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### EXCERPTED OVERVIEW

A war neither Israel nor Hamas truly wanted turned into a war both are willing to wage. The six-month ceasefire that expired on 19 December was far from ideal. Israel suffered through periodic rocket fire and the knowledge that its foe was amassing lethal firepower. Hamas endured a punishing economic blockade, undermining its hopes of ruling Gaza. A sensible compromise, entailing an end to rocket launches and an opening of the crossings should have been available. But without bilateral engagement, effective third party mediation or mutual trust, it inexorably came to this: a brutal military operation in which both feel they have something to gain. ( )

To be sustainable, cessation of hostilities must be directly followed by steps addressing both sides core concerns:

an indefinite ceasefire pursuant to which:

Hamas would halt all rocket launches, keep armed militants at 500 metres from Israels border and make other armed organisations comply; and

Israel would halt all military attacks on and withdraw all troops from Gaza;

real efforts to end arms smuggling into Gaza, led by Egypt in coordination with regional and international actors;

dispatch of a multinational monitoring presence to verify adherence to the ceasefire, serve as liaison between the two sides and defuse potential crises; countries like France, Turkey and Qatar, as well as organisations such as the UN, could play an important part in this; and

opening of Gazas crossings with Israel and Egypt, together with:

return of an EU presence at the Rafah crossing and its extension to Gazas crossings with Israel; and

coordination between Hamas authorities and the (Ramallah-based) PA at the crossings.

That last point Hamass role is, of course, the rub, the unresolved dilemma that largely explains why the tragedy unfolded as it did. Gazas two-year story has been one of collective failure: by Hamas, which missed the opportunity to act as a responsible political actor; of Israel, which stuck to a shortsighted policy of isolating Gaza and seeking to undermine Hamas that neither helped it nor hurt them; of the PA leadership, which refused to accept the consequences of the Islamists electoral victory, sought to undo it and ended up looking like the leader of one segment of the Palestinian community against the other; and of the international community, many regional actors included, which demanded Hamas turn from militant to political organisation without giving it sufficient incentives to do so and only recognised the utility of Palestinian unity after spending years obstructing it.

This should change. Sustainable calm can be achieved neither by ignoring Hamas and its constituents nor by harbouring the illusion that, pummelled into submission, it will accept what it heretofore has rejected. Palestinian reconciliation is a priority, more urgent but also harder than ever before; so, too, is the Islamists acceptance of basic international obligations. In the meantime, Hamas if Israel does not take the perilous step of toppling it will have to play a political and security role in Gaza and at the crossings. This might mean a victory for Hamas, but

that is the inevitable cost for a wrongheaded embargo, and by helping end rocket fire and producing a more stable border regime, it would just as importantly be a victory for Israel and, crucially, both peoples as well.

Source: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5838&l=1>

Full Report: [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle\\_east\\_north\\_africa/arab\\_israeli\\_conflict/b26\\_ending\\_the\\_war\\_in\\_gaza.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle_east_north_africa/arab_israeli_conflict/b26_ending_the_war_in_gaza.pdf)