

Disarming Hamas Is the Only Path to Lasting Peace and the Return of Israel's Last Hostage

The [announcement on January 14 by Steve Witkoff](#)

(<https://x.com/SEPeaceMissions/status/2011478211075391845>) that Phase Two of the Trump Peace Plan would begin marked a major diplomatic moment. It raised expectations for calm, rebuilding, and political transition in Gaza. Yet none of those goals can succeed while Hamas remains armed and in control. The non-return of Israel's last remaining hostage, Ran Gvili, stands as direct proof that Hamas still holds coercive power and has not met even the most basic conditions of post-war accountability. Without full disarmament, any pause in fighting only sets the stage for the next war.

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Key Takeaways

- Hamas retains weapons, command structures, and leverage as long as it holds an Israeli hostage
- The return of Ran Gvili must remain a condition for any political or economic progress in Gaza
- Reconstruction before disarmament rewards armed terror groups and weakens deterrence
- Every past round of fighting followed partial deals that left Hamas armed
- Lasting stability requires Hamas to give up weapons, authority, and control

Why Disarming Hamas Comes First

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Hamas launched the October 7 massacre as an organized military force. It planned the attack, trained fighters, stockpiled weapons, and governed Gaza as a terror-run entity. That capacity did not disappear on its own. While Israeli operations have severely degraded Hamas, it has not been eliminated. As long as Hamas holds arms, it retains the ability to threaten Israel and dominate Gaza's population through violence.

Peace plans that move forward without full disarmament ignore the core driver of conflict. Armed groups that survive war tend to regroup, recruit, and rearm. Gaza has followed this pattern repeatedly. Ceasefires that leave Hamas intact have consistently ended with rockets, tunnels, and renewed fighting. Disarmament is not a political talking point. It is a security requirement.

Ran Gvili and the Meaning of Accountability

Ran Gvili (https://www.cominghomesoon.online/people/ran_gvili) was killed while defending Israeli civilians on October 7. His body was taken into Gaza by terrorists. More than two years later, he has not been returned. This fact alone demonstrates that Hamas still operates with leverage and defiance. Holding the remains of a fallen Israeli hero is not symbolic. It is a tactic used to extract concessions and delay consequences.

No reconstruction plan can claim legitimacy while Hamas uses hostage remains as bargaining chips. Returning Gvili is not separate from disarmament. It is part of it. An armed group that refuses to release hostages is an armed group that still believes force works. Ending that belief requires removing its weapons and authority.

Reconstruction Without Disarmament Guarantees Failure

Calls to rebuild Gaza often focus on humanitarian need. That need is real, but history shows what happens when rebuilding comes before demilitarization. After previous conflicts, cement meant for homes went into tunnels. Pipes meant for water systems became rocket casings. Aid moved through Hamas-controlled channels and strengthened its rule.

Reconstruction under armed Hamas control does not help civilians in the long run. It restores the group's power and ensures the next conflict. True rebuilding can only happen once Hamas no longer controls territory, weapons, or institutions. Anything else is a reset button for war.

The Cost of Ignoring Reality

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Some argue that delaying reconstruction risks instability. The opposite is true. Allowing an armed terror group to survive politically teaches that mass violence leads to negotiation, funding, and legitimacy. That lesson will be repeated.

Israel has lived through this cycle many times. Partial agreements followed by calm, then escalation. Each round became deadlier. October 7 was not an accident. It was the result of years in which Hamas remained armed, funded, and in charge.

Disarmament breaks that cycle. Without weapons, Hamas cannot rule by fear. Without weapons, it cannot kidnap soldiers or civilians. Without weapons, it cannot plan the next attack.

What Phase Two Must Require

Phase Two of any peace plan must treat disarmament as non-negotiable. That includes:

- Complete removal of Hamas weapons
- Dissolution of its military and command structure
- Loss of governing authority in Gaza
- Full return of all hostages and remains, including Ran Gvili

These are not extreme demands. They are the minimum standards applied after conflicts worldwide when armed groups initiate mass atrocities.

Conclusion

There can be no lasting peace while Hamas remains armed. There can be no healing while Ran Gvili remains in Gaza. Reconstruction without disarmament is not peacebuilding. It is a postponement of war. If Phase Two is to mean anything, it must enforce clear consequences for terror and clear conditions for progress. Disarming Hamas is the only way to protect Israeli lives, give Gaza's civilians a future free from armed rule, and prevent the certainty of another war in the years ahead.

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A CEASEFIRE USED AS A WEAPON: WHY HAMAS REARMING PROVES DISARMAMENT IS NON-NEGOTIABLE

During the second phase of the U.S.-brokered ceasefire, Israeli military officials are [delivering](https://www.ynetnews.com/article/rjdp8m8rbx) a clear warning. Hamas is using every moment of the pause in fighting to rearm, rebuild, and entrench itself deeper across the Gaza Strip. What was presented as a test period meant to reduce violence has instead confirmed a long-standing reality. Hamas does not treat ceasefires as steps toward peace. It treats them as opportunities to prepare for the next war.

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Key Takeaways

- Hamas is actively rebuilding tunnels, weapons sites, and command structures during the ceasefire
- IDF withdrawals have created space for Hamas to reassert control near Israeli positions
- Undiscovered tunnels and ready-to-fire rockets remain near the withdrawal line
- Hamas has preserved thousands of fighters and much of its leadership
- Reconstruction without full disarmament guarantees renewed conflict



The Reality Along the Withdrawal Line

so-called yellow line, marking areas where Israeli forces are expected to pull back, remains far from cleared of Hamas infrastructure. In recent days, Israel Defense Forces uncovered underground chambers suspected to be tunnel shafts near military outposts on the outskirts of Gaza City. Troops also located multiple ready-to-fire rocket launchers positioned close to Israeli lines.

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In Rafah, Hamas terrorists directly attacked IDF soldiers, wounding two. A separate rocket fired from Gaza landed near an IDF position. These incidents occurred during a ceasefire meant to lower tensions. Instead, they confirm that Hamas remains operational, armed, and aggressive.

A Halted Operation and a Missed Opportunity

The past week underscored what many IDF officers describe as a failed test period. A major operation aimed at Hamas positions, known as Gideon's Chariots II (<https://embassies.gov.il/multilateral-organizations-france/en/news/israels-objectives-and-current-operation>), was halted at the last moment as troops began withdrawing. The result was familiar. Hamas infrastructure remained in place, and its underground network escaped further damage.

Large sections of Gaza, including critical tunnel systems used to move fighters, weapons, cash, and commanders, were left only partially damaged. Combat engineers now warn that many demolition methods used earlier in the war may not have fully disabled these tunnels. Hamas has studied the damage, repaired routes deep underground, and concealed signs of reconstruction.

Wherever the IDF maintains a constant ground presence, Hamas struggles to rebuild. Where the IDF withdraws, Hamas returns.

A Terror Army That Adapted and Survived

Israeli assessments indicate that Hamas made a calculated decision early in the war to preserve much of its force. Rather than fighting head-on, most of its 24 battalions pulled back, engaging IDF troops only in selective encounters. That strategy paid off.

According to conservative estimates, Hamas has retained at least 10,000 trained fighters from before the war, with thousands more recruited during the fighting. Leadership redundancy remains intact. Senior commanders continue to issue orders from underground, including in areas once disrupted by Israeli control, such as central Gaza.

Killing large numbers of operatives alone has not proven decisive. Hamas operates as a deeply embedded terror movement, where nearly every young man is treated as a potential combatant. Without sustained control on the ground, the group



erates.

Financing Terror Under the Cover of Aid

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Hamas has also preserved its financial base. Israeli defense officials estimate that hundreds of millions of shekels in cash remain hidden inside tunnel networks. These funds allow Hamas to continue paying tens of thousands of operatives and civil servants.

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Humanitarian aid, while essential for civilians, has become another revenue source.

[Hamas imposes fees and taxes at multiple points](https://www.ynetnews.com/article/s1rhffeezg)

(<https://www.ynetnews.com/article/s1rhffeezg>), earning tens of millions of shekels daily. This income has allowed the group to maintain internal stability and prevent large-scale public unrest, even as Gaza suffers.

Planned economic relief measures under the next phase of the ceasefire, including expanded crossings and construction materials, risk strengthening Hamas further. Dual-use materials such as cement and steel have repeatedly been diverted to rebuild tunnels, bunkers, and weapons sites.

Untouched Strongholds and Renewed Production

Entire Hamas battalions in central Gaza, particularly in Deir al-Balah and Nuseirat, remain largely intact. These areas were avoided during much of the ground campaign due to hostage concerns. Today, they have become hubs for weapons storage and renewed manufacturing.

Intelligence assessments indicate that Hamas has restarted production of rockets and anti-tank weapons, hiding facilities inside densely populated neighborhoods. Smuggling routes are also suspected to be reopening through sophisticated methods, including drones and disguised shipments within aid convoys.

Why This Leaves No Room for Illusions

The ceasefire has not weakened Hamas. It has exposed the danger of leaving it armed. Declarations about future governance structures mean little when tens of thousands of Hamas operatives and loyal civil servants remain embedded at every level of Gaza's society.

History has already delivered its verdict. Partial withdrawals, symbolic disarmament, and economic relief without enforcement lead to one outcome: another war.

Conclusion

What Israeli forces are witnessing on the ground confirms a hard truth. Hamas cannot be managed, restrained, or incentivized into peace while it retains weapons, tunnels, money, and command structures. Every pause that leaves Hamas armed



next war.

...es preparation time for the next attack. Disarmament is not a political
...ence. It is the dividing line between temporary quiet and lasting security.
...ut it, the current ceasefire is not a step toward peace. It is the prelude to the

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Iran's Internet Shutdown Exposed a Global Disinformation Web

At this moment, [mass demonstrations demanding political freedom are spreading across Iran \(https://theconversation.com/irans-protests-have-spread-across-provinces-despite-skepticism-and-concern-among-ethnic-groups-273276\)](https://theconversation.com/irans-protests-have-spread-across-provinces-despite-skepticism-and-concern-among-ethnic-groups-273276), marking one of the most serious internal challenges to the Islamic Republic in years. The regime responded with a familiar tactic: it shut down the internet across most of the country to block communication, hide security force actions, and prevent images of protests from reaching the outside world. While this blackout severely affected ordinary Iranians, it also produced an unexpected result. As Iran went offline, a range of social media accounts around the world suddenly fell silent, exposing how Iranian infrastructure had been used to interfere in foreign political debates. The episode highlighted how authoritarian control at home and information manipulation abroad are closely connected.

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Key Takeaways

- Iran imposed a nationwide internet shutdown in January 2026 to suppress protests and limit reporting on regime actions.
- The blackout restricted access to information, obstructed independent journalism, and reduced outside visibility into arrests and violence.
- At the same time, hundreds of foreign-facing social media accounts abruptly stopped posting, revealing operational ties to Iran.
- Pro-Scottish independence networks were among those affected, pointing to coordinated Iranian efforts to stir division in democratic societies.

A Digital Clampdown Inside Iran

As protests intensified across major Iranian cities, authorities ordered internet service providers to cut off international connectivity. Mobile data slowed to a crawl or disappeared entirely, messaging apps failed, and access to foreign news sites vanished. This action mirrored earlier crackdowns, where digital isolation allowed security forces to act with limited outside scrutiny (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/01/12/irans-internet-blackout-concealing-atrocities>).

For Iranians on the ground, the shutdown meant more than inconvenience. Families struggled to confirm the safety of loved ones, activists lost the ability to coordinate, and citizen journalists could not share evidence of what was happening in real time. History shows that such blackouts often coincide with mass arrests and the use of force, and it followed that pattern. By silencing the internet, the regime aimed to control the narrative both domestically and internationally.

The Sudden Silence Abroad

While attention focused on Iran itself, analysts noticed a parallel development overseas. A wide range of social media accounts that had been highly active on divisive political issues abruptly stopped posting within hours of the Iranian blackout. The timing was not random. These accounts relied on Iranian connectivity, servers, or operators and could not function once the country went dark.

This phenomenon offered rare insight into how state-linked influence operations depend on domestic infrastructure. When that infrastructure collapsed, so did the online personas that had been posing as local voices in other countries. The blackout unintentionally exposed the mechanics behind years of coordinated messaging.

Pro-Scottish Independence Accounts as a Case Study

One of the clearest examples involved accounts claiming to support Scottish independence (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2026/01/12/scottish-independence-accounts-dark-iran-internet-blackout/>). These profiles presented themselves as grassroots activists, using local slogans, flags, and political language. Over time, they amplified polarizing narratives, attacked opponents, and pushed content designed to inflame debate rather than inform it.

When Iran's internet went offline, many of these accounts stopped posting simultaneously. Their silence revealed that they were not locally based supporters but part of a coordinated network operated from Iran. Analysts examining posting patterns, language reuse, and technical markers concluded that a significant share of the online discussion they generated had been artificial.

This mattered because the goal was not to support Scotland in any meaningful way. The aim was to deepen social divisions inside a democratic society, weaken trust in institutions, and distract Western governments from confronting authoritarian behavior in the Middle East.

A Broader Pattern of Authoritarian Interference

Iran's actions fit a wider pattern seen among authoritarian regimes. These governments suppress dissent at home while exporting instability abroad through covert digital activity. By posing as ordinary citizens, state-linked operators try to manipulate debates on independence movements, elections, and foreign policy issues.

For the United States and its allies, this tactic presents a direct challenge. Open societies depend on good-faith debate. When foreign actors inject false amplification into that debate, they distort public perception and erode trust. The blackout made this threat visible in a way that years of investigations had struggled to prove conclusively.

Conclusion

Iran's internet shutdown was meant to hide a domestic crackdown, but it also exposed the regime's reach beyond its borders. As Iranian citizens were cut off from the world, disinformation networks tied to Tehran went quiet, revealing how closely domestic repression and foreign interference are linked. For democracies, the lesson is clear. Protecting free speech at home requires vigilance against hidden

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manipulation from abroad. Recognizing these patterns is the first step toward
defending open debate, supporting those who seek freedom inside Iran, and
countering regimes that rely on silence and deception to maintain power.

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