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## **A Multilateral Arrangement is Preferable to a Unilateral Move**

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As with any military operation, the Israeli government faces several options for ending the campaign in Gaza. Generally speaking, the two major options are an arrangement involving the international system and a unilateral announcement that the operation is over, followed by the withdrawal of troops. While each alternative has its respective advantages and drawbacks, overall it seems that a multilateral rather than unilateral arrangement is preferable.

In the case of Operation Protective Edge, advantages of the unilateral end to fighting include:

1. Israel retains almost complete freedom to decide when and under what circumstances it ends the military effort and which actions by the other side demand a response. Israel retains fairly extensive freedom of action, as it has not explicitly committed itself not to engage in military action of any sort.
2. Israel responds positively to demands on the international arena calling for an immediate ceasefire.
3. Israel has no commitment to any Gazan, regional, or international party on political or other moves vis-à-vis Gaza itself, the Palestinians, or any particular international body.
4. On the internal political front, the government deflects the criticism it can expect from the right wing that it paid a political price to Hamas and/or the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, or the United States, either directly or indirectly, to reach a negotiated end to the military confrontation.
5. It reduces the time the army must remain in Gaza, certainly the densely populated areas, an operation that incurs multiple casualties both among the IDF and the local civilian population.

Drawbacks of the unilateral end to the fighting include:

1. The move doesn't obligate any of the parties directly involved with the military confrontation – Hamas, the PA, Egypt, or the UN – to take certain steps or conduct itself in any particular manner in the future.

2. A unilateral move involving the withdrawal of troops has no effect on some of the factors that created the situation in the first place, such as the siege of Gaza.
3. The unilateral move may earn the faint, temporary, and partial blessing of the relevant international community, but this pales in comparison to the political advantages of a joint political move with key actors on the international arena.
4. The military infrastructure the IDF did not have time to destroy remains intact, without even a partial response that could have been attained by an arrangement via the international system.
5. In the absence of a broader agreement, the unilateral move is nothing more than a hiatus before the next round of fighting. It does not leverage the military and psychological successes into a relatively long term settlement.

At the same time, an agreement involving the regional and international political system demands a focus on the longer term and incurs the risk that, despite its inherent advantages, Israel is liable eventually to find itself in the same situation should it choose the unilateral option.

The agreement option brings with it its own set of advantages and disadvantages. In the negotiations for an agreement, Israel can present the full range of its demands to deny any military infrastructure in Gaza, including the elimination of the existing infrastructure and the future demilitarization of Gaza. Israel could demand involvement in supervision and the composition of the mechanisms that would be established to oversee and ensure the execution of the various arrangements. The pitfalls of such arrangements are familiar from the failed implementation of previous UN Security Council resolutions on Lebanon and Gaza, and it is possible to apply the lessons learned from past experience. The difficulties are obvious. One must assume that not all of Israel's demands would be met and that the entire supervision structure – even one in which Israel would participate – would not be able to prevent completely the renewal of the military infrastructure in Gaza.

During Operation Protective Edge, a convergence of interests between Israel and regional parties, such as Egypt, the PA, and Jordan, has emerged. These interests touch on the situation in Gaza, relations with other regional players, especially Turkey, and the complex relationship with the United States. This convergence of interests will not disappear even if Israel chooses the unilateral option, but the other parties would prefer the international umbrella of an agreement. This also entails a certain drawback, namely taking into consideration the political needs of the parties sharing Israel's interests, but in the new Middle East reconstruction, partnerships and converging interests have added value.

An agreement within an international system would force Israel to confront some of Hamas' demands, given the assumption that the regional parties, including those whose

interests are congruent with Israel's, cannot ignore the reality existing in Gaza on the eve of the military campaign, which was exacerbated by the weeks of fighting. One of the difficulties Israel will have to confront, should it choose the path of an agreement, is the limited success, if not outright failure, to channel the Israeli, regional, and international efforts toward solutions to Gaza's underlying problems while bypassing Hamas. The effort to exclude Hamas or reduce its role must be made, but the assumption must be that while full success is not guaranteed, the route of an agreement is preferable to a unilateral approach.

Israel's willingness to engage in an extensive effort to reconstruct Gaza must go hand-in-hand with the willingness to adopt – gradually, and pending the implementation of disarmament and demilitarization – steps that can, on the face of it, be seen as accepting Hamas demands. Expanding the fishing zone of the coast of Gaza, for example, is not an unreasonable demand. It will make it more difficult for the Israeli navy to monitor ships, even if they are only fishing vessels, but one can assume that if the expansion is implemented gradually the navy will be able to wrestle with this difficulty.

Lifting the siege can likewise be broken down into a series of steps, under the full supervision of Israel and in line with the implementation of other sections of the agreement. It is possible to begin immediately with Gazans entering Israel for the purpose of medical treatment, followed by visits to the West Bank by certain population groups.

Past experience has demonstrated that Hamas exploited international aid agencies and Israel's agreement to bring cement to Gaza, for example, to its own military ends. All such questions must be addressed through Israel's demands for tight supervision alongside its agreement to the comprehensive reconstruction of the Gaza Strip.

At this point, it is necessary to postpone building strategic infrastructures such as a seaport and airport until the intra-Palestinian and security pictures become clearer and an in-depth study of the economic viability of these projects is conducted. This point does not relate to urgent projects in the fields of electricity, water, and environmental pollution.

All this is possible only if Israel is prepared to investigate the viability of an agreement and afterwards weigh the advantages and drawbacks as well as the risks it incurs. The way Israel chose to deal with the Gaza issue since Hamas forced itself on the Strip has not borne the anticipated results despite three large scale military operations. Israel is of course not responsible for the current situation in Gaza, though this does not excuse the Israeli government from the attempt to find a comprehensive solution likely to generate more positive results. The cooperation created by an agreement with regional and international parties is of great importance. The improvement in Israel's situation in the international arena that would be generated by presenting such an agreement to the

international community and the ability to develop positive, stable channels with regional players are assets whose value must not be dismissed.

The idea an international establishment that can provide auspices for an agreement can refer to the UN, a coalition of interested nations, or any combination that would provide an effective response both to Israel's security needs and to the needs of the Gazan population not directly involved in terrorism, despite the difficulty in making that distinction.

