The policy paper argues that the design of the humanitarian apparatus and civilian management of the Gaza Strip, as well as the rehabilitation mechanism, directly affect the political future, while a political horizon is vital to ensure a humanitarian response and sustainable rehabilitation.

In the shadow of the war’s massive destruction, both physical and human, we must plan for a better future, which may even provide a measure of compensation for all that has been lost. As professionals, decision-makers, and civil society organizations, it is incumbent on us to undertake forward-looking planning based on an in-depth examination of alternatives, taking into account political, social, environmental-climate, and economic aspects. It is necessary to arrive at the moment of rehabilitation equipped with orderly work plans and with the ability to challenge the existing paradigms to build a better reality.

The simulation illustrated the range of questions that must already be addressed in depth when thinking about the Gaza Strip’s rehabilitation processes.

1. How to expand or reshape the perception of Israel’s security as one that relies on Israel’s regional integration through cooperative relations and interdependence.
2. How to transition from aggression and combat to a process of mental and physical rehabilitation shaped by strategic and holistic thinking.
3. How to expand current paradigms of thinking to offer creative and sustainable alternatives.

These questions will continue to occupy the State of Israel for many years, shaping its moral compass and image, the resources at its disposal, its relations with the Palestinians, and its residents’ prospects of secure and prosperous lives.