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ROOM DEBATE

A Running Commentary on the News

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Taking Risks After the Gaza War

By [DANIEL GORDIS](#)

Smoke above underground tunnels after an Israeli air strike in Rafah, Gaza Strip. (Photo: Khaled Hasan/Bloomberg News)

Daniel Gordis, senior vice president of the *Shalem Center* in Jerusalem, joins us in discussing the consequences of Israel's war against Hamas, as fierce fighting entered its **18th day** on Monday. Mr. Gordis's next book, "*Saving Israel: How the Jewish People Can Win a War That May Never End*," will be published in March.

The Israel-Gaza Conflict

Other experts on this panel discussing the war in Gaza.

[Daoud Kuttab: Ace in Obama's Pocket](#)

[David Newman: Israelis United](#)

[Shibley Telhami: The Only Solution](#)

[Michael Young: The War So Far](#)

With the battles in Gaza possibly reaching their zenith and talk of a cease-fire apparently more serious, what will Israel have achieved from this war? The eradication of Hamas, an Iranian pawn and a terrorist organization bent on Israel's destruction, would have been ideal. But was that ever Israel's goal?

Ehud Olmert, humbled by unfulfilled promises from the 2006 war, has been studiously ambiguous. Some Israeli commentators believe that Hamas rule could be ended. But many Israelis are not so certain. They may also not be willing to pay the price that such a victory would exact.

If Hamas does remain in control, how might the war leave the region altered for the better? Here, the United States has a key role to play. Barack Obama, who has been mostly silent, has said that he will soon have much to say about the war in Gaza. It will be interesting to see how firm he'll be with the major players. At the very least, this is what they need to hear.

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To Hamas: Recognize Israel's right to exist, publicly and in Arabic, cease smuggling arms and firing missiles on Israel's civilians, and embrace transparent democracy, and we will work with you. But until you renounce your commitment to Israel's destruction, you will remain to Israel what Al Qaeda is to America and we will unwaveringly support Israel's right to defend its citizens.

To the Palestinians: We recognize your unrelenting suffering. But you must take responsibility for your destiny. Hamas has dragged you into this conflict, in cruel disregard of your welfare. When you elect a leadership committed to peace, we will invest heavily to help you realize your legitimate aspirations.

To Egypt and Jordan: Egypt must seal the tunnels that make Hamas' military exploits possible. The failure of the two-state solution is as dangerous for you as it is for anyone else. Increasingly, it is said that because the Palestinians cannot govern themselves, Gaza should revert to Egypt, the West Bank to Jordan. Vocally and aggressively supporting moderate Palestinians is the role you have to play.

To the international community: We need both balanced rhetoric and wiser policy. Hamas has fired rockets at Israel for years, yet there was silence. Why the outrage now? The U.N., too, contributes to the crisis. Under its watch in Lebanon, Hezbollah has completely rearmed. The European Union never objected to UNRWA, the United Nations's relief agency for Palestinians in the Middle East, classifying newborns in Gaza as refugees, creating an incentive for birth rates that Gaza cannot support. (Half of Gaza's population is now under 15 years of age.)

To Israel: While our alliance is unshakable, you must give Palestinians cause for hope. If Gaza's leadership changes, open the crossings and help Gazans transcend their unremitting poverty. And all illegal West Bank settlements must be dismantled without delay. Successive Israeli governments have committed to taking action, but have done virtually nothing. If no Israeli government can muster the courage for political risk, why should anyone else? Your survival depends on your courage, not only in battle, but in building Palestinian trust. Israel's youth will not remain in Israel if they believe that the conflict can never end.