

A “revitalized” EUBAM Rafah? One avenue for EU’s involvement in the “day after” in Gaza

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The re-deployment of the European Union Border Assistance Mission for the Rafah Crossing Point (EUBAM Rafah) emerges as one crucial component for promoting stability and governance in Gaza already during the cease-fire and in “the day after” the war. The deployment and re-deployment of international missions in conflict zones often present complex and multi-dimensional challenges that require a thorough examination of political, security, and socio-economic factors. EUBAM Rafah remains a critical focal point in efforts to stabilize the region, enhance humanitarian aid delivery, and facilitate trade. This paper aims to evaluate the opportunities and challenges associated with the re-deployment of EUBAM Rafah in the post-conflict scenario, as part of the general role the European Union (EU) can take in the aftermath of the Gaza war. The paper draws valuable lessons from several EUBAM missions, provides a practical roadmap for future engagement by outlining both immediate and long-term strategies aimed at improving border management, strengthening security measures, and supporting Gaza’s reconstruction and economic recovery, and presents a framework for understanding how an international mission can play a pivotal role in shaping a more secure and stable future for Gaza and the wider region.

A. Introduction

The war in Gaza has brought about devastating humanitarian consequences and has further complicated the already fragile political landscape of the region. As discussions regarding a strategic international response gain momentum, the re-deployment of the European Union Border Assistance Mission for the Rafah Crossing Point (EUBAM Rafah) emerges as one crucial component for promoting stability and governance in Gaza in “the day after” the war. The EU will be the third foreign player to be deployed, after private US and Egyptian companies were deployed at the Netzarim crossing.¹

The deployment and re-deployment of international missions in conflict zones often present complex and multi-dimensional challenges that require a thorough examination of political, security, and socio-economic factors.

EUBAM, initially established in 2005 to monitor and assist in the management of the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt, remains a critical focal point in efforts to stabilize

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¹ See here: <https://www.axios.com/2025/01/23/us-private-security-contractors-will-operate-key-gaza-checkpoint>.

the region, enhance humanitarian aid delivery, and facilitate trade. Its reactivation, however, was subject to numerous hurdles, including political divisions between Palestinian factions, ongoing militant threats, and broader regional concerns.

This paper aims to evaluate the opportunities and challenges associated with the re-deployment of EUBAM in the post-conflict scenario, as part of the general role the European Union (EU) can take in the aftermath of the Gaza war. In order to do so, the paper will begin by observing the historical context of EUBAM's deployment, to understand its potential relevance in the context of the recent war. It will then analyse the objectives, strategies, challenges, and outcomes of several EUBAM missions (EULEX Kosovo, EUBAM Libya and EUBAM Balkans), in order to draw valuable lessons from these case studies that can enhance EUBAM Rafah's effectiveness and readiness for the challenges anticipated. Finally, it will examine the perspectives on the re-deployment of EUBAM Rafah, which is taking place only a couple of weeks since the cease fire and hostages release deal begun. By exploring the views of key stakeholders, the essay seeks to highlight political and security challenges, assess stakeholder interests and contribute to the broader discourse on promoting stability and peace in conflict-affected areas like Gaza.

The paper provides a practical roadmap for future engagement by outlining both immediate and long-term strategies aimed at improving border management, strengthening security measures, and supporting Gaza's reconstruction and economic recovery. These strategies focus on addressing the region's political and security challenges while fostering sustainable development and humanitarian aid, ensuring that the Rafah crossing operates effectively in a post-conflict environment, and facilitating the broader stabilization and rehabilitation of Gaza.

By exploring the intricate web of interests that surround EUBAM Rafah, this analysis provides a framework for understanding how an international mission can not only navigate the complexities of a post-conflict environment but also play a pivotal role in shaping a more secure and stable future for Gaza and the wider region. Through collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and pragmatic steps, EUBAM has the potential to serve as a critical mechanism for peace, security, and economic recovery, laying the groundwork for sustainable development in Gaza.

B. Historical Background

The EU Border Assistance Mission at the Rafah Crossing Point (EUBAM Rafah) was established in November 2005 as part of international efforts to monitor and facilitate the operation of the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt. This initiative was a key component of the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA), which followed Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005 under the disengagement plan.

It was launched in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process with the aim of ensuring the reopening of the Rafah border crossing, a critical link for the movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza. The mission was part of the broader goal of facilitating Palestinian movement, boosting economic development, and fostering regional stability. The mission aimed to facilitate the movement of people and goods while preventing arms smuggling.

EUBAM Rafah operated between 2005 and 2007, with a mandate to monitor the crossing and provide technical assistance and capacity-building to Palestinian border authorities. During this period, the mission successfully facilitated the safe passage of people, although

it faced multiple closures due to security concerns and Israeli-imposed restrictions. According to data recorded by EUBAM, from November 25, 2005, until the last day of EU monitoring, June 9, 2007, the mission facilitated the crossing of a total of 443,975 people, 229,429 from Gaza into Egyptian territory, 214,117 for the reverse route.

The mission was suspended in June 2007 following the violent takeover of Gaza by Hamas, which led to the collapse of the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority’s control in the Strip. Israel and Egypt closed their borders with Gaza in response to the political change, and EUBAM Rafah withdrew from its monitoring duties, leaving the crossing mostly inoperative.

Since the suspension of EUBAM Rafah, the mission has remained formally on standby, but without an active presence on the ground. The Rafah crossing has been largely controlled by Egypt and operated sporadically, mostly for humanitarian purposes, depending on Egypt’s relations with Hamas and the broader security situation in the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza.

In recent years, the EUBAM Rafah mission has implemented – through the work of ten international and eight local staff members – a long-term preparedness project with its Palestinian counterparts, namely “capacity-building activities to improve their ability to redeploy at the Rafah crossing when conditions allow”. At its height, EUBAM Rafah mission consisted of around 70 personnel. The 2025 mission is to deploy around 20 men, six to deal with monitoring the humanitarian crossing of injured individuals out of Gaza for medical treatment² and 14 mission men will secure the mission.³

Mission Facts and Figures

Theatre:	Occupied Palestinian Territories
Headquarters:	Tel Aviv
Starting date:	24 November 2005
Head of Mission:	Nataliya Apostolova
Mission strength:	18 (10 int. and 8 local)
Contributing states:	All EU Member States can contribute to the Mission

In this framework, the Mission undertakes a number of actions including training sessions, workshops, and study visits. They focus on topics such as border management, detecting and preventing smuggling, cross border crime, risk analysis and information sharing, cooperation between customs and judicial authorities, in addition to human rights, gender equality and women’s empowerment. Besides the capacity building activities, EUBAM Rafah continues through dedicated Action Plans to support GABC in implementing its ‘Business and Integrated Border Management Strategies’ drafted with support from the Mission. An additional number of projects have been identified to further enhance Palestinian border control capacities.⁴

EUBAM Rafah has been intermittently considered as part of broader efforts to reconstruct Gaza and manage its borders, particularly after major conflicts like those in 2014 and 2021. Its potential lies in facilitating trade and movement through the Rafah crossing if political conditions were to stabilize. As of January 2025, it is the only crossing Palestinians can leave the Gaza Strip. However, as EUBAM Rafah’s mandate is with the Palestinian Authority, and as Hamas was declared by the EU as a terrorist organization in 2003, the

² See here: <https://eubam-rafah.eu/en/node/5516>.


³ The security force is composed of Carabinieri officers from Italy, Spanish Guardia Civil officers and French gendarmes. See <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-ministers-agree-revive-rafah-border-mission-2025-01-27/>.

⁴ The European Union Border Assistance Mission for the Rafah Crossing Point (EUBAM Rafah) - <https://eubam-rafah.eu/en>

mission’s reactivation is heavily dependent on an agreement between Hamas and Fatah. The deep division between Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza, compounded by ongoing hostilities, has greatly complicated any prospects for resuming the mission. Israel’s acceptance of EUBAM Rafah redeployment was another hurdle to cross. Especially as the agreement necessitates the Palestinian Authority agreement on its other side, while the EU is the middlemen.

In May 27, 2024, the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU gave a green light to examine and prepare for redeployment of EUBAM Rafah.⁵ Yet the redeployment was contingent on Israel and Hamas reaching a cease-fire, and written agreement from Israel and from the PA to the EU’s mission mandate, along with Egypt consent.⁶ The cease-fire between Israel and Hamas took place on January 15 2025. Two weeks later, on January 27, came the final green light from the Foreign Affairs Council for redeployment, after Israel, the PA and Egypt gave their consent and invited the force to redeploy. The mission's primary objective "is to coordinate and facilitate the daily transit of up to 300 injured and ill individuals, ensuring assistance and protection for vulnerable people in a humanitarian emergency context".⁷

In its Decision, the European Council stated that the EU remains firmly committed to a lasting and sustainable peace based on the two-state solution and that Palestinians and Israelis have an equal right to live in safety, dignity and peace. The European Council furthermore recalled that “the EU Border Assistance Mission to the Rafah Crossing Point (EU BAM Rafah) can play an important role based on that principle in support of a future Palestinian state”.⁸

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COUNCIL DECISION (CFSP) 2024/1813		
of 25 June 2024		
amending Decision 2013/354/CFSP on the European Union Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS)		
THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,		
Having regard to the Treaty on European Union, and in particular Article 42(4) and Article 43(2) thereof,		
Having regard to the proposal from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,		
Whereas:		
(1)	On 3 July 2013, the Council adopted Decision 2013/354/CFSP ⁽¹⁾ , which continued EUPOL COPPS as from 1 July 2013.	
(2)	On 28 February 2023, in the context of the coordinated Strategic Review of EUPOL COPPS and EU BAM Rafah, the Political and Security Committee agreed that the two Missions should be extended until 30 June 2025, in the form of two extensions for one year each.	
(3)	On 26 June 2023, the Council adopted Decision (CFSP) 2023/1302 ⁽²⁾ , which extended EUPOL COPPS until 30 June 2024.	

⁵ See here: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-affairs-council-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-after-meeting-14_en.

⁶ In June 2024, the EU Council decided to extend the mission by one year, until June 30, 2025, with the possibility of an extension for an additional year and a budget of €3.72 million from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025. This is the usual procedure for the mission’s extension. See Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1806 of 25 June 2024 amending Joint Action 2005/889/CFSP - https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L_202401806

⁷ See here: <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-ministers-agree-revive-rafah-border-mission-2025-01-27/>.

⁸ Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1806 of 25 June 2024 amending Joint Action 2005/889/CFSP - https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L_202401806.

Reactivating the 2005 Crossings Agreement – What does it mean?

This scenario involves returning to the 2005 “Agreement on Movement and Access” that had been in effect until Hamas’s takeover. Under this agreement, the Palestinian Authority managed the crossing with the EU as a supervising observer.

This scenario is the most acceptable to Egypt and the United States. However, it faces three major challenges: previous EU requirements; Israel’s objection to the Palestinian side being officially represented by the PA; and the refusal of Palestinian factions in Gaza, particularly Hamas, to accept any non-Palestinian administration of the Rafah crossing. EUBAM Rafah was part of the solution and the cease fire deal with Hamas. On January 29, 2024 it was announced of the nearby transfer of fifty injured men to Egypt, accompanied by around 150 escorts. While the focus is on the cease-fire period, this is likely to be pursued also as part of the plan for the day after the war.

C. EU Border-Control Missions: Case Studies

In recent years, the EU has played a key role in promoting stability, governance, and security in conflict-affected regions through its various civilian missions. These missions, often centered on border management, rule of law, and capacity building, aim to strengthen local institutions and foster regional cooperation. By examining specific EU missions such as EULEX Kosovo, EUBAM Libya and EUBAM Balkans, we can better understand the objectives, challenges, and outcomes of these international interventions. This section will discuss these case studies, observing their successes and challenges, and compare them in order to draw valuable lessons for the Rafah mission.

The **EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX)**, launched in 2008, had the primary objective of supporting the development and strengthening of the rule of law in Kosovo. It specifically aimed to assist local authorities in managing critical sectors such as policing, the judiciary, and customs services. EULEX’s strategy centered on monitoring local officials to build a robust legal and institutional framework that would allow Kosovo to maintain law and order, reduce corruption, and improve border security. However, the mission faced significant challenges. One of the most prominent hurdles was navigating the political tensions stemming from Kosovo’s unresolved status, particularly the ongoing tension with Serbia, which made it difficult for EULEX to carry out its mandate without exacerbating local sensitivities. Another major challenge was the need to build capacities within a post-conflict environment, which required vast resources and time. Integrating local personnel into the revamped systems was a slow and difficult process. Despite these challenges, EULEX achieved notable outcomes. It played a crucial role in improving border management and significantly reduced smuggling and human trafficking activities. Additionally, the mission contributed to strengthening the rule of law, though challenges such as corruption and political interference continued to hinder the full realization of its goals.

The **EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM Libya)**, established in 2013, was designed to support Libyan authorities in developing effective border management and security systems. Its primary objective was to train and advise Libyan personnel, enabling them to better control borders and manage migration flows. However, the mission quickly encountered severe difficulties due to the volatile security situation in Libya, which was plagued by civil war and widespread political fragmentation. The persistent threat of violence severely limited the mission’s ability to operate effectively, often placing both staff and

operations at risk. In addition to the security concerns, Libya's weak and fragmented institutions made it difficult to implement sustainable practices for border management. The lack of a stable governmental framework significantly hampered the mission's efforts to build local capacities. As a result, EUBAM Libya achieved only limited success. The mission made little progress in securing the borders or in establishing long-term improvements in border control and migration management. The continuing instability and political fragmentation in the country meant that any gains made were often overshadowed by the broader geopolitical dynamics at play.

In the Western Balkans, the **EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM Balkans)** was tasked with enhancing regional cooperation and strengthening border management capacities across the region. Its mission was particularly focused on helping the countries of the Western Balkans align their border management practices with EU standards, a critical step toward potential future EU membership. One of the central challenges faced by the mission was fostering cooperation among the region's diverse countries, many of which were still grappling with political tensions and a history of conflict. Regional cooperation proved difficult, and the mission had to work diligently to promote effective communication and collaboration across borders. Another significant challenge was ensuring that adequate resources and consistent political will were available from all participating countries. Without these, the mission's effectiveness was often constrained, making it difficult to maintain momentum. Despite these obstacles, EUBAM Balkans achieved important outcomes. The mission played a crucial role in facilitating improved regional cooperation, leading to better communication and coordinated efforts in managing borders. Moreover, its work helped align border management practices with EU standards, aiding the Western Balkan countries in their progress toward EU integration.

Comparison and Analysis

The case studies of EULEX Kosovo, EUBAM Libya, and EUBAM Balkans, offer valuable insights into the EU's efforts to stabilize post-conflict regions and support fragile states in managing borders and building rule of law institutions. Despite the different geopolitical and local contexts, these missions share several commonalities in their objectives, while also presenting unique challenges and outcomes. Examining these similarities and differences provides an opportunity to draw lessons for future missions, especially for the specific case of EUBAM Rafah.

Similarities Across the Missions

Objective of Supporting Rule of Law and Border Management: One of the primary similarities across these missions is their focus on reinforcing the rule of law and establishing effective border management. Whether it was EULEX Kosovo's goal to strengthen judicial systems and border security, or EUBAM Libya's aim to assist in border control amidst migration issues, all four missions were centered on providing support to national and local authorities in managing security-related responsibilities. For EUBAM Rafah, the mission's purpose was to ensure that the Rafah border crossing operated in line with international standards, similar to the broader goals of the other missions in terms of border control and governance.

Capacity Building: All of these missions placed a strong emphasis on capacity building as a means to empower local authorities to take over responsibilities eventually. EULEX Kosovo worked to mentor local personnel in law enforcement, while EUBAM Balkans sought

to align the border management practices of Western Balkan countries with EU standards. In Libya, the mission provided training and advisory support despite the ongoing civil war. This goal of developing local capacity to handle security and governance issues was also central to EUBAM Rafah, although its success was limited due to external factors.

Political and Security Challenges: A significant commonality among these missions is the difficulty of operating in politically unstable or conflict-ridden environments. In Kosovo, the unresolved status of the region and tensions with Serbia posed diplomatic and operational challenges for EULEX. Similarly, the civil war and political fragmentation in Libya severely constrained EUBAM Libya’s effectiveness. EUBAM Rafah, too, was deeply affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and internal Palestinian political divisions, resulting in frequent disruptions in mission operations between 2005-2007. Even in the Balkans, where the political situation was relatively stable, the mission encountered difficulties in fostering regional cooperation among countries with historical tensions.

Key Differences in Context and Outcomes

Nature of the Conflict and Security Environment: One of the main differences among the missions is the severity and nature of the conflict environments in which they operated. EUBAM Libya functioned in an extremely volatile setting, where ongoing civil war and violent conflict directly hampered the mission’s ability to operate. In contrast, while Kosovo remained politically sensitive, EULEX operated in a more stable post-conflict environment where active warfare had subsided, allowing it to focus on building institutions rather than managing immediate conflict. EUBAM Rafah’s challenges lay more in the political volatility and the recurring security escalations between Gaza and Israel and from the ongoing conflict between Fatah and Hamas, rather than an internal armed conflict as in Libya.

Institutional Strength and Local Government Engagement: The missions also differed in the level of engagement and cooperation from local authorities. In Kosovo, despite political tensions, EULEX was able to work closely with local institutions, which had some degree of capacity and willingness to engage with international actors. EUBAM Balkans also benefited from the active cooperation of Western Balkan governments that aspired to EU membership, making the mission’s capacity-building efforts more impactful. By contrast, EUBAM Libya struggled due to the lack of stable institutions and a central government with control over the territory, which greatly limited the mission’s effectiveness. EUBAM Rafah faced similar issues with the lack of cooperation from both the Palestinian and Israeli sides, as well as the internal division between Fatah and Hamas, which complicated its efforts.

Outcomes and Long-Term Impact: The outcomes of these missions varied significantly depending on the challenges faced and the political will of the host governments. EULEX Kosovo made measurable progress in improving the rule of law and border security, contributing to the stabilization of the region, though corruption and political interference remained a challenge. EUBAM Balkans also made strides in regional cooperation, helping Western Balkan states align their practices with EU standards, which aided their EU integration prospects. EUBAM Libya, however, achieved only limited success due to the extreme security challenges and political fragmentation in the country, with its efforts frequently being undermined by broader geopolitical dynamics. EUBAM Rafah, while initially successful in opening and operating the Rafah crossing, was unable to sustain its mission due to the repeated closures and escalating conflict in the region.

Below is a comparison summarizing the key aspects of the four EU border assistance missions mentioned:

Mission	Objective	Challenges	Success Factors	Results	Lessons for EUBAM Rafah
EULEX Kosovo	Support rule of law, strengthen border management	Political tensions between Kosovo & Serbia	Strong international backing, local political support	Improved border management, enhanced local capacities	Political stability and strong backing critical for success
EUBAM Libya	Assist Libya in securing borders, managing migration	Volatile security situation, political fragmentation	Limited due to instability, weak governance	Minimal progress, mission constrained by ongoing conflict	Security and stable governance are prerequisites for effectiveness
EUBAM Balkans	Foster regional cooperation, strengthen border capacity	Regional tensions, but less severe than Libya	Cooperation between Balkan countries, alignment with EU standards	Progress in aligning border practices with EU norms	Cooperative frameworks enhance regional stability
EUBAM Rafah	Monitor Rafah crossing, facilitate movement of people	Political instability, conflict in Gaza, security tension between Israel, Egypt and the PA	Initial success with EU presence, suspended in 2007 due to Hamas takeover	Facilitated movement before suspension, technical assistance continued	Effective in stable periods; must adapt to volatile situations

The comparison of these missions highlights several critical lessons for EUBAM Rafah and any future border management missions in conflict-prone areas. First, the importance of sustained local capacity building and the need for political stability are evident from the relatively greater success of missions in more stable regions, such as EULEX Kosovo and EUBAM Balkans. In contrast, the limited success of EUBAM Libya underscores the difficulties of operating in a highly unstable environment without strong local institutions. Additionally, fostering regional cooperation, as seen in the Balkans, could be crucial for long-term success in border management, something EUBAM Rafah struggled with due to political divisions.

Second, political will and local engagement are key determinants of success. The missions that succeeded in making lasting improvements, such as EULEX Kosovo, had stronger engagement with local authorities and a clear political commitment to reforms. EUBAM Rafah’s difficulties in securing long-term gains illustrate the challenge of operating in politically divided contexts where local actors may not fully cooperate or agree on the mission’s mandate.

Lastly, adaptability is crucial for these missions, especially in conflict zones. While EULEX Kosovo and EUBAM Balkans were able to adjust their strategies to changing political landscapes, EUBAM Libya and EUBAM Rafah struggled with the unpredictable nature of conflict and political instability. For EUBAM Rafah, this highlights the need for flexible mandates and contingency plans that can allow missions to remain effective despite fluctuating political and security conditions.

In conclusion, these EU missions share common goals of supporting governance and border management. Their varying contexts and outcomes offer valuable insights into the challenges of international interventions. The lessons learned from these case studies can help inform future approaches to EUBAM Rafah and similar missions in conflict-affected regions.

Each of these EU-led missions in post-conflict and conflict-prone regions highlights both the potential and limitations of international interventions aimed at improving governance, security, and cooperation. Whether in Kosovo, Libya, or the Balkans, these missions faced a wide range of political, security, and institutional challenges. While some missions achieved notable successes in enhancing border management, building local capacities, and promoting regional cooperation, others were hampered by the complex geopolitical environments in which they operated, leading to limited and short-term results. Nevertheless, these missions represent important steps in the EU's broader efforts to support stability, development, and governance reform in regions facing significant post-conflict challenges.

These case studies emphasize the importance of stability, political support, and sustainable capacity-building efforts in the success of international border control missions. By learning from these experiences, the EU can better design and implement future missions to address the evolving challenges of global border security, and in particular, the challenges facing the “day after” the war in Gaza.

D. Re-deploying EUBAM Rafah

In the aftermath of the current Gaza war, the re-deployment of EUBAM Rafah could play a crucial role in stabilizing the region, facilitating humanitarian aid, and promoting long-term security at the Rafah crossing. However, for this mission to be effective, its mandate must be significantly expanded and adapted to the new post-conflict reality. This will require addressing a range of political, security, and socio-economic challenges, alongside ensuring strong coordination among all relevant stakeholders.

Opportunities

One of the primary components of this expanded mandate should be an enhanced political and diplomatic role for EUBAM Rafah, allowing the mission to actively participate in mediation efforts between Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Egypt. This would include negotiating terms for the crossing's operation and fostering confidence-building measures aimed at long-term peace. At the same time, the mission must take concrete steps to improve security and border management at Rafah, such as strengthening security

infrastructure, installing surveillance systems, and providing comprehensive training to border personnel on advanced management techniques and human rights standards.

On the humanitarian front, EUBAM Rafah must establish dedicated corridors for the safe and timely delivery of essential goods and medical supplies to Gaza. Moreover, promoting economic development projects that create jobs and reduce reliance on smuggling and illicit trade will be critical to the mission’s success. These efforts could also include infrastructure projects, vocational training programs, and support for small businesses, as part of the rehabilitation and reconstruction process in Gaza in the “day after”.

In terms of coordination and oversight, EUBAM Rafah would benefit from forming an international coalition that includes along the EU, also the UN, the Arab League, and other regional and global stakeholders to provide comprehensive support. Such collaboration would ensure that broader political and security challenges are addressed, while regular assessments of the mission’s effectiveness would allow for necessary adjustments. Legal clarity will be vital, and a robust legal framework should define the roles, responsibilities, and operational procedures for the mission, alongside a clear dispute resolution mechanism to address conflicts.

To achieve effective deployment, immediate actions should focus on assessing the situation at the Rafah crossing and engaging stakeholders to build consensus on the mission’s objectives and operational means and methods. Short-term initiatives should prioritize emergency aid delivery and urgent security enhancements, while long-term strategies must focus on sustainable capacity-building programs for local personnel and economic development projects to rebuild Gaza’s economy.⁹ Through these expanded mandates and strategies, EUBAM Rafah could serve as a stabilizing force in the region and contribute to a more secure and prosperous future for Gaza.

Challenges

Re-deploying EUBAM Rafah in the aftermath of the Gaza war will face numerous challenges rooted in the complex political, security, logistical, and socio-economic environment of the region. Politically, instability is likely to be a major obstacle, especially given the hostile political relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which could hinder the cooperation necessary for the mission’s success. The broader regional geopolitics, involving actors like Egypt and Gulf states, may further complicate efforts, as different countries have varying interests and alliances that might impact EUBAM Rafah’s deployment and operations.

On the security front, the mission will have to contend with the ever-present threat of violence, especially from militant groups in Gaza, which poses a direct risk to mission personnel and the Rafah crossing’s operational integrity. There is also a heightened risk of retaliatory attacks in the post-war environment, necessitating enhanced security measures to protect both the crossing and the mission staff.

Logistically, access and mobility will present another set of challenges, as movement restrictions imposed by Israel could severely limit the ability of the mission to deploy

⁹ For deeper understanding of the possibilities for International Partnership for Gaza Rebuilding, see Yitzhak Gal and Maya Sion-Tzidkiyahu (2024) “A Vision for Regional – International Partnership for Gaza Rebuilding and Palestinian Economic Leap,” Mitvim, <https://mitvim.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/A-Vision-for-Gaza-Rebuilding-Gal-Sion-Tzidkiyahu-English-V1-1.pdf>.

personnel and equipment efficiently. Additionally, supply chain issues, including delays in the flow of humanitarian aid and technical equipment, could arise due to border closures and stringent security checks that Israel likely to demand. The socio-economic situation in Gaza, further complicates matters. Addressing the immediate needs for food, medical supplies, and essential services will be critical to stabilizing the region, as will efforts to mitigate the economic collapse caused by widespread infrastructure destruction and the disruption of daily economic activities. This economic desperation could fuel unrest, adding to the volatility in the region.

Finally, the current legal and operational framework of EUBAM Rafah may be insufficient to handle the full scope of challenges in the post-conflict environment. The mission’s mandate may need to be expanded to cover not only security and border management but also humanitarian aid delivery and economic recovery to fully support Gaza’s stabilization and recovery.

D. Estimated Stakeholders Perspectives

The re-deployment of EUBAM Rafah is likely to be seen through various lenses by key stakeholders, including the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), regional actors like Israel and Egypt, and the broader international community (e.g., UN, US). Each of these stakeholders will approach the mission with distinct political, security, and operational priorities.

The Palestinian Authority

The PLO supports the re-deployment of EUBAM Rafah as it adds international legitimacy and oversight to the Rafah crossing, helping to ensure fair and transparent operations. For the PLO, the technical assistance provided by EUBAM, particularly in training and capacity-building for Palestinian border personnel, is valuable as it could enhance the Palestinian Authority’s (PA) ability to manage the crossing independently over time. However, challenges exist, particularly regarding the need for full cooperation from local authorities, which may complicate EUBAM’s operations if the PA’s legitimacy, influence and control of Gaza remains limited.

The PLO is cautious about any arrangements that could potentially increase Israeli control or influence over Palestinian borders. To mitigate this, the PLO prefers a stronger role for international bodies like EUBAM, ensuring that neutrality is maintained and that Palestinian sovereignty is not compromised through external interference. These challenges and reservations highlight the delicate balance the PLO seeks in supporting international involvement while maintaining a degree of autonomy and resisting external pressures that could undermine Palestinian control over border management.

Egypt

Egypt views EUBAM as a potential facilitator of humanitarian aid and economic exchange, both of which are essential for stabilizing Gaza in the post-war environment and could also benefit Egypt’s economy. By ensuring that Gaza’s border remains secure, Egypt seeks to mitigate the pressures it faces along its own border.

Israel

Israel places significant emphasis on security and is much more cautious after Oct. 7. Given the volatile nature of the region and the constant threat posed by militant groups, Israel may be skeptical about the mission's overall effectiveness, particularly in the absence of significant security guarantees. Without clear and robust operational protocols in place, Israel would question whether EUBAM could adequately control and monitor the border, especially when militant groups remain in Gaza and the potential for future conflicts. Thus, Israel is likely to insist on stringent security measures and operational clarity to ensure that EUBAM can operate effectively and align with Israel's broader security objectives.

The International Community

The re-deployment of EUBAM Rafah is viewed positively by the broader international community. The UN is invested in the re-deployment of EUBAM as part of its broader efforts to promote peace and security in the region. The UN views EUBAM as a key player in the framework for stabilizing Gaza post-conflict and ensuring that humanitarian corridors are established and maintained. The organization emphasizes the importance of efficient border management, which is essential for delivering humanitarian aid and supporting economic development initiatives. By endorsing EUBAM's presence, the UN aims to contribute to a sustainable resolution of the ongoing humanitarian crisis and facilitate the long-term recovery of Gaza.

The US could also support the re-deployment of EUBAM as part of its strategic interest in maintaining stability in the region. For the US, EUBAM represents a means to reduce tensions between Israel and the Palestinians while simultaneously providing a layer of oversight that enhances security for all parties involved. The US is likely to coordinate closely with Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and regional actors such as the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia to ensure that EUBAM's operations align with broader regional security and diplomatic objectives. This coordination underscores the US commitment to fostering a more stable environment in which diplomatic negotiations can take place.

Regional Players

Regional Arab countries, including the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, have varied perspectives on the re-deployment of EUBAM. The UAE and Bahrain, as part of the Abraham Accords, are increasingly engaged in normalization with Israel and may see the re-deployment of EUBAM as a mean to enhance regional security and cooperation. Both nations support initiatives that promote stability and peace in the region, recognizing the potential for economic partnerships and collaborative efforts that can arise from a more secure environment in Gaza. Qatar, known for its significant humanitarian aid contributions to Gaza, views EUBAM's presence as a mechanism for ensuring that aid flows efficiently and securely, thus alleviating the humanitarian crisis in the territory. Qatar's role as a mediator in regional disputes further positions it as a key player in supporting the successful re-deployment of EUBAM.

Saudi Arabia, while traditionally cautious about direct engagement with Israel, may also support EUBAM's re-deployment as part of its broader vision for regional stability and economic development. The kingdom is keen on fostering security and economic partnerships in the region, and facilitating humanitarian efforts in Gaza aligns with its

strategic objectives. As part of its Vision 2030 initiative, Saudi Arabia is increasingly focused on enhancing its role as a regional leader and promoting peace initiatives that can lead to long-term stability.

In summary, the re-deployment of EUBAM Rafah is generally viewed favourably by the international community and regional Arab states, reflecting a shared interest in stabilizing Gaza and fostering cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians. However, this support must navigate the complex political and security landscape of the region, with each actor bringing its own interests and concerns to the forefront.

E. Steps for Effective Deployment

To ensure the successful re-deployment of EUBAM Rafah in the post-war context, a structured approach involving immediate actions, short-term initiatives, and long-term strategies is essential. Each of these phases will contribute to establishing a stable operational framework and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the mission.

Immediate Actions: The first step in the re-deployment process is to conduct an assessment mission to thoroughly evaluate the current situation at the Rafah crossing. This mission should aim to identify immediate needs, challenges, and potential security threats, providing a clear understanding of the operational landscape. Following this, stakeholder engagement will be critical. Engaging with key stakeholders, including local authorities, international organizations, and community leaders, will help gather valuable input on the mission’s objectives and strategies. By fostering an inclusive dialogue, EUBAM can build consensus and ensure that the interests and concerns of all parties are considered from the outset.

Short-term Initiatives: In the short term, EUBAM should prioritize emergency aid delivery. Coordinating with humanitarian organizations to deliver emergency supplies will address the urgent needs of the population in Gaza, helping to stabilize the dire humanitarian situation. This initiative should include the provision of food, medical supplies, and essential services to alleviate suffering and build goodwill within the community. Concurrently, implementing immediate security enhancements at the Rafah crossing is crucial. These enhancements may involve increased surveillance, improved screening processes, and collaboration with local security forces to prevent illegal activities, such as smuggling, while ensuring the safety of EUBAM personnel and the smooth flow of humanitarian aid.

Long-term Strategies: For sustainable success, EUBAM must focus on long-term strategies that empower local institutions and promote economic resilience. One key aspect is the development and implementation of comprehensive capacity-building programs for local Palestinian border personnel. These programs will enhance skills and knowledge, ensuring sustainable and efficient border management in the future. This approach fosters local ownership and strengthens the Palestinian Authority’s ability to manage the crossing independently. Additionally, launching long-term economic development projects aimed at rebuilding Gaza’s economy is essential. By focusing on infrastructure development, job creation, and support for local businesses, EUBAM can help reduce dependency on external aid and promote self-sufficiency within the community.

Overall, by following these steps—starting with immediate actions and progressing through short-term initiatives and long-term strategies—EUBAM can effectively navigate the complexities of the post-war environment in Gaza. This structured approach will not only enhance the operational efficacy of the mission but also contribute to broader regional stability and humanitarian relief efforts.

F. Conclusion: Re-deploying EUBAM Rafah – A road map for success

The re-deployment of EUBAM Rafah offers a significant opportunity for the EU to play a vital role in stabilizing Gaza and fostering humanitarian relief, as well as a potential to build trust between Israeli authorities and the PA. By learning from past missions and adapting to the specific challenges of the region, EUBAM Rafah can help sustain the cease-fire. In the future it can assist with border management, security, and economic recovery. However, this analysis highlights the complex mix of political, security, and logistical issues the mission will face post-conflict, requiring a nuanced approach to overcome hurdles like local political divisions, ongoing militant threats, and the severe humanitarian crisis.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) supports EUBAM Rafah’s potential for reinforcing international oversight, but its success will hinge on the level of cooperation from local authorities and the Palestinian Authority’s influence in Gaza. Similarly, Israel, as a third-party monitor, will insist on strict security measures and operational protocols due to the ongoing influence of militant groups (and as long as Hamas has not been defeated). The international community, including the EU, UN, and US, emphasize the critical need for secure border management and humanitarian relief as key to broader regional stability.

Regional Arab nations such as the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia add another layer, bringing their unique interests in economic cooperation and Gaza’s recovery. Their involvement could pave the way for a coordinated regional approach to support EUBAM, aligning with both political and humanitarian objectives, as part of the EU’s vision to strengthen its relations with the Gulf States.

Roadmap for Success

Moving forward, a clear vision and actionable steps are essential to ensure EUBAM Rafah's future effectiveness. First, it is crucial to establish an operational framework that includes input from all stakeholders - particularly local authorities in Gaza. Formal agreements should clearly define roles, responsibilities, and security protocols to address concerns from both Israel and the PLO.

Strengthening security measures, particularly through cooperation with regional partners, will mitigate risks posed by militants. Enhanced intelligence-sharing and joint security operations can create a safer environment for EUBAM personnel. Meanwhile, building capacity among Palestinian border personnel will empower local authorities, fostering long-term border management.

Finally, the mission must prioritize Israel’s security needs and humanitarian needs in Gaza, working with the UN and NGOs to deliver essential supplies and rebuild critical infrastructure. Long-term recovery efforts should focus on fostering economic development, reducing reliance on external aid, and improving living conditions in Gaza.

To ensure sustained success, ongoing dialogue with international and regional actors is essential. Regular consultations with the EU, US, UN, and Arab nations will align EUBAM

Rafah's mission with broader diplomatic and security efforts, creating a path toward long-term stability in the region.

In conclusion, despite the many challenges, EUBAM Rafah has the potential to play a transformative role in Gaza's post-conflict recovery, enhancing security, improving humanitarian conditions, and fostering economic development. By addressing political and security concerns with a clear operational plan, the EU through EUBAM Rafah can contribute significantly to shaping a more stable and prosperous future for Gaza in the "day after" scenario.