

Israel – Hamas 2023 Symposium – Time for the Arab League and EU to Step Up on Gaza Security

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by [Michael Kelly](#) | Dec 4, 2023



When the Israel-Hamas conflict eventually comes to an enduring ceasefire, the aftermath will require a constitutional settlement. This will not be easy, but while a new two-State solution is being negotiated, security will be of foremost concern to both parties. Honest brokers with capacity are needed but hard to come by. The United Nations is not capable; the United States is not trusted.

The Arab League and the European Union (EU) should perform this vital function while Israel and the Palestinian Authority are engaged in hashing out the arrangement everyone agrees is needed. Arab League troops can provide security guarantees from within the Gaza Strip, and EU troops can provide the same on the Israeli side. Capacity and trust. Palestinians will be far more comfortable, for instance, with Egyptian and Tunisian soldiers on their side of a modest demilitarized zone around Gaza, and Israelis would no doubt feel the same with Dutch and Italian troops on their side.

The Broader Regional Calculus

The Arab League has repeatedly endorsed not only normalization of relations with Israel through the years, but also considered peacekeeping operations in Africa and elsewhere. And the EU has ample experience with such operations from lengthy patrols in Bosnia and Kosovo. For this to work, however, the Arab world must come to the realization that it has been hoodwinked by Iran—something it is presently not willing to hear nor consider—especially because Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi was received by the Saudis in the wake of Israel’s bombardment of northern Gaza. Eventually, however, Arab leaders will see that the both the manner and timing of Hamas’s attacks on 10/7 reveal only one regional instigator and beneficiary: Iran.

As to manner, Iran’s fingerprints are all over how Hamas carried out its incursion. The phased advances in predefined directions to particular undefended kibbitzes, merciless and grotesque killing, beheading, and burning of innocents, raping of civilians, hostage-taking to prolong the conflict, broadcast of atrocities on social media to fan Israeli outrage, ensuring a harsh response from the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), and finally retreat to hide behind human shields thereby increasing the Palestinian civilian death toll, are hallmarks of strategic and tactical planning well beyond anything this small terrorist group has ever demonstrated itself capable of.

As to timing, Hamas’s attack handily sidelined Saudi Arabia’s imminent accession to the Abraham Accords, an event which would have upended the Middle East power balance to Tehran’s detriment by normalizing relations between Riyadh and Jerusalem. The IDF’s predictably muscular response resulting in over 11,000 Palestinian casualties then united not only Arab but also Muslim countries against Israel, the eternal enemy of the Mullahs. Moreover, nobody is talking about the Iranian nuclear problem at this point. And Ukraine is completely out of the headlines, a boon to Iran’s erstwhile ally Russia. Finally, Syria’s brutal president, Bashar al-Assad, another old Iranian ally, is undergoing a political rehabilitation as Arab countries rally to the Palestinian cause.

The Persians gain everything from this turn of events and the Arabs gain nothing. Once that manipulation becomes clear, the Arab League should seize this opportunity to firmly play a constructive role in reshaping this part of the Levant in a way that ensures cooperative economic prosperity, mutually guaranteed security, and safeguards against further geopolitical meddling by Iran. The Arab world has longed to control its own destiny since the collapse of their Ottoman oppressors over a century ago; now is the time to step forward and do just that.

A European Contribution

Likewise, the EU has arrived a moment when its foreign and defense policies are finally beginning to gel after decades of effort. The war in Ukraine has politically crystalized not only capitals across the continent, but institutions within the Union, with an ability to focus in a

way they've never proven capable of before. Brussels is demonstrating the strength of its collective action.

The European Defense Union is the apparatus that has previously deployed EU peacekeepers on over 30 missions of a much smaller scale in Europe, Africa, and Asia. These have been successful, and they are models which could pave the way for deployment to Israel. While Europe's efforts toward Middle East peace have oscillated between central and peripheral roles, the EU can demonstrably place its foreign and security policy marker here in an impactful way.

Concluding Thoughts

Sometimes recipes for success are made more effective when key ingredients are changed. The events of October 7 and their aftermath have shredded prior political and diplomatic frameworks that stitched together fragile security arrangements between Israel and Palestine. The Arab League and the EU are the missing ingredients that can alter the flavor and texture of this security recipe and provide it a better chance of success. Without it, security issues are likely to remain on the table to further bedevil efforts toward a two-State solution. Israel, Palestine, and the world, need that solution sooner rather than later. The Arab League and the EU can help deliver it.

Michael Kelly holds the Sen. Allen A. Sekt Endowed Chair in Law at Creighton University School of Law.

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