

*American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research*



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South Asia**

**“Gaza After the War”**

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for including me in this timely and important hearing. In your invitation, you suggested that the focus of my testimony should be American policy goals in Gaza, assistance to the Gaza population that does not bolster Hamas, the role of international institutions and NGOs and the intra-Palestinian divide.

These are all vital questions, and ones that Americans (among others) have sought to answer for years. Yet, for unclear reasons, too many who have engaged in the debate and analysis -- and even in the policy-making -- persist in the belief that there is a magical solution to the Israel-Palestine problem -- some trick, some person, some formula that will make it all right.

Compounding the problem is the fact that we often make assessments about diplomatic progress with little reference to the reality on the ground for Israelis and Palestinians. For example, the last administration trumpeted the fact that President Bush was the first to formally support a two state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. President Clinton was hailed as an ardent peacemaker for bringing the Israelis and the Palestinians to the brink of a supposed solution -- though even the participants in those talks now admit that the shape of the so-called solution was untenable. We have welcomed the return of the PLO to the West Bank and Gaza, the leadership of Yasser Arafat, the leadership of Abu Mazen, the responsible stewardship of Salam Fayyad, the participation of Hamas in elections (that worked out well), various truces and agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and more. We have rushed, serially, to worship at the feet of various Palestinians who we think can "deliver" without regard to their standing in Palestinian society or their actual accomplishments.

Have the Israelis and the Palestinians actually made appreciable strides in the direction of a lasting peace that will enable the Israelis to live in peace and security and the Palestinians to live in a sustainable state with responsible governance? Arguably, they have not.

You will hear in the coming months from administration officials and legions of peace process professionals that change is afoot in the Middle East, and that Arab nations are increasingly impatient with the likes of Hamas; that Egypt and Saudi Arabia and others will no longer tolerate wanton Palestinian efforts to drag Israel -- and the region -- into war. I caution you not to read too much into their evolving stances. They are animated by fear of Iran, not tolerance of Israel. They do not like Hamas because they recognize that jihadism is the face of their enemy. That may well serve American goals -- indeed, it's good news for us -- but it does not advance the Palestinians' interests.

American policy goals should be simple and straightforward: An end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict built on a stable edifice that may, but should not necessarily include a state of Palestine. A relationship with Hamas will not advance those goals, as the *raison d'être* of the group is the eradication of the Jewish state. Efforts to tinker with Palestinian politics -- efforts that the Israelis appear unable to eschew despite decades of failure -- are equally dangerous. There are no "moderate" Hamas leaders with whom we should work.

Let's just review for a moment how we got to the current state of affairs between Israel and Hamas: Israel withdrew from Gaza in August 2005. Hamas took over in 2007. Since 2005 Hamas fired approximately 6,300 rockets at Israeli civilians. During the six-month cease-fire last year, rocket attacks diminished but didn't stop, and after the truce ended last December, Hamas launched several hundred rockets, missiles and mortars. Hamas has pledged to rebuild the tunnels it uses for smuggling arms, and Israeli intelligence reports concerns that Iran will attempt to smuggle longer range missiles to Hamas, including the Fajr, which has a range of 70 kilometers.

Some have seen these developments as cause to rethink Israeli withdrawal. Frankly, decisions on this matter are in Israel's hands. The United States is not the final arbiter of Israeli security; its elected leaders are.

What we do know is that until the supply of rockets to Hamas ends, Israel will be targeted. Unless we address the supply side, the demand will continue. In light of the Obama Administration's professed intention to sit down and negotiate with Iran, it seems unlikely we will achieve many gains on the arms export/import front.

On the immediate question of aid to the Palestinians, there should be little doubt that UNRWA is central to the problem of manipulation of aid, though other NGOs are culpable as well. For decades, UNRWA has been an unapologetic advocate for Palestinian extremism and an unrelenting Israel detractor. That was no different in this recent Gaza war. UNRWA schools foment extremism, its employees are not vetted for connections to terrorist groups, its aid has been hijacked and more often than not, UNRWA has been complicit in political exploitation of its assistance to those in real need. Palestinians in Gaza are among the highest aid recipients in the world. UNRWA employs more than 20,000 people (compare that to all of UNHCR, which employs just over 6000). UNRWA is single-mindedly dedicated to perpetuating the victimhood of Palestinian refugees and pseudo-refugees. In light of its history of failure – even when graded on pure aid and development scales – it would be wise to revisit its existence.

One additional note about the role of international organizations: In the last week of January, the Palestinian Authority recognized the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court in the territories. As a result, the ICC prosecutor has decided to open an investigation into alleged war crimes by Israel (not, I should add, by Hamas). While we should not jump to conclusions about the course the ICC prosecutor will choose to take, I suspect little good can come of this development, which will require close monitoring by the United States and others concerned about the role the ICC intends to play on the world stage.

On the question of the intra-Palestinian divide, I am reminded of the (apocryphal?) question put to Henry Kissinger about the Iran-Iraq war. When asked which side he favored, he answered: I hope they both lose. Relatively speaking, Fatah is certainly better than Hamas. But then again, we are not Palestinian voters, who tried Fatah, tested them, and found them, unsurprisingly, wanting.

I would like to be able to say that Abu Mazen and Salaam Fayyad represent a new Palestine, but rather they are the old Palestine that looks better only when compared to Hamas. In fact, the Palestinian scene offers little by way of political hope for the future of the Palestinian people. In turn, the

international community has done almost nothing to aid the Palestinian political grass roots, to bring new leadership to the fore, to educate about governance or to demand real accountability from any Palestinian political leaders. It is not enough to say that standards of leadership involve not killing Israelis. The Palestinians have the right to expect accountability, good governance, economic prosperity, and hope for their own future. The main reason they don't have those most basic of human needs has little to do with Israel and a lot to do with what is wrong with the modern Middle East.

In the short term, we must push off the question of a solution to the Israel-Palestine problem until we find a solution to the Palestine problem. We must isolate Hamas, and help the Israelis to do so more effectively. We must vote with our aid money to marginalize aid agencies that do not serve anyone's interests except their own, and turn to private sector economic development as a means to build civil society. We must use the political, economic and military tools available to a great power to penalize Syria, Lebanon, Iran and others who arm and finance Hamas, and we must start any peace-building exercise at the beginning – with the understanding that the only stable peace in the Middle East rests upon a Palestine that is more concerned with jobs and education and less concerned with Zionists.