

## The Thorn in Every Plan for Gaza

Planning for the day after in Gaza faces all sorts of obstacles. The obstacle common to every vision for governance or deradicalization is that Gaza cannot be separated from the larger Palestinian arena.

**By Michael J. Koplow**

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What makes humans unique—and why artificial intelligence is not going to dislodge us quite so soon—is that we are able to take in data and recognize patterns. In encountering a new or unfamiliar situation, we immediately compare it to other situations, determine the common variables that make it the same as something else we have seen, and draw lessons accordingly. Anyone thinking through what should happen in Gaza once Hamas no longer controls the territory will follow this approach. There are concrete problems to address: figuring out how to establish security, how to set up a functioning government, how to deradicalize the population. The natural thing to do is search for other historical examples of when these things were successfully done, and apply the lessons learned in formulating plans for moving forward.

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There is, however, one big problem with making comparisons between Gaza and other situations—whether it be defeating ISIS, creating a new government in Iraq, or deradicalizing Germany and Japan after their defeat in WWII—which makes these comparisons inapt. The problem is that it assumes that Gaza is a self-contained entity, when in reality that perception is an artificial one. Anything that happens in Gaza is connected to and impacted by what happens in the West Bank, and the entire Palestinian arena is impacted by the fact of Israeli military occupation. Any plan, whether it addresses who will be in control or how to transform Palestinian society in

Gaza, is going to bump up against these fundamental factors, which, like gravity, exert their influence at all times even if they are not visible.

Take the issue of governance. There is an array of plans that have been put out—many of them smart and well-conceived—that contain different ideas for what should replace Hamas; some envision local Palestinian clan leaders or businessmen, some a group comprised of representatives from Arab states, some an international mandate. All of these plans envision creating an arrangement for Gaza that is unconnected to what exists in the West Bank, and given that Gaza now faces a wholly different set of circumstances and that the Palestinian Authority would be in no position to take charge of Gaza tomorrow even if it wanted to, it makes sense to treat it differently. But Palestinians in Gaza do not think of themselves as Gazans; they think of themselves as part of a larger Palestinian nationality. When you ask Palestinians whether they prefer the PA or Hamas, there is a reason that nobody answers that they prefer one for Gaza and a different one for the West Bank. Any permanent arrangement for Gaza that does not in some way account for the governance structure in the West Bank is going to be incomplete and guarantees ongoing instability.

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The issue of deradicalization is similar. There is lots of discussion about Nazi Germany and the success of the Allies in not only defeating the Nazi regime, but deradicalizing the German population. People also point to recent efforts by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to root out radicalization in their societies by overhauling and centralizing educational curricula, appointing imams for mosques, and even issuing mandatory state-approved Friday sermons. These are all things that could be tried in Gaza, and they will hopefully meet with some degree of success. But imagine if after WWII, there was another larger Japanese island that encompassed more than half of the Japanese population that had not surrendered, and the U.S. attempted to rebuild post-war Japan on the island it conquered while still fighting on this second island. How successful would a deradicalization program be if the Japanese in one territory were absorbing a constant stream of their Japanese brethren in the other territory continuing

to fight and proclaim resistance? Israeli government policies for a decade and a half purposely tried to separate the West Bank and Gaza, but Palestinians never accepted that distinction. Continuing to make the same mistake is not going to be any more of a recipe for future success than it was a recipe for past success.

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Any plan for deradicalization that ignores the situation in the West Bank is going to be a half measure at best. And while a large part of the answer has to be deep reforms in how the Palestinian Authority runs the West Bank, addressing incitement and education first and foremost, that alone is not going to solve the problem. While Hamas is a terrorist group dedicated to Israel’s complete annihilation, the underlying source of radicalization for most Palestinians is their lack of independence and sovereignty. So long as Palestinians in Gaza see what takes place in the West Bank every day without any change, treating them as if they are insulated from the situation there is myopic. Deradicalization is not a strategy for spoilers, but a strategy for Palestinian society, and without addressing Israeli military occupation in the West Bank and the collapse of any real hope that Palestinians have for viable statehood, any measures that Israel institutes will only move the needle in marginal ways. Palestinians have to own up to their radicalism, but Israel also has to own up to the ways in which its policies aid and abet that radicalism.

Identifying patterns is critical to solving problems. But Gaza is its own entity, and trying to cut and paste solutions from elsewhere won’t work without also identifying the important ways that Gaza is different and adjusting accordingly. The enormous glaring way that Gaza is different is that it is part of a larger whole, and that larger whole remains subject to the overarching issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, irrespective of whether Hamas is eradicated and who runs Gaza. Figuring out the day after in Gaza cannot and should not wait for a larger political resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but it cannot and should not proceed as if that larger conflict is non-existent.

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