



Philadelphi Corridor Control is Decisive Strategic Factor in Gaza's Future

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In addition to its tactical accomplishments in Rafah, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) achieved a significant strategic objective by securing control of the Gaza side of the Gaza-Egypt border, which had for years enabled cross-border smuggling of weapons and raw materials used to manufacture munitions. Ensuring the security of this border and preventing cross-border tunnels from being rebuilt will be critical to the future security of Israel and Gaza alike.

However, plans for future control and security monitoring of the pivotal axis remain unclear. Strong U.S. leadership is required to help preserve Israel's strategic achievement of gaining control of the roughly eight-mile-long Egypt-Gaza border and adjacent narrow buffer zone, known as the Philadelphi Corridor.

What Happened?

- Recent media reports suggest that negotiations are underway between Israel, Egypt, the Palestinian Authority (PA), and the United States regarding future control of the Gaza side of the roughly eight-mile-long Gaza-Egypt border and adjacent narrow buffer zone, known as the Philadelphi Corridor, including the primary border crossing at Rafah Crossing.
 - » On July 16, Israel's *Mako* outlet [reported](#) that Israeli, Egyptian, and U.S. officials crafted a ceasefire deal outline under which the United States, Egypt, and unspecified Palestinians with no connection to Hamas would have control of the border.
 - » On July 15, *The New York Times* [reported](#), citing Israeli officials, that "Israel and Egypt have privately discussed a possible withdrawal of Israeli soldiers from Gaza's border with Egypt ... if Egypt agreed to measures that would prevent arms smuggling along the border," including installing sensors and constructing an underground barrier.
 - » On July 12, Reuters [reported](#) that Israel and Egypt, as part of ceasefire negotiations, were in talks about installing an electronic surveillance system along the border in lieu of a continued Israeli presence after a ceasefire deal.
- Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has denied reports that Israel is contemplating withdrawing its forces from the Philadelphi Corridor as part of any future arrangement, with his office calling them "[complete fake news](#)" and Netanyahu himself [asserting](#) on July 18 that "our possession of the Philadelphi Corridor and the Rafah Crossing ... [is] essential."



Source: [France24](#)

Why Is It Important?

- Securing control of the Philadelphi Corridor was a major strategic objective of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) operation in Rafah. The border between Gaza and Egypt, particularly the tunnels underneath it, was a vital lifeline for Hamas, enabling the terror group to smuggle massive quantities of munitions, weapons components, and raw materials used to construct weapons into the Gaza Strip. However, failure to establish an effective control and monitoring framework for the axis going forward risks jeopardizing the IDF's hard-fought tactical successes to gain control of the axis.
- JINSA Distinguished Fellow IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, Israel's former National Security Advisor, [said](#) in a recent JINSA webinar that Gaza being disconnected from Egypt is a strategic imperative for Israel to deprive Hamas of the ability to return to the axis and replenish itself with weapons and funds.
 - » The [over 40](#) cross-border tunnels from Gaza into Egypt, had they remained undetected, would likely have enabled Hamas to reconstitute itself.
 - As JINSA has previously [noted](#), the cross-border tunnels “have been used to smuggle hundreds of tons of explosives, thousands of rockets, and countless firearms and weapons components [into Gaza].”
 - JINSA's Julian and Jenny Josephson Senior Vice President for Israeli Affairs IDF MG (ret.) Yaacov Ayish, former head of the IDF General Staff Operations Branch, recently [stated](#) in a JINSA webinar that the tunnels were also used “to bring in ... funds, financial support, and even [conduct] communication with [Hamas's] outside leadership ... via couriers using those tunnels.”
 - » In addition, Israeli authorities are reportedly [concerned](#) that if the tunnels are left intact or rebuilt in the future, terrorists may covertly enter Egypt through the tunnels and then, via Egypt, infiltrate into southern Israel to perpetrate attacks on Israeli communities in an October 7-style attack.

- However, as MG Amidror recently [noted](#), Israel does not “have a good solution yet” regarding future control and monitoring of the border area.
 - » Israel is reportedly [seeking](#) to install sensors and deploy other advanced surveillance equipment along the border, but reportedly was rebuffed by Egypt.
 - Press reports from early January [indicated](#) that Egypt refused Israel’s requests to install sensors along the border, and that Egypt [turned down](#) an Israeli request to send surveillance drones into the Philadelphi Corridor.
 - Israel is likely seeking to replicate its past decade of success defending its own border with Gaza from underground tunnels using technologies [funded](#) by the United States following the 2014 Israel-Hamas war, [including](#) installing sensors able to detect changes in soil and soundwaves [generated](#) by digging, and building a concrete barrier [extending](#) dozens of yards underground.
 - » Seeking to exploit the diplomatic sensitivity of the situation, Hamas has [placed](#) rocket launchers along the Egyptian border, likely in hopes that Israel would be deterred from risking a strike on Egyptian soil or accidentally striking Egyptian soldiers.
 - » The issue has garnered congressional attention in the form of a proposed provision to the 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the annual U.S. defense bill.
 - The [provision](#), which [passed](#) the House version of the NDAA, would require the Defense Department and State Department to submit a report to Congress “on steps that Israel, Egypt, and the United States can take to enhance international security measures on the border between Gaza and Egypt” to counteract smuggling.
- Exclusively Egyptian control of the axis risks a return to the unbridled cross-border weapons smuggling which characterized Hamas’s rule of Gaza for over 16 years and turned cross-border smuggling into a [multi-million dollar industry](#).
 - » Multiple Egypt-Israel bilateral agreements oblige Egypt to secure its side of the border with Gaza, including below ground.
 - Under the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, Egypt is [obligated](#) to “ensure that acts or threats of belligerency, hostility, or violence do not originate from and are not committed from within its territory.”
 - In September 2005, when Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip, Israel and Egypt [signed](#) an agreement known as the Philadelphi Accord, which [stipulated](#) that Egypt undertake a “comprehensive and systematic effort” to secure the border and prevent cross-border smuggling.
 - » However, since Israel removed its troops from the border in September 2005 as part of its unilateral disengagement from Gaza, Egypt has proven unwilling or unable to prevent rampant cross-border smuggling.
 - Underscoring the immense volume of smuggling, a *New York Times* reporter who traveled to the border in February 2013 [wrote](#) that he witnessed “about two cargo trucks” worth of material entering Gaza per minute.
 - Smugglers at one point were reportedly [transferring](#) over a million liters of diesel into the Gaza Strip a day, and, at its peak, the smuggling operation reportedly [involved](#) at least 70,000 people.
 - » Egypt has [claimed](#) it implemented a number of measures—including constructing underground steel barriers; flooding the tunnels with saltwater and sewage, and; pumping gas into the tunnels—to impede smuggling. Though, as JINSA detailed in its

March NatSec Brief, [Egypt-Gaza Tunnels Pose Threat to Israel's War Aims](#), Egypt's preventative efforts were an abject failure.

- Israel estimates that between September 2005—when Israel ceded control of the axis—and December 2008, at least 4,000 rocket propelled-grenades (RPGs), 1,800 rockets, and 250 tons of explosives [crossed](#) the border during that span.
- Extrapolating from these figures, since January 2009, terrorists in Gaza likely, by conservative estimates, have smuggled over 16,000 RPGs, 7,000 rockets, and 1,000 tons of explosives via the cross-border tunnels into Gaza.
- RPGs, as JINSA has [documented](#), have been a prevalent feature of the war, with Hamas frequently targeting IDF tanks in RPG attacks in an effort to immobilize them.
- Plans for control of the border will need to include delineating who will take responsibility for civil administration at Rafah Crossing, the primary crossing for [human traffic](#) and [goods](#) along the Gaza-Egypt border.
 - » Israel's *Mako* outlet recently [reported](#) that Israel has agreed to a framework in which Rafah Crossing would be operated by international entities “with the support of Palestinian entities that do not belong to Hamas” approved by the Shin Bet, Israel's internal security agency.
 - U.S. officials have reportedly [proposed](#) tasking the European Union Border Assistance Mission to the Rafah Crossing Point (EUBAM Rafah), which helped administer the border in Gaza prior to Hamas seizing power, with a civil administration role at the crossing.
 - » However, according to a July 17 *Axios* article, when Israel [pushed](#) the PA to send some PA personnel to the crossing “in an unofficial capacity” in recent negotiations, Palestinian officials rejected the proposal.
- Planning for future control of Rafah Crossing will also require determining policies and procedures regarding the future import of dual-use materials like cement and fertilizer.
 - » Cement was the primary component used to [construct](#) Hamas's over 430-mile-long sprawling tunnel network underneath Gaza.
 - » MG Ayish [noted](#) in a recent JINSA webinar that fertilizer that Israel long permitted to enter the West Bank for agricultural purposes is now banned due to terrorists using it to create triacetone triperoxide (TATP) and other explosives.
- A multilateral international framework could involve private security contractors (PSCs) operating along the border with a clear mandate and international—namely U.S. and Israeli—oversight.
 - » As JINSA and the Vandenberg Coalition's task force of former senior U.S. national security officials [wrote](#) in its February report, [The Day After: A Plan For Gaza](#), “PSCs, if properly overseen and disciplined, have a proven track record of providing important and reliable security in non-permissive environments such as Gaza.”
- Any framework for future control and monitoring of the border must preserve the IDF's ability to maneuver along the Gazan side of the Gaza-Egypt border, even after major combat operations conclude, as JINSA has previously [noted](#).
 - » Israel's *Ynetnews* outlet [reported](#) on July 18 that the leadership of the IDF's Southern Command is proposing the establishment of a “Philadelphia Brigade,” which would remain in the border area to prevent smuggling and infiltrations.
 - » Israel's political officials have also emphasized the importance of Israel retaining the ability to operate along the border as needed.

- Israel’s Minister for Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer, formerly a JINSA Distinguished Fellow, [told Israel Hayom](#) in March, “we have to make sure that the border is sealed with Egypt so that weapons cannot come through ... we have to make sure that we have the right to continue to conduct military operations.”
- Likud MK Moshe Saada [said](#) during a July 18 interview, “if we are not in the Philadelphi Corridor, we will not be in the Land of Israel. It is an existential threat to the life of the Jewish nation.”

What Should the United States Do Next?

- The United States should exert diplomatic pressure on Egypt to ensure it addresses Israel’s legitimate concerns about cross-border weapons and weapons components smuggling, namely by agreeing to install sensors monitored by Israel and constructing an underground barrier along the border.
- The United States should mobilize key European and Arab partners to strengthen its leverage over Egypt, particularly countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that have previously played major roles in stabilizing Egypt’s fragile economy, as JINSA has [advocated](#) for.
- To help streamline the process of establishing a responsible security regime on the border, the Senate should strongly consider passing a House-advanced [provision](#) in the 2025 defense bill addressing the issue.
 - » The provision [requires](#) the Defense Department and State Department to submit a report to Congress overviewing “steps that Israel, Egypt, and the United States can take to enhance international security measures on the border between Gaza and Egypt.”
 - » These measures could include private Western companies with expertise in border security and inspections, as JINSA has previously [recommended](#).