

September 1, 2024

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
Members of the Political–Security Cabinet

**For the sake of the hostages and for Israel's security, Israel must retain
control of the Philadelphi Corridor and Rafah Crossing areas
while balancing all the political considerations**

The Israel Defense and Security Forum expresses its *anguish at the cold-blooded execution by Hamas, of our abducted citizens*. Above all else, we *commend and appreciate the IDF combatants and all of the security services* for their dedication, courage, professionalism, and their confidence in the justice of this existential war. *We also desire for the speedy homecoming of all of our hostages*.

Turning our attention to the trenchant debate over the magnitude of the Philadelphi Corridor in hostage deal negotiations, our professional opinion is that *to claim that the hostage deal may include a temporary withdrawal of several weeks from the Philadelphi Corridor is to deceive the public, materially endanger the hostages' lives, and possibly reverse many of the IDF's achievements in the war*. It may even lead to the needless shedding of our soldiers' blood, either in areas that were already captured and cleared, or by facing an invigorated Hamas immeasurably more dangerous, once it returns to battle.

Any retreat from the Philadelphi Corridor, even if temporary, *will enable Hamas to both strengthen itself rapidly with significant quantities of weaponry, and allow it to absorb armed fighters arriving from the Sinai Peninsula into Gaza, not within a matter of weeks but within days and possibly even hours*. In addition, *Hamas may exploit the ceasefire and withdrawal as an opportunity to smuggle hostages out of the Gaza Strip, possibly even to Iran. It would require only hours, not weeks, to do so*. In that case, Israel could find itself in a *heightened state of risk in return for little benefit*. At the same time, Israel would be failing to preserve assets and leverage for later stages of the negotiations.

Recapturing the Philadelphi Corridor after the deal, which various sources suggest, is a more complicated matter than a tank's speed of travel. Tremendous political pressure on the part of the US, Egypt, and the international community was directed at Israel early in the war and contributed decisively to the delay in capturing Philadelphi. We foresee not merely similar diplomatic pressure, but most likely stronger pressure to prevent Israel from retaking Philadelphi subsequent to a withdrawal deal.

Israel's takeover of the Philadelphi Corridor and Rafah Crossing areas is one of this war's significant strategic accomplishments. As a smuggling channel, they enabled Iran to arm Hamas with significant deadly weaponry which Hamas employed in the October 7 massacre. The revitalized Gaza Strip then became a terrorism hotbed right at Israel's doorstep because of that "oxygen supply". Israeli control is merely a remedy for one of the past mistakes that enabled Hamas to gain strength. Replaying those same mistakes would likely presage its resurgence. This point has been demonstrated by the many tunnels and shafts that the IDF has exposed in recent months.

The Israeli policy of withdrawals and reliance on international guarantees; or on supposed 'moderate' Palestinian forces, has already demonstrated its immeasurable damage to Israel's security. This failure is evidenced in Israel's reliance on the Oslo Accords guarantees, UNIFIL's failure to deter Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, and Israel's previous withdrawal from Philadelphi. We cannot repair the damages of the past if we are to repeat its mistakes.

Our leadership must share with the public the dangers that such decisions pose in terms of the threat to the hostages' safety and the resurgence of Hamas. From the standpoint of national security, Israel's interest is in maintaining control in the strategic Philadelphi and Rafah Crossing areas. The political echelon must balance vital considerations, including societal and security considerations alike, in a way that will preserve public unity. The decision must be made within the limits of flexibility as managed by the political echelon in the negotiations.

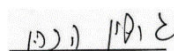
In closing, we call on the public and the leadership not to fall into the trap of Hamas by returning to the divisiveness that had characterized the pre-October 7 period. We notice a discourse in the enemy's media and social media that rejoices at the potential fissures in Israeli solidarity. The debate must be issue-based, transparent, and conducted with fraternity. Everything necessary must be done in order to ensure that the nation is unified and closes ranks for the sake of this paramount national security interest.

Respectfully,

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IDSF Chairman and Founder



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on behalf of the IDSF association's leadership and its 35,000 members