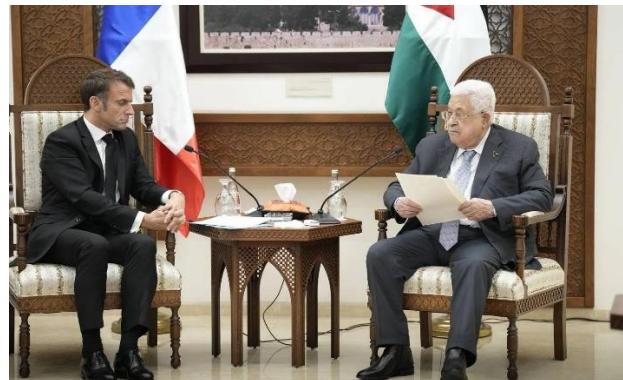




**After Gaza:
Enduring Consequences of the War and Palestinian Strategy**



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Critical Policy Brief

After Gaza: Enduring Consequences of the War and Palestinian Strategy

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The Hamas attack of October 7, 2023, and the devastating two-year war that followed, was not merely another tragic cycle of violence; it was a system-disrupting event that has irrevocably altered the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the regional order. Looking toward the next decade, it is clear that the war has shattered the paradigm of “conflict management,” triggered a profound crisis of legitimacy for international law and Western diplomacy, and exacerbated a deep political vacuum within the Palestinian national movement. This Brief distills what is likely to endure from the 2023–25 Gaza war and translates those trend lines into policy. It analyzes the enduring consequences of the war, assesses the deeply flawed Trump Peace Plan, and outlines the strategic options available to a Palestinian leadership grappling with a new and perilous reality. It argues that any path forward must begin not with external plans, but with internal Palestinian political renewal, as the old strategies have been rendered obsolete by a world remade by the trauma of war.

(1) Enduring Consequences of the 2023–2025 Gaza War

The Gaza war was not just another round in a familiar cycle; it was a system shock. Like 1948 and 1967, its effects will be measured in institutional and attitudinal shifts that persist beyond any ceasefire or the Trump plan for Gaza. It has unleashed a series of structural shifts whose consequences will define the next decade of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the broader Middle East. These trend lines are not fleeting headlines but fundamental realignments in public opinion, political power, and international norms.

First, the war has triggered a lasting realignment in global public opinion. In the United States, a profound generational and partisan chasm has opened. Polling by Gallup between 2023 and 2025,¹ Pew Research Center in October 2025², and Shibley Telhami July-August 2025 survey³ consistently shows that while older Americans and Republicans remain staunchly pro-Israel, a majority of Democrats and voters under 35 now express more sympathy for Palestinians. This cohort, whose views are shaped by social media and a social justice framework, increasingly supports conditioning U.S. aid to Israel. Within the MAGA movement, an “America First” isolationism has emerged, questioning the cost of foreign entanglements, including aid to Israel, creating a fracture in the once-monolithic Republican pro-Israel consensus.⁴ It is worth noting that these important shifts in the US are happening at a time when Israel has become much more dependent on the US than ever, as it coincides with heightened Israeli military reliance on the U.S., creating challenges for

¹ See a comparative summary here: <https://wwwaxios.com/2025/07/29/israel-military-gaza-us-approval-low-gallup-survey> and detailed findings here: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/692948/u.s.-back-israel-military-action-gaza-new-low.aspx>

² See a detailed two-year comparison here: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2025/10/03/how-americans-view-the-israel-hamas-conflict-2-years-into-the-war/>

³ <https://sadat.umd.edu/sites/sadat.umd.edu/files/Questionnaire%20July%20August%202025%2009122025.pdf>

⁴ See this November 2025 report: <https://www.npr.org/2025/11/07/nx-s1-5558286/israel-republicans-antisemitism-carlson>, and this January 2026 report by Fox: <https://foxbaltimore.com/station/share/republican-split-on-israel-grows-wider-amid-conservative-infighting-gaza-war-donald-trump-jd-vance-tucker-carlson-ben-shapiro-megyn-kelly-steve-bannon>; <https://mondoweiss.net/2025/12/new-poll-shows-young-republicans-turning-against-israel/>

policymakers and increasing the perception of American support as an "existential" factor for Israel.⁵ According to the *New York Times*, the Israel's dependence on U.S. political, military, and economic support has become "glaring" during recent conflicts, making the battle for American public opinion crucial for Israel's strategic outlook, according to the *New York Times*.⁶ This trend is mirrored in Europe, where youth-led activism has raised the political cost of unconditional support for Israeli policies.⁷ In the Arab world, Arab Barometer Wave VIII⁸ shows large majorities opposing normalization absent credible steps toward statehood and sharply unfavorable views of the U.S. These opinion structures will constrain decision making on policy choices regarding Israel-Palestine.

Second, the war has shattered a decade-old paradigm of "conflict management." In this approach "managing" rather than resolving the conflict—via security coordination, economic inducements, and periodic crisis mitigation—became orthodoxy. It assumed the conflict could be contained indefinitely while bypassing a political solution. The October 7 attack and the subsequent war discredited that doctrine. The violence recentered the Palestinian question, demonstrating that a people under occupation cannot be ignored. It demonstrated that occupation and blockade cannot be indefinitely contained and that bypassing Palestinians (the premise of the Abraham Accords) will not yield stable regional integration. The Palestinian issue was violently re-centered in Arab and global diplomacy; Saudi-Israeli normalization was rendered politically unviable without Palestinian gains. In Israel, this realization does not necessarily mean a turn to conflict resolution, as we will see below. Rather, it could mean that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will now enter a more devastating phase of coercion and violence.

Third, the war has precipitated the terminal decline of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and a profound crisis of representation. Before the war, the PA faced deep illegitimacy. PSR polling showed supermajorities viewing the PA as corrupt and demanding President Abbas's resignation.⁹ The war provided Israel's extreme right-wing government and settlers an opportunity to further weaken the PA and render it impotent. PA's passivity and inability to protect its people cemented its irrelevance. Polling during the war consistently shows over 80% of Palestinians view the PA as corrupt and demand President Abbas's resignation. The PA was absent and powerless; its security forces were unable to protect vulnerable Palestinian communities against settler terrorism; and it had no role in shaping the "day after" debate. Hamas emerged bloodied but politically validated among segments of the public as "steadfast," even as its governing capacity in Gaza was significantly weakened. The result is not a single address for diplomacy but a vacuum: a weakened PA in the West Bank, residual Hamas influence and armed groups in Gaza.

This has created a leadership vacuum so complete that it has enabled the re-Arabization of the conflict, a fourth enduring consequence. From the late 1960s, "the Palestinian decision is independent" became doctrine. The Gaza war reversed that achievement. An Arab "contact group" (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, UAE) became the primary forum for "day after" planning; Egypt re-assumed centrality on Gaza borders and security; Qatar and Egypt monopolized hostage and ceasefire mediation; Gulf capitals signaled that reconstruction money would be conditioned on PA reform and a credible political horizon. Arab states—primarily Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar—have stepped in as architects of the "day after," effectively

⁵ Leon Hadar, "Israel Is Growing More Dependent on a Less Sympathetic United States," *The National Interest*, July 1, 2025: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/israel-is-growing-more-dependent-on-a-less-sympathetic-united-states>.

⁶ The *New York Times* piece can be seen here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/12/world/middleeast/israel-us-polls-support.html>

⁷ See, for example, <https://yougov.co.uk/international/articles/52279-net-favourability-towards-israel-reaches-new-lows-in-key-western-european-countries>, and see a summary of these polls and trends here: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/03/public-support-for-israel-in-western-europe-lowest-ever-recorded-yougov>

⁸ See more information based on the 2023-24 wave of the Arab Barometer here:

<https://www.arabbarometer.org/2025/01/support-for-the-two-state-solution-is-shifting-unexpectedly/>, and here:

<https://www.arabbarometer.org/media-news/press-release-foreign-affairs-article-how-arab-public-opinion-constrains-normalization-with-israel/>

⁹ PSR polling since the start of the war can be seen here: <https://www.pcpsr.org/> and here: <https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/154>

usurping Palestinian political agency. The Israeli September 2025 military strike on Doha gave the major Arab and regional powers an added motivation to step in and take charge of the management of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. They are now the primary interlocutors with Washington, setting the terms for reconstruction and future governance in a direct reversion to the pre-PLO era. This development will endure because Palestinian institutions lack legitimacy and capacity, and because the U.S./EU are outsourcing stabilization to Arab partners. Until Palestinians rebuild a representative and legitimate national body, the file will be managed in Arab capitals.

Fifth, the trauma of October 7 has led to a profound and dangerous hardening of Israeli society and the political ascendancy of its extreme and religious Zionist right. October 7 did not produce a broad reckoning with occupation; it hardened threat perceptions and shifted the political center further right. The Israeli increased reliance on a less sympathetic US, as we have seen above, could further heighten Israel's perceived vulnerability and increase dependence on brute force to eliminate potential future threats. By now, the outcome is clear: the peace camp is diminished; two-state diplomacy is widely viewed as dangerous; annexationist and punitive preferences gained ground. Far-right ministers and settler movements have translated this into policy: accelerated settlement construction and outpost legalization, budgetary and administrative tools to entrench control, increased impunity for settler violence, and a security discourse that prioritizes domination over accommodation. The dominant Israeli narrative is not one of policy failure but of a failure of will, leading to a widespread rejection of compromise and a political discourse centered on permanent security control. Messianic and religious-nationalist parties, once on the fringe, are now central to Israeli policy, driving an agenda of *de facto* annexation in the West Bank and entrenching a one-state reality of unequal rights. This shift ensures no Israeli government will have the political mandate for a meaningful peace agreement in the foreseeable future. At the same time, pre-war civil-military and constitutional conflicts (judicial overhaul, Haredi conscription) are re-emerging, pitting right-populist coalitions against centrist and liberal constituencies, including reservist networks. The next decade will see an internal struggle over Israel's democratic character overlaid on a policy consensus that rejects meaningful concessions.

Sixth, the war provided Iran the opportunity to demonstrate its capacity to shape Middle Eastern outcomes. The behavior of Iran's "Axis of Resistance" during the war, while highly costly for Iran and its allies, has significantly transformed the entire Middle East region increasing the level of instability and the prospects for war. In this environment, war has successfully derailed top-down, U.S.-led normalization efforts, handing a strategic victory to the Axis. The war made it politically impossible for Saudi Arabia to normalize relations with Israel, re-linking regional diplomacy to the Palestinian cause. While the cost for Iran and its allies has been devastating, the Axis increased its political capital by demonstrating integrated coercive capacity: calibrated pressure on northern Israel, long-range fires, and maritime disruption. This raised the costs of U.S.-led normalization that sidelines Palestinians; Saudi Arabia made normalization conditional on credible steps toward statehood. As importantly, the war made the Middle East more volatile and ensured the conflict remains a flashpoint for a wider regional confrontation. The Middle East is now marked by chronic low-grade multi-front instability rather than isolated crises, and the Palestinian issue is embedded in that strategic competition.

Finally, the war has triggered a profound crisis of the international legal and normative order. The proceedings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC), combined with the political assault on UNRWA, have solidified a perception across the Global South of Western double standards. Funding suspensions for UNRWA and pressure on humanitarian actors created a chilling precedent. The long-term effect is clear: Western claims to lead a "rules-based order" will carry less moral weight where selectivity is perceived. The West's championing of international law in Ukraine while providing diplomatic and military cover for actions in Gaza has shattered its moral credibility. This has weakened the legitimacy of international institutions and accelerated the shift toward a more fragmented, multipolar world where the "rules-based order" is seen as a tool of power, not a set of universal principles.

(2) Israeli Untrustworthiness, Western Loss of Soft Power, and the Trump Plan

The enduring consequences of the Gaza war outlined above have been accompanied by other developments that might not be the direct outcome of that war or that might not be as enduring, but they, nonetheless, have implications to any future Palestinian strategy as they (1) raise questions about the usefulness of any future agreements with Israel; (2) affect the structure and norms of the emerging international system and their possible impact on the long term interests of the Palestinians; and (3) impact the Palestinian short term policy regarding the Gaza Strip and the Trump 20-point plan.

The Perception of Israeli Untrustworthiness: The experience of the Gaza war negotiations has led to a widespread perception among Palestinians and Arabs that Israel does not negotiate in good faith, that it exploits ambiguity, defers core obligations, and has a history of renegeing on agreements. That view will not end bargaining—combatants still need tactical deals and the need for stability will ensure that talks continue. But it could affect the usefulness of such agreements and transform how agreements are designed and sold. While, the era of trust-based, gradualist peace-making, epitomized by the Oslo process, is over, future negotiations will be defined by transactionalism over trust, with every step requiring meticulous verification and enforcement.

For Palestinian, this means demanding front-loaded concessions and robust third-party guarantees. Any future PA leadership, to maintain public legitimacy, will have to abandon interim agreements and demand irreversible steps toward sovereignty upfront. For Arab states, this perception drastically raises the political risk of engaging with Israel. Mediators like Egypt and Qatar will insist on US and broader international backing to guarantee compliance, while potential normalizers like Saudi Arabia will make any deal explicitly contingent on US guarantees and tangible, upfront progress toward a sovereign Palestinian state. The price of normalization has significantly increased. The old model of deferring core issues is seen reckless; it could be replaced by a demand for concrete Israeli deliverables at the beginning of any process, creating a much higher bar for diplomatic success.

The Normative and Structural Change in the International System: Building on the seventh enduring outcome discussed above, the Gaza war has inflicted a deep and lasting wound on the credibility of the United States and Europe in the Arab world and across the Global South. The perception of a profound double standard—contrasting the West's robust, morally-charged defense of Ukraine with its diplomatic and military support for Israel's campaign in Gaza—has shattered the West's claim to champion a "rules-based international order." This is not a fleeting disagreement but a fundamental crisis of legitimacy.

This credibility vacuum in norms is occurring at a critical moment of global structural change. The emerging normative change creates a strategic opening for non-Western and non-NATO powers like China and Russia. China, in particular, offers a pragmatic and predictable alternative. Its foreign policy, built on the principle of non-interference and transactional economic partnerships, is appealing to regional regimes weary of Western lectures on human rights. China's credibility stems not from a shared moral vision but from its reliability as an economic and arms-exporting partner and its consistent (if self-serving) rhetoric of state sovereignty and multipolarism. Russia offers a potential source of weapon but it will not be seen as a strategic ally. Constrained by its Ukraine ambition, it finds itself unable to support its allies in the region or elsewhere in any meaningful way, as we have seen in Syria, Iran, Venezuela, and Cuba.

The long-term consequences of a multipolar world and the accelerated decline of Western soft power are difficult to predict. The United States will likely remain, at least in the medium term, the region's primary security guarantor, but its influence is increasingly transactional. Arab states will continue to hedge their bets by diversifying partnerships—relying on the U.S. for security, China for economic engagement and arms development, and Russia for selective military needs. The West's ability to forge broad international coalitions and act as a moral arbiter has been severely weakened, signaling the definitive arrival of a more fragmented and contested global order moving toward multipolarity. The 1947 partition of Palestine was a product of the post-World War II rules-based international order, yet that partition has remained unfulfilled. The emerging global order promises Palestinians neither independence nor equality; securing either will depend on their own capacity to define their place and shape their future within this new landscape.

The Trump Peace Plan: A Pause, Not a Peace: The Trump 20-Point Plan for the Gaza Strip, which secured a ceasefire and hostage release in its first phase in late 2025 and established a Palestinian technocratic committee-- the “National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG)—and a non-Palestinian “Gaza Executive Board” in preparation for the start of the second phase, is not a viable roadmap to a larger sustainable peace. Instead, it is a transactional arrangement poised to fragment and stall, achieving its immediate goals while failing in its broader strategic ambitions. The plan’s architecture is fundamentally misaligned with the political realities on the ground, creating a pause in the war but not a path to a resolution of the larger Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The plan is unsustainable due to five core challenges. First, its demand for the disarmament of Hamas in the absence of a wider peace and end of occupation is likely to prove unrealistic. Islamist groups are unlikely to accept such total vulnerability to direct Israeli attacks or to attacks by armed domestic groups aligned with Israel. In that, it has public support, including among Gazans who have no trust in Israel or its proxies and continue to fear expulsion and genocide. In this regard, Hamas and its arms remain the sole leverage Gazans feel they have.

Second, the plan’s proposed governance model—a foreign-supervised administrative committee and foreign military force under American command—is a form of neo-colonialism that denies Palestinian agency and lacks any local legitimacy. While in the short term, the administrative committee will undoubtedly enjoy significant support from Gazans, its inability to navigate Israeli constraints or implement US political agenda will render it impotent and unable to significantly change the reality on the ground for more than two million Gazans.

Third, the plan’s ambiguous “political horizon” is correctly perceived as a deliberate evasion of the core issues of sovereignty, including the fundamental issues of borders and Jerusalem, making it impossible for any Palestinian leader to see it anything other than the discredited 2020 “Deal of the Century.” Fourth, despite the increased US willingness to use leverage to press Israel, the plan remains subject to an Israeli political veto, as any right-wing government will be beholden to extremist parties who oppose Palestinian statehood. Finally, it fails to resolve the crisis of Palestinian representation, bypassing the PA while expecting it to reform and negotiating with Hamas while seeking to sideline it.

Consequently, the plan will not reunify the West Bank and Gaza; it will formalize their separation by creating a separate governance track for the Gaza Strip. Reconstruction will be severely constrained by fears of recurrent experiences of the past decade when repeated military action by Israel destroyed all investments in infrastructure and homes by Egypt, Qatar, UAE and others. Therefore, reconstruction will be slow and heavily conditioned, not a comprehensive redevelopment.

The only way to overcome these challenges is to invert the plan’s logic: prioritize inclusive Palestinian elections to produce a legitimate national leadership, define the two-state endgame based on international law first, and make disarmament an *outcome* of a final political settlement, not a precondition for it. Without these fundamental changes, the plan will simply replicate the failures of the past.

(3) Palestinian Options: A New National Strategy

A new Palestinian strategy must internalize the enduring consequences of the post–October 7 era—recognizing new constraints while capitalizing on emerging opportunities including those offered by the Trump 20-point plan. Given the ascendancy of Israel’s national-religious right, the profound crisis of Palestinian leadership, the collapse of the Oslo framework, and the perceived unreliability of Israeli governments as negotiating partners, the Palestinian people are at a strategic crossroads. The old, U.S.-mediated diplomatic strategy is defunct. A fundamental strategic rethink is therefore necessary for national survival, beginning with the core imperative of rebuilding national legitimacy.

The first and most urgent step must be to forge ties with the administrative committee of the Gaza Strip and hold inclusive presidential and legislative elections across the West Bank and Gaza, using all available methods to ensure participation. This is the only path to maintaining links to Gaza and to producing a new, legitimate leadership with a popular mandate. Following elections, a national unity government must be

formed with a clear mandate for internal reform. Its priorities should be to restore basic governance and service delivery in health, education, and security for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; ensure full commitment to the Palestinian Basic Law and amend all post-2007 legislation that violates it; reunify public institutions across the West Bank and Gaza; and take credible steps to combat corruption, including the creation of an independent commission.

Concurrently, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) must be restored as a functional and representative institution, not a hollowed-out fiction. This requires holding elections for its governing bodies in the West Bank, Gaza, and the diaspora, using all available technological means to ensure broad participation. A reformed PLO must possess electoral legitimacy, be reconstituted to include all major factions, abide by its own internal regulations, and no longer be subject to the whims of a single individual or a small elite. Only under these conditions can the PLO once again serve as the sole, credible address for international negotiations.

Externally, the new strategy must pivot away from a near-total reliance on the United States and embrace a principled multilateralism. This requires strengthening alliances with supportive countries in the Global South and in Europe that have demonstrated a commitment to international law. It also means engaging with powers like China and Russia not as saviors, but as geopolitical counterweights at the UN Security Council to block initiatives detrimental to Palestinian interests. Furthermore, the systematic use of international legal institutions—the ICJ and the ICC—must be elevated from a tactic to a core strategic pillar. This “lawfare” reframes the conflict as a struggle against an illegal occupation with clear legal consequences, shifting the burden of compliance onto Israel and its international backers.

Finally, the national goal must be redefined to align with shifting global public opinion and the realities on the ground. Given the political trends within Israel, the traditional two-state paradigm is currently unrealistic. While the goal of a sovereign state must not be abandoned, the most viable path forward is to shift the immediate struggle from a specific political configuration to the realization of core, inalienable rights: self-determination, full civil and political equality for all people between the river and the sea, and justice for refugees based on international law.

This rights-based framework is strategically powerful because it builds on the changing landscape of global public opinion and forces the world to choose between supporting equal rights or endorsing a system of ethnic supremacy. It transforms the Palestinian struggle from an intractable territorial dispute into a global anti-apartheid movement—a terrain on which Israel is far more vulnerable. This strategy, grounded in internal unity, global alliances, and a rights-based struggle, offers the most effective path for Palestinians to reclaim their agency. Crucially, a rights-based framework keeps both end states—equality in one state and sovereignty in two states—conceptually open while prioritizing the immediate fight for concrete protections and freedoms.

Conclusion:

The 2023-25 Gaza War was a watershed event that shattered the illusions of conflict management and exposed the deep rot in both the international order and the Palestinian political system. The enduring consequences have created a new and more perilous strategic landscape. In this environment, externally imposed frameworks like the Trump Plan, which ignore the core issues of political legitimacy and sovereignty, are destined to fail. They may achieve a temporary pause in hostilities but cannot build a lasting peace.

For the Palestinian people, the path forward is not to be found in the chancelleries of foreign capitals but in the difficult and essential work of national renewal. The profound crisis of leadership is not just a symptom of the conflict's intractability; it is a primary obstacle to its resolution. The only viable strategy is one that begins with rebuilding internal legitimacy through democratic elections and national unity. A revitalized and representative Palestinian leadership can then pivot to a new global strategy: one that moves beyond a failed U.S.-led process and instead builds a broad international coalition grounded in international law and a non-negotiable demand for equal rights. This is a long and arduous path, but it is the only one that offers a chance to break the tragic cycle of violence and finally address the dual crises of occupation and internal legitimacy that continue to plague the Palestinian people.

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