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Speeding up relief, recovery and reconstruction in post-war Gaza

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

PLENARY II

Looking ahead: prioritizing reconstruction tasks

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What Gaza needs is not humanitarian assistance but a trading border open to the outside world that functions according to internationally acceptable standards and practices—a border that will enable long-suffering Gazans to go back to work. Israel is not prepared to enable Gazans to buy and sell via Israel. Since Hamas assumed undisputed power in Gaza in June 2007 this opposition has been absolute. But Israel's no-trade policy reflects a strategic choice to divorce itself from the Strip, notwithstanding its still-relevant obligations as an occupying power to be mindful of the welfare of the region's 2 million inhabitants. Egypt too, under the post-July 2013 regime, is, if anything, more adamant than Israel in its refusal to countenance the creation of a functioning trade border between Egypt and Gaza, viewing this as an Israeli responsibility.

Given this situation on Gaza's land borders, the search for a viable trade option must necessarily focus on maritime options.

The shortcomings of the response to last summer's war lends a sense of urgency to move Gaza and its population away from the unprecedented, longstanding embargo to a more open trade policy.

There are many potential options for establishing new maritime trade routes to/from Gaza that make use of Israeli, Egyptian, Turkish, or Cypriot facilities, including:

Turkey to a newly constructed and managed satellite port in Gaza

A jointly managed Egypt-Palestinian port on the Gaza/Egypt/Sinai border

1. Palestinians in Gaza are interested in establishing such an option for strategic and economic reasons
2. Israel has an interest in reducing its operational (and political) role in Gaza trade and shifting the responsibility for Gaza to Egypt/international community in such as way as to protect its security concerns in the absence of an overall agreement

3. Egypt has an interest in reducing strategic pressure to increase responsibility for Gaza and operational\political\security interest in reducing tunnel economy and functionality

4. Turkey has an interest in making a material contribution to Gaza's economy and in expanding existing trade links (including the maritime/land bridge to Jordan and the Gulf) between Ankara and Jerusalem.

In operational terms goods destined for Gaza would be bonded in an offshore port. Security provided under a protocol with Israel (similar to current Turkish truck convoys now transiting Israel to Jordan) prior to shipment to Gaza under maritime coordination with Israel. An international operator would manage the Gaza port, together with Palestinians. A simple roll on roll off facility in Gaza port (World Bank and others have scoped this out in the past) would receive goods for import. PA/Palestinian supervision of administrative and tax issues would be in operation. Gaza exports could be treated in similar fashion.

Experience of the last decade in Gaza has shown that "common space" has been established between the parties to enable similar operational and security understandings.

Putting Gaza back to work offers ready advantages to all parties.

Establishing a working port in Gaza marks one step in the direction of creating a route that links the Mediterranean through Gaza to the Arab heartland - the (still distant) prospect of a safe passage linking Gaza with the West Bank and points east through Jordan or via Sinai to Saudi Arabia.

I call on the international community and starting with our hosts today, to begin the practical steps necessary to mobilize international support for Gaza's renewal.

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