

Transcript of Teleconference: Gaza Conflict Resumes After Ceasefire Ends

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Moderator: Maria-Stella Gatzoulis
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Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. Today's call is being recorded. If you have any objections you may disconnect at this time. All participants will be in a listen only mode for the duration of the call. During the question and answer session if you would like to ask a question, please press star one. I would now like to turn the call over to Mr. Aaron David Miller. You may begin.

Aaron David Miller: Thanks so much and welcome to all of you and welcome to the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars 33rd (unintelligible) briefing. Today we have a lot to cover in a very short period of time. And I'm really pleased that we have both (Diora Iland) and (Halil Shicocke) on the line. There are no two finer analysts of Israeli and Palestinian political scene and I want to thank them in advance for joining us.

Just a housekeeping, two housekeeping notes. Number one, (Diora) needs to leave at about 10:40 or so, so we will go until then. And I'm hoping (Halil) if there are additional questions, you will state on the line to field them.

The situation in Gaza is uncertain. We have another three day humanitarian cease fire against the backdrop of negotiations in Cairo and an ongoing political and security crisis in Iraq. So it's a complicated time and I want to turn the conversation over to you (Halil) for some opening remarks. Thanks so much again for participating.

(Halil Shicocke): Thank you. Let me start by answering the question as to what might happen first and then talk a little bit about the various actors and the impact of all of this, the long term impact of this. It is obviously not clear where this will end. I tend to think that an agreement is feasible.

Neither Hamas nor Israel want a war of attrition. So a long term ceasefire might be feasible. One that would include easing the siege but some sort of exchange and postponement of some of the other issues in return for the opening of the (Rafaf) Crossing. These might be the elements in a deal.

Hamas certainly would be the immediate winner in such a deal, but however could also benefit in the long term. Nonetheless this is not the only possible outcome although I think it is most likely. Escalation is also possible, but I doubt very much that it will escalate to a total war or full occupation of Gaza.

There is also a third possibility that there will be neither agreement nor escalation. Which means that there would be some sort of de facto arrangement in which there is some exchange of fire but it is something that both sides can live with.

On the part of Hamas, I think Hamas is coming out much stronger out of this domestically than before the war. It is now seen probably as the hero of the moment for Palestinians. This message of victory is bound to strongly

resonate with public opinion. But its regional status is not likely to change. It will be as bad as it was before the war. It is not likely to change.

Hamas is not likely to change its domestic agenda, its search for legitimacy, through some sort of integration into the Palestinian domestic political system will probably continue. This can be done through the reconciliation agreement it made with (Fara). This commitment will probably continue although it is not clear how fast it will go.

If elections were held today, Hamas would do very, very well, although I'm not sure it can win those elections. It is probably more willing now to go to elections than any time before,

but even after elections and even if it wins or do very well, I think for Hamas to be effectively integrated into the Palestinian political system and become more acceptable regionally and internationally, it will need to reassess the positions it has taken after its (unintelligible) victor in 2006.

I tend to believe that Hamas is more willing now to reconsider its positions. As far as Abbas is concerned, I think he by now has lost considerable public support, although he's motivated now to take a leading role in the post-war regiment in Gaza, it isn't clear the extent to which he can.

It depends on what (Sisa) is willing to give him, it depends on what Netanyahu is willing to give him. It also depends on the capacity of his prime minister and the reconciliation government to be daring and take the initiative and show determination in unifying the institutions of the PA, something they haven't really shown so far.

Going to elections soon might not be something that Abbas might want to do at this moment, as the case was before the war. Nonetheless, he can still win elections I believe. He will probably continue to look for ways that would make that possible. To do that he would have to do very well in taking later control and unifying the West Bank and Gaza.

His competition with Hamas, however, might make him more willing now to take risks with his Israel and the U.S. Mostly, taking Israel to international forums. He has already taken steps that is bringing him much, much closer to signing their own treaty and it might not be easy for him to back away from that. His motivation of course to seal greater control over Gaza is not enough.

As I said earlier, he needs to show greater initiative, particularly domestically within (Fara) within his own party which suffers from considerable fragmentation, particularly in Gaza. To stabilize the situation, I think we need to aim at four goals, produce a lasting cessation of violence which is I think is feasible, improving conditions in the Gaza strip, helping empower Abbas and improving the overall Palestinian-Israeli relations.

I doubt very much that we can do all of these four. But I think efforts to stabilize our situation should aim at all four. For that, Israel, Hamas and the Palestinian authority, all of them need to change their behavior. Israel in particular needs to accept the Palestinian reconciliation deal and the government and contribute to ending the Gaza siege and help empower Abbas both in Gaza and in the West Bank.

Netanyahu should in fact view reconciliation positively and help move the election agenda forward. There is no doubt that if Abbas is able to win such elections, this would be a game changer.

In any case, without that, the situation will certainly worsen. The most dramatic impact might be on the future of the two state solution, a combination of U.S. failure so far, the Gaza war and a failure to stabilize conditions could very well deliver a very serious blow to the future of that solution.

Aaron David Miller: (Halil) thank you so much, fascinating presentation. You covered an enormous amount of ground. (Diora) over to you.

(Diora Iland): I think that it is clear or maybe could have been clearer before the operation, that whenever we are talking about Gaza from the Israeli perspective, it should be clear that Israel does have only security interest in Gaza. We do not have any territorial interest in Gaza, we do not have any political interest in Gaza and we do not have any economic interest in Gaza. So the whole interests are security-wise.

Now we never would speak about security interests in Gaza, it is not only a profession of violence, which is obvious, we do expect to have a very long period of a complete cessation of any kind of violence. But also we want to make sure that the threat that actually can be (unintelligible) would be (unintelligible) or even eliminated and we are thinking about two main methods.

One of them is the promise, the promise that we'll (unintelligible) and sealed by Hamas in order to be some kind of avenues to bring (unintelligible) that are below the ground at this time. The threat was destroyed, but it is important for us that there will be no way to rebuild them. And the second thing is the huge (unintelligible) of rockets including medium range and long range missiles that can cover (unintelligible) including Tel Aviv.

I don't think that Israel will tolerate the existence of such a weapon in the hands of Hamas. So these are the only real Israeli interests. And if we can find a way that these Israeli interests are met then Israel can be very flexible as regards to all other methods.

And especially I want to emphasize the political ones. Israel might have sound wishful thinking but it doesn't mean that we do have explicit interests to see a return of the Palestinian authority to Gaza at the expense of Hamas.

This is by the way, more or less the Egyptian interest, but this is not necessarily the Israel interest. So when we decide to present the Israeli interests on one hand and Hamas interests on the other hand, we can see that we are not in absolute dispute.

Both of us, and here I agree with (Halil) addressing a cessation of violence. Neither side is interested in a long attrition war and at the same time, as far as Israel is concerned, Hamas can continue and control Gaza and actually manage to build de facto independent state in Gaza which is not bothering Israel. It might bother others, but it does not bother us.

At the very same time we can agree to any projects that will re-build Gaza, and rebuilding for such in Gaza, and even to develop its economy and we do understand that huge economic investments are required in these (unintelligible) and can cooperate we can all do.

Even the issue of what is known as the (figs) is something that Israel can be, and I believe will be more flexible with regard to the number one, the passages between Israel and Gaza and even the people that might be, if you want, the symbol of the removal of the closure is something that is not hopefully, not absolutely rejected by Israel.

It is something that in principle can be discussed. I'm not saying exactly that this is the official policy of the government of Israel but I'm presenting my personal view that the seaport in Gaza can be built. But it has to be part of a real package deal in which the Israeli requirements for the demilitarization of Gaza will be part of the deal and if this matter can be guaranteed, then Israel can be much more flexible in regard to all other Hamas expectations.

So that's where we are right now. And of course, since the military conflict did not end in a very clear decisive victory by either side, each side when they arrived in Cairo, had of course, very high expectations and wanted to be clear to the other side what would be achieved.

Certainly it is not going to be that easy but as far as I can understand, both sides, and especially Hamas by the way, understand that there is a limit to what they can achieve and they are beginning to adjust their expectations to the reality.

So I can express little optimism about the chance which reasonable arrangements, reasonable deal in Cairo. But at the very same time it has to be emphasized that one of the problems, one of the reasons that Hamas is not very happy with what is happening.

And this is one of the reasons why it violated the last ceasefire like it did to the other previous ceasefires is because he is frustrated by the way that the Egyptians are trying to humiliate him by trying to increase the influence of the presence of the Palestinian authority in Gaza which of course are not acceptable by Hamas and as I say, they represent interests of others. This is not in Israel's interest.

Actually what is happening right now in Cairo is not a deliberate, the dispute of the literal confrontations between Israel on one side and Hamas on the other side, but also some other interests, especially Egyptians interests having injected and of course they caused more problems than support, to an ability to reach a reasonable arrangement.

Aaron David Miller: (Diora) thank you so much. Let me remind all of our listeners to press star one to queue for questions. In the interim I have a question for you (Halil) and for (Diora). For (Halil) when you say and it's intriguing that you may believe that circumstances could create an opportunity for Hamas to "reassess its positions," are you talking the basic strategic positions of the organization itself?

(Halil Shicocke): Yes, I think evidence was there before the war that Hamas and the aftermath of the spring, the changes in Egypt and so on, was seriously reconsidering positions the organization has taken in the past. And I think there was a much greater willingness as part of this reassessment to reconsider those fundamental positions that Hamas took back in 2006.

Perhaps the most important input that has contributed to that was the position that was taken by the Morsi regime, the Muslim Brothers, regarding the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and the kind of confusion that this has created within Hamas circles and the kind of dialogue that ensued. And I think part of that dialogue has lead Hamas to conclude it, there should be some flexibility in their position.

I think there are other changes as well to do with the domestic political environment and the way Hamas related to other factions and so on but I think the most fundamental change that is possible. It isn't, it's not clear to what

extent the war might have shifted things, but I think it is something worth looking for and testing.

Aaron David Miller: (Halil) thank you. And (Diora) intriguing comment that it is in Egypt's interest to see the Palestinian authority return to Gaza in a substantive and symbolic manner, but it's not necessarily in Israel's interests. Can you elaborate?

(Diora Iland): I believe it is also important whenever we speak about interests, to return to what I believe is the right definition of an interest. And an interest is not simply general wishful thinking. An interest is something that is important enough that in order to achieve it, you are ready to pay a price.

Now maybe Israel would prefer to see a stronger influence of the Palestinian authority in Gaza and maybe someday even a collapse of Hamas. But whenever I say that this is not in Israel's interest, I mean that we should not and we actually do not intend to pay any price for something like this.

And the fact that Hamas expressed its frustration by breaking the ceasefire again and again only because or mainly because of the humiliating way that they are treated by the Egyptians, of course it does not serve any of the Israeli interests.

And I want to say again, as far as we are concerned, the only interests that we have in Gaza are security ones and if this interest can be guaranteed, then as far as we are concerned the political situation in Gaza and what exactly should be the balance of powers between Hamas and Palestinian authority, this is not part of our business.

And I even tend to agree that whenever Israel tried to intervene within the domestic Palestinian policy, just as we did several times on the West Bank and Gaza and similarly what we tried to do in Lebanon back in 82, whenever we tried to influence the internal politics of some of our neighbors it has always lead to some mistakes. So I think that this lesson has been learned and we try to focus on what seems to be only legitimate Israeli interests.

Aaron David Miller: Thank you much. Question from (Mahamed Dulis) from Gallup. (Mahamed) are you there?

(Mahamed): Hello. Yes, I think there's a delay, yes, I'm here.

Aaron David Miller: Yes, go ahead please.

(Mahamed): Great, I just had a question to Mr. (Shicocke). What is the, as your understanding, the current state of public opinion among Gazans on Hamas specifically and on sort of hopes for future peace. I know that obviously research may not be amenable in public opinion field these days with the security situation, but sort of what's your latest take on the perception of Gazans on Hamas?

(Halil Shicocke): I believe, but first of all no polling has taken place in Gaza since the start of the war. But based on previous cases where war took place back in 2008 and 9 and in 2012, Hamas came out much more liked by the public. Its mission, approach was supported a lot more. So this is temporary, it didn't last more than six months to a year.

But evidence in the West Bank, however, and polling has been conducted in the West Bank, shows in fact, unbelievable spike in Hamas' popularity in the West Bank. Now remember, Hamas' popularity is higher in Gaza than in the

West Bank. This is the case before the war. This has actually been the case for a very, very long time.

And in the West Bank, Hamas' popularity has not really been very high, but current findings in the West Bank indicate tremendous increase in Hamas' popularity. I don't think that this is going to last for a very long time.

These surveys were conducted during the war and so people's emotions were speaking rather than their real positions. Nonetheless I think even after things calm down, Hamas' popularity will go up considerably.

Aaron David Miller: (Halil) thank you. We have a question now from (Leander Bernstein) from the IRA News Agency, Russian. (Leander) are you there?

(Leander Bernstein): Yes I am.

Aaron David Miller: Please go ahead.

(Leander Bernstein): All right, great. My question is this exchange, this region conflict really exposed a lot of fissures in the Israeli-U.S. relationship politically. It didn't seem to effect tense relationships but I would like to know where you see that U.S.-Israel relationships going following this conflict. There have also been some who have suggested, activist groups who have suggested the U.S. reconsider its \$4 billion annually contributed to Israeli defense?

Aaron David Miller: (Diora) do you want to answer?

(Diora Iland): Yes. I think that the relationship between the United States and Israel continues to be stable regardless of some debates and even some public disputes, as we could see it in the past few weeks, and not only in the past few

weeks. It is, let's say it is public domain that the personal relationship between President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu are far from being so good compared to a lot of other (unintelligible).

But I don't think that it will change dramatically the relationship between the two countries. And especially in regards to a very simple but very basic American segment that says that Israel should be strong enough in order to defend itself to fight against all enemies and against all coalitions of enemies.

This is a sentence that is repeatedly announced by every American president and I believe that it continues to reflect the reality today. However, I think that Israel made some mistakes, especially in the way, the wrong way that we treated the Secretary of State Kerry who came here with a very good will, tried to reach some sort of agreement, maybe made some mistakes but the way that the Israelis treated him publicly, not only about the press, but speaking about a lot of (unintelligible) issues was unnecessary. It caused some temporary damage but I don't think it has any importance in this.

Aaron David Miller: (Diora) thank you. We have a question now from (Moonser Slayman) from El Mayadin television. (Moonser) are you there?

(Moonser): Yes, thank you very much Aaron. I want to follow up on that same question but specifically about what is the U.S. role now in the negotiation? What's the assessment of U.S. relation with Egypt? With the current regime in Egypt and whether there is a role of a guarantor of any such or any potential agreement may come up. How that agreement may be shaped by whom? By United Nations resolution? By U.S. guarantees? How do you assess that?

Aaron David Miller: (Diora)?

(Diora Iland): Yes. If we think about it, the literal relationship between Egypt and the United States, I think that there is a dramatic improvement in the last few months. Let me remind you that when (Sisi) was still the leader when it was, still was not elected to be president, the Americans greeted him as someone who was responsible for illegitimate (unintelligible) and actually they refused to cooperate with him and they stopped some of the American's military assistance to Egypt because the Americans were concerned, I'm speaking about the period of six months ago.

Well eight months ago, the legitimate leader was the elected president, (unintelligible). I think that this policy has changed significantly in the last few months. I think that Americans do understand that (Sisi) is a good and reliable potential partner for the United States and they begin to treat him this way.

Ironically, six months ago or eight months ago, Israel was in a position to try to persuade the Americans to continue to give military support to Egypt, something that a few weeks ago no one could believe that such a scenario could develop.

If you refer to the specific American involvement in the talks in Cairo, well I don't know exactly, because Israel doesn't have communications with the Egyptians who are living with them and we don't necessarily need someone else.

But whenever we come and at some point it will come to questions of reconstruction of Gaza and some other more international agreements and here I believe that the United States will lead it, even if it is not related to any official resolution, it will be some kind of international decision that will be between the unions and the United States I'm sure.

(Moonser): Can I follow Aaron with one thing about the Israeli-Egyptian relation now compared to other previous regimes?

(Diora Iland): The Israel-Egyptian relationship I believe is one of the best if I compare it to any other experience in the past 35 years. We have disagreements and it is not common that we have some kind of common enemies whether it's the brothers of Hamas or Islamic jihad but it is in wider context whenever we think about the Iranians, attempting to influence the region and other things.

So I think that Israel is now very careful in speaking about Egypt, not to spread officially the (unintelligible) or the credit that is given to Egypt because it might be counterproductive but if you ask them what do you really think. They really, I would say appreciate very much whatever General (Sici) is doing both domestically and ultimately in regards with the relationship with Israel, Netanyahu hopes that it continues to be this way.

Aaron David Miller: (Diora) thank you. We have a question from (Mohammed El Sharif) from the Arab League. (Mohammed El Sharif) of the Arab League are you there? Okay, let's move to (Gary Mitchell) from the Mitchell Report. (Gary) are you there?

(Gary Mitchell): Yes, I'm there. Can you hear me?

Aaron David Miller: Yes.

(Gary Mitchell): All right. Thank you. I'd like to ask both of our guests, what I will call the Rip Van Winkle question.

And that is, imagine that instead of having this conversation today with this group of people, you were talking with a group of people who have been asleep for the last few months, and have just woken and would ask you, what in any sort of fundamental and strategic way, has the situation that exists between Israel and the Palestinians, changed and how would you characterize the nature of that change?

Is it leaning for the better or leaning for the worse? And I'm not asking you to cover the specifics of the last two months but sort of say well, two months ago, there were these set of circumstances in existence, now it's the 4th of August and there's these circumstances and I'm just interested in sort of a broad contextual strategic sense of where we are and whether it leans to the good or in the other direction.

Aaron David Miller: Great question, (Halil) to you first.

(Halil Shicocke): I don't think there has been any strategic surprises or changes here. However, I think we have seen continued deterioration in the situation. I think the most likely damage is going to be to the two state solution and the extent to which the parties can bring that back to life. Hamas is stronger, its message is stronger.

Abbas is weaker, his message is weaker. He will be going to the UN out of that weakness and an Israeli-Palestinian confrontation, a diplomatic confrontation, inevitable, that could very well lead to the collapse of the Palestinian authority.

But there is nothing strategically new about this. This was a process that was already ongoing. And on the Israeli side of things, there is no doubt that Israel comes out with a lot more security concerns about Gaza about the West Bank.

And there is no doubt that the stronger Netanyahu is not someone who is likely to have any kind of domestic pressure as President Obama wanted, to make peace. So I see the situation evolving in a manner that accelerates the demise of the two state solution and bring about a quicker collapse of the Palestinian authority.

Aaron David Miller: (Diora)?

(Diora Iland): I tend to agree that at least for the time being we could not see any sign of any sort of change. Some people hope that if we manage to reach an arrangement in Cairo, it might lead to resumption of the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians and it will lead eventually to a comprehensive two state solution agreement. I don't think that this is going to happen.

A few months ago the talk about a two state solution reached a dead end, not because of the situation in Gaza, Gaza has nothing to do with it but because of the differences between Israel and the Palestinian authority in regard to the way its living, seems to be too wide.

So I don't think there is any break room for the time being and there is no direct or immediate influence of the situation in Gaza regardless of the result of the strategic issue of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship.

Aaron David Miller: (Diora) thank you. I think (Mohammed Shiraf) from the Arab League is back on the line. (Mohammed) are you there?

(Mohammed): Yes, do you hear me?

Aaron David Miller: Yes, we do.

(Mohammed): Okay, okay thank you very much then. My question is to the Major General (Celeran). Regarding you talked about security and that's the only thing that you are worried about and not territory, not political agenda, not the economy. But here you have, you are surrounding a place, besieging a place and blockade the Gaza for many years. And also, as Mr. (Cameron) (unintelligible) said that Gaza is the biggest open air prison on earth.

And then you talk about security and now Hamas proved that nobody secured the area, even Israel is secured by the Iron Dome, by the United States that kept Israel security, qualitatively stronger than all the Arab countries combined. So here those people who are under blockade to hurt you or to fight back?

Aaron David Miller: Okay, (Diora)?

(Diora Iland): Yes. I understand the question. Number one there is no contradiction within the Israel interest, and what is presented as the let's take the best situation in Gaza and the misery of the people there. Because whatever is done with Israel is done only because of security interests and nothing more than that.

And we could see, and even when we were never persuaded to let, let's say cement and other materials to enter in Gaza, they were not used in order to build new schools, but they used most of them in order to build (unintelligible) and the only reason why these (unintelligible) are built is in order to enable terrorists to try to attack Israeli civilians.

However, I do say now that certain or more even (unintelligible) with stability can be made in regards to the regime of the passages around Gaza and there

should be a trade-off between the security needs and removal of these restrictions.

And I said, and again this is my personal view, I do believe that even a seaport can be built in Gaza, not in order to let every ship to arrive there because then Iranian ships will come with a lot of weapons that we cannot tolerate but there could be an arrangement in which there could be a seaport in Gaza and only shuttered from a few countries that are monitored by the police.

Those countries, (unintelligible) this is something that I believe that Israel can take. But we have to remember at the very same time that Palestinians themselves in Gaza prefer to open the passage to Egypt, what is known as the (unintelligible). And this is between two Arab nations. It is between Gaza and it is between Egypt.

And I think this question should be presented to the Egyptians, why don't you open up the passage to much more movement of goods and people because this is something that is let's say

Number one, much more desired by the Palestinians in Gaza and number two it does not create any real threat to anyone and I guess that this question should be presented so Israel is not the only one who tries, is supposed to enable much more movement of goods and people from Gaza into Gaza.

Aaron David Miller: (Diora) thank you. We have a question from (George Nelson) from (Nabfak). (George) are you there?

(George): I'm here. I just have a question about declining U.S. influence in the area. Could it be that the U.S.'s influence has declined in the Middle East simply

because regimes have changed and that times are different now and that just has to take its course?

Aaron David Miller: (Halil) do you want to give us your view on that one?

(Halil Shicocke): I think the U.S. is weak simply because the U.S. won't use its leverage. The U.S. is trying to mediate between two parties, the Israelis and the Palestinians. There is no doubt there are other parties here, but on the two sides, on the Palestinian front, the U.S. is weaker because both Israel and the Palestinian authority depend greatly on U.S. support, financial and political and otherwise. And the U.S. isn't really using that leverage now to achieve goals it defines for itself as important, this is why it is weak.

Aaron David Miller: (Diora) do you have a comment?

(Diora Iland): Yes, I think that the weakness of the United States is a result of two reasons. Number one is that this administration is reluctant from the use of force under almost any circumstances. We could see even what is happening in Iraq right now.

Even if you are talking only about air strikes, but we are speaking about so little, so sporadic air strikes, that this is almost pathetic. So if the situation in Iraq has the great force of this new Islamic movement is a real threat, it will be a creature that actually was built by the United States. If this is the existing government of Iraq, then we could expect to see much more for the American involvement there but we cannot see.

So this is one reason, reluctance from any kind of use of force, and this is many times it is understood as a sign of weakness. And the second thing is that the United States believes that the right way to move forward is to build

democracy and the word democracy and the word election will actually be answer for everything.

And it lead them for example to show, not very I would say, still, attitude toward President Mubarak for example, who was a very reliable and close ally of the United States and in this region it is, there's no much appreciation to behavior like this.

So the Americans look for sometimes opportunistic behavior and attempt to get something just because it showed a little bit more democracy as the all important element is perceived as a terrible mistake and I think that that's the way that things are understood in this part of the world.

Aaron David Miller: (Diora) thank you. We have question from the Wilson Center's (Holla Zembyare). (Holla)?

(Holla): (Halil) the question is for you. Hi, nice to have you back.

(Halil Shicocke): Hello (Holla).

(Holla): (Halil) can you talk a little bit about the split in Hamas, those who wanted to go to Cairo, those how believed that they can continue with sending rockets over Israel. And at the end of the day, was that same government continue or should we expect a new leadership emerging for Hamas?

(Halil Shicocke): (Holla), I don't think there is a great deal of differences among Hamas. I don't agree with (Diora's) assessment that the military wing of Hamas was unhappy with something and that it was quick to violate the ceasefire. I don't think it was an intentional desire on the part of Hamas to violate the ceasefire on Black Friday.

When that happened, I think it happened for reasons beyond Hamas' control and therefore I don't see. I think the main difference within Hamas right now revolves around the question of the role of Egypt. With most of Hamas leaders leaving, that deal, whatever deal they make must involve Egypt, and must involve improvement in the relationship between Hamas and Egypt.

This I think is considered to be a strategic goal for the movement, without which Hamas believes that its regional standing and its domestic standing among Palestinians will be negatively affected. And these leaders are doing their best at the moment to try and use the current crisis in order to achieve that goal. The military wing of Hamas thinks the hell with the (Rafa) Crossing and let's have an airport or let's have a seaport.

So there is this debate it seems within Hamas on the extent to which the movement should do whatever Egypt wants or should seek to break away from Egypt. I don't think, there might also have been some differences over the extent to which Hamas has made concessions to (Fara) and the reconciliation talks.

With some in the military who do not have to deal with the financial issues and the political problems and the issues of legitimacy and so forth, not appreciating the extent to which Hamas weaknesses have forced the political leadership of Hamas to kind of make the concessions it made to (Fara) when the military wing looking at its own military capacity was thinking that it had a great capacity, it's not in need to make concessions. This is probably one reason why the escalation this time around was possible and inevitable leading to the war in Gaza.

Aaron David Miller: (Diora) are you still there?

(Diora Iland): Yes, I am.

Aaron David Miller: Do you want to add anything about splits between the military, so-called splits between the military and the political wing?

(Diora Iland): The only thing that I can say is the impression of most Israeli analysts is that the strongest side is the military wing and the real decisions are not necessarily decided by (Hamad Marshal) and others, but are decided by people like (Mohamadin) who is the leader of the military wing and he is very extreme in his approach. And this is I would say the real voice of Hamas is actually presented by him.

Aaron David Miller: Okay. I think, it's now 10:45. We don't have additional questions and I don't want to strain anyone's patience or time. I want to thank (Halil Shicocke) and (Diora Iland) for fascinating, very fascinating astute presentations, and I want to thank all of you for joining. Until next time, thank you so much.

Coordinator: Thank you for your participation in today's conference. All parties may disconnect at this time.

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