

The Philadelphi Corridor: Examining a Major Impediment in Ceasefire Talks

By Josh Hayes

September 2024



THE GLOBAL POLICY HORIZONS LAB

Empowering Evidence-Based Solutions

For a Better World



Webster University
470 E Lockwood Ave, St. Louis, MO 63119, USA



SUMMARY

As mediators and parties discuss important concerns in Cairo and Doha, surrounding the ceasefire proposal for the Israel-Hamas War in Gaza, a seemingly small, albeit important sticking point has emerged: The Philadelphi Corridor. Israel argues it needs to maintain a hold of the corridor indefinitely to continue its military campaign in Gaza as well as prevent smuggling into Gaza. Its chief opposition Hamas opposes this in the ceasefire negotiations as do other important international actors. I believe Israel should drop this demand from the negotiations and agree to leave the corridor, for now, to get the hostages back and potentially reach a ceasefire. They can do this knowing they have the necessary military superiority to reenter the corridor as needed.



The Headlines

- Hamas, Israel, and international negotiators disagree on how the Philadelphi Corridor should be addressed in ceasefire talks
- Israel believes it can't leave the corridor due to the security risk posed by the tunnels under it and smuggling into Gaza
- Until it is addressed, a ceasefire deal remains unlikely in the short term

Background

The corridor, which is a narrow 9-mile strip of land that is 100 yards wide making up the entirety of the Egypt-Gaza border, has evolved into a major clash between Israel, Hamas, and Egypt in the current negotiations. Under Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, as well as the Philadelphi Accord in the same year, Egypt was given control of its side of the border, and the Palestinian Authority was given control over the Gazan side. The accord gave Egypt the authority to deploy 750 border guards to control the Egyptian side of the border. The intent was to prevent the crossing of people and weapons in and out of Gaza, which Egypt and Israel both believed was necessary for their security. Hamas took over control of the Gazan side when they won power in Gaza following the 2007 elections. Following the October 7th, 2023 Hamas terrorist attacks and Israel's subsequent invasion of Gaza, Israel additionally took tactical control over the Rafah crossing in May 2024. It put forces within the corridor, violating the 1979 Camp David Accords (JINSA, 2024).

Diverging Views

Israel-Netanyahu Government

Mediators and parties from all sides have diverging views. The Netanyahu government seems inclined to forcefully push for the continued presence of IDF forces in the corridor indefinitely. Netanyahu and his staff have argued that if Israel were to withdraw, its recapture would not be assured due to international pressure (Times of Israel, 2024). Israeli forces have discovered over 150 tunnels in the corridor that have been used to smuggle weapons into Gaza. Netanyahu contends that Israel must remain in control of the corridor to ensure the tunnels are not used to prevent future attacks. They also argue that Egypt has not done enough to prevent smuggling from happening.

Egypt

Egypt, one of the lead mediators in the ceasefire talks, has taken issue with Netanyahu's position. Egypt argues they have successfully blocked all of those tunnels for years, and any smuggling in or out of Gaza has nothing to do with these tunnels (Times of Israel, 2024).



Hamas

Hamas has also taken issue with Israel's position on the Philadelphi Corridor. Hamas is demanding a complete withdrawal of IDF forces from the area, something that Netanyahu says is off the table.

United States

For its part as one of the lead negotiators, the United States is pushing Netanyahu to be more flexible. They contend it is possible to reduce troop levels in the corridor and fully withdraw from certain sections. President Biden recently said that he believes Prime Minister Netanyahu is not doing enough to secure a ceasefire and hostage release deal, signaling his disapproval (NBC News, 2024).

Israeli Opposition

And the debate over this has incredibly high real-life consequences. Just in the last few weeks, Israeli forces found the bodies of six slain hostages in Gaza, including the body of an Israeli American. Widespread protests across Israel have been reignited and nationwide strikes in the name of reaching a deal to free the hostages have ensued (NBC News, 2024). The political climate within Israel continues to worsen. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant called for the war cabinet to reverse its position on the Philadelphi Corridor and reach a deal that brings the hostages home (Yoav Gallant on X, 9/1/24). Political and international pressure is mounting on Netanyahu, who is reacting with defiance.

In a very defensive speech, following the death of the hostages, he apologized for their deaths. Still, he doubled down on his claims that the Philadelphi Corridor is vital for Israeli security. To many protesters and the families of those killed, the failure of Netanyahu's cabinet to reach a deal essentially condemned their loved ones to death.

A Workable Solution: Dropping the Demand of Staying in the Corridor

The Philadelphi Corridor is certainly of the utmost importance strategically. Despite legitimate concerns about smuggling, the Netanyahu government should immediately drop its demand to remain in control of the corridor indefinitely. This is because the lives of the hostages are more important than a red line that until recently was not a hold-up. To assuage Israeli concerns about smuggling in the corridor, a middle point could surely be reached. The proposal on the table from the United States should be supported which calls for only international forces in the corridor for a period (Middle East Monitor, 2024). This would ensure operational control for Egypt and prevent Hamas from having control. Egypt should in turn agree to full transparency with Israel. Plus, as Israeli leaders like Benny Gantz have argued, Israel can return to the Philadelphi Corridor if necessary at a later date (The Times of Israel, 2024). The actions of PM Netanyahu and his extreme cabinet have led to the unnecessary deaths of hostages that could have been saved. Like his counterpart Hamas, the Prime Minister appears to be acting out of his political ambitions and has not worked in good faith during the negotiating process. To prevent the further loss of life and raise the prospects for peace and security, the Netanyahu



government's demand regarding the Philadelphi Corridor should be dropped and a hostage and ceasefire deal should be cemented.



WORKS CITED

- Berman, Lazar. "Bring Home Hostages, Deal with Hezbollah and Go Back to Philadelphia as Needed, Gantz Says in Rejoinder to PM | The Times of Israel." The Times of Israel, 3 Sept. 2024, www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/philadelphia-is-important-but-leaving-troops-there-forever-not-the-answer-gantz-says-in-rejoinder-to-pm/.
- Gallant, Yoav. "X.com." X (Formerly Twitter), 1 Sept. 2024, x.com/yoavgallant/status/1830134072166797486.
- "Have the Hostage Deaths Pushed Israel to the Breaking Point?" NBCNews.com, NBCUniversal News Group, 2 Sept. 2024, www.nbcnews.com/news/world/hostage-deaths-pushed-israel-breaking-point-rcna169196.
- Magid, Jacob. "'Philadelphia Is Becoming Rafah': Negotiators Lament Politicization of Ceasefire Term." The Times of Israel, Aug. 2024, www.timesofisrael.com/philadelphia-is-becoming-rafah-negotiators-lament-politicization-of-ceasefire-term/.
- "The Philadelphia Corridor Proposal Is a Trap That Can Explode at the Egyptian Border." Middle East Monitor, Middle East Monitor, 3 Sept. 2024, www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240903-the-philadelphia-corridor-proposal-is-a-trap-that-can-explode-at-the-egyptian-border/.
- Tobin, Y., 2024. Egypt-Gaza Tunnels Pose Threat to Israel's War Aims, Jewish Institute for National Security of America. United States of America. Retrieved from <https://coilink.org/20.500.12592/ghx3mwp> on 03 Sep 2024. COI: 20.500.12592/ghx3mwp.
- "What Is the 'Philadelphia Corridor' and Why Is It a Sticking Point in Israel-Hamas Talks?" NBCNews.com, NBCUniversal News Group, 3 Sept. 2024, www.nbcnews.com/news/world/philadelphia-corridor-explainer-israel-hamas-talks-cease-fire-gaza-rcna169274.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Josh Hayes is an undergraduate student studying in Political Science at Webster University in St. Louis, USA. His research focus is on stability in the Middle East, specifically in Israel and Palestine. With his policy-oriented research, he hopes to provide analysis for the underlying conflicts that have shaped the region for centuries as well as propose a framework for future pathways to peace and stability. Additionally, he is working on a research paper that explores the foreign policy of Israel and its impact on the broader region and global stakeholders.





ABOUT THE GLOBAL POLICY HORIZONS RESEARCH LAB

Webster University's Global Policy Horizons Lab is a policy-focused research entity where students, Lab researchers, affiliated faculty, as well as members of the policy community from across disciplines, can explore national and global security issues, generate original research, as well as produce peer-reviewed policy papers and commentaries. The Lab pursues innovative research focusing on unconventional threats, identity and security, role of technology in security, economic security, as well environmental and food security. The goal of the Lab is to become a knowledge hub that informs national governments and other members of the global policy community on contemporary and future security challenges.

The current Director of the Lab is Professor Dani Belo, PhD.

