

ISRAEL'S GENOCIDE IN GAZA

DOMESTIC, REGIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL DYNAMICS



Arab Center Washington DC
المركز العربي واشنطن دي سي

**KHALIL E. JAHSHAN AND
TAMARA KHARROUB, EDITORS**

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Arab Center Washington DC, Inc.
1400 K Street NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20005
www.arabcenterdc.org
info@arabcenterdc.org

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Introduction

Tamara Kharroub

By early August 2026, more than 73,000 Palestinians had been killed in Gaza—with women and children making up approximately 70 percent of the total reported fatalities—and more than 173,000 had been injured, affecting at least 11 percent of Gaza’s pre-war population. Some reports estimate that the actual death toll could be more than 186,000. At least 90 percent of Gaza’s population has been displaced, sheltering in makeshift tents or in severely damaged buildings and living in dire conditions without adequate food, medical care, education, or electricity, while disease and infestations continue to spread. Roughly 90 percent of all civilian and life-sustaining infrastructures, including homes, hospitals, and schools, have been damaged or destroyed. The long-term physical and psychological impact of this devastation on the population—especially children and women—is also alarming, as human development in Gaza has been set back 77 years. Israeli attacks and control over Gaza continue to expand. Since the putative ceasefire began on October 10, 2025, Israel has killed more than 1,200 Palestinians in Gaza, an average of four people daily. Despite so-called peace initiatives by President Donald Trump’s administration, Israel continues to occupy and destroy Gaza, controlling nearly 70 percent of the territory, and obstruct vital humanitarian aid, while reconstruction and essential services have yet to begin.

Israel’s genocide has unfolded alongside broader efforts to depoliticize and erase Palestinian presence in all of historic Palestine. In the West Bank, ethnic cleansing has escalated, marked by state-sanctioned settler violence, forcible evictions and dispossession of Palestinians, settlement expansions, and lawfare weaponized to take over Palestinian land, as well as documented extreme torture and sexual violence against unlawfully detained Palestinian civilians. Beyond Palestine, Israel has expanded its military activity across the region, conducting attacks

against seven countries as well as in international waters. In 2026, the United States joined Israel's war on Iran, which has contributed to a global economic and energy crisis and resulted in thousands of deaths across Iran, Lebanon, the Gulf, and Israel.

Although the world seems to have only recently started paying attention to Palestine, its history did not begin on October 7, 2023. The Israeli genocide is the cumulative effect of decades of dispossession and oppression. For decades, Israel has maintained a system of occupation, ethnic cleansing, and apartheid, imposing military rule over millions of Palestinians whose daily lives and basic rights have been severely constrained. Moreover, Palestinians have been deprived, particularly with the support of liberal Western governments, of any meaningful avenues to protect themselves. Peaceful protests and non-violent resistance have been suppressed and met with violent crackdowns by Israel, diplomatic efforts and agreements have been violated, legal measures brought by Palestinians at international forums have been blocked and punished with sanctions and defunding, and political boycotts of Israel in the West have been criminalized. The genocide in Gaza, while significantly larger in scale and scope than previous waves of violence, is an extension of earlier Israeli policies of settler colonialism and erasures of Palestinian existence.

There is no doubt that the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack and the ensuing genocide—which has lasted nearly three years at the time of writing—represent a watershed not only for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also for the region and the global order more broadly. Israel's policies and the global acquiescence to them pose a serious existential threat to Palestinian survival, while also reshaping the identity of Israeli society, undermining prospects for regional peace, and challenging the credibility of the United States and European powers. Israel's genocide has also raised fundamental questions about the future of the international order. The scale of Israel's mass killing—unprecedented in recent decades—has exposed glaring failures in the international system and its capacity to prevent mass atrocities. The rules-based international order, and the credibility of international law itself, have been deeply shaken. Furthermore, Israel and its allies have made deliberate efforts to erase evidence of the genocide, evade independent investigations and accountability for both perpetrators and complicit states, rewrite the historical record, and dismiss or ignore the catastrophic human suffering and violations of international law that continue to unfold.

This critical juncture, and the regional and global transformations it has produced, warrant careful, in-depth analysis. To meet this need, this volume seeks to provide a critical, extensive analysis of the genocide in Gaza. It examines the domestic, regional, and international dimensions of the genocide while documenting the realities on the ground, especially given Israel's barring of any independent investigation into its conduct in Gaza. In addition to chronicling the genocide, this volume seeks to document and critically analyze the political, corporate, and legal

structures and global institutions that enabled it. Scholars from various disciplines bring different historical, political, and theoretical perspectives to the ongoing genocide in Gaza, situating contemporary mass violence in the history of settler colonialism and dispossession in Palestine as well as structural inequalities in the global system. The chapters offer a comprehensive account of the past three years of genocide, while exploring pathways toward accountability, rehabilitation, reconstruction, self-determination, and a future for the region grounded in justice and lasting peace.

This book is organized into six parts. The first section examines the anatomy of the genocide and documents Israel's conduct and abuses in Gaza, including the crime of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. In Chapter 1, genocide scholar Martin Shaw analyzes the legal determinations of genocide, evaluates the evidence of Israel's genocidal acts and intent, and assesses the complicity of third states that supplied Israel with military, economic, political, and diplomatic support in carrying out the genocide. In Chapter 2, Yara M. Asi examines the deliberate targeting of health workers and destruction of the health sector in Gaza, characterizing it as "medicide." Asi details the enduring health consequences that are projected to persist for decades, arguing that a justice-based political solution is the only adequate response to the long-term health crisis that has emerged. Chapter 3 focuses on the role of the media and technology industries in enabling mass atrocities: Tamara Kharroub examines the extensive evidence of the role that legacy media, social media platforms, and technology companies have played in dehumanizing Palestinians, suppressing Palestinian content, normalizing anti-Palestinian racism and violence, and justifying and enabling Israeli crimes. Given the publicly available legal evidence of war crimes and the plausible risk of genocide, Kharroub argues that media and technology companies have facilitated mass atrocities and failed to meet their obligations under international legal frameworks; they may therefore be held complicit in aiding and abetting genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. In Chapter 4, Sonia Boulos assesses the gendered nature of the genocide, noting that sexualized violence has long been part of Israeli rule over Palestinians. Examining the evidence of sexualized violence in Gaza and the relevant legal frameworks, Boulos argues that these acts are deliberate tools of genocidal destruction intended to inflict severe physical and psychological harm as well as social fragmentation and long-term communal disruption. Boulos further contends that sexualized violence and the accompanying public humiliation serve as indicators of genocidal intent, as they reflect a strategy aimed at degrading and fracturing the group's social and biological continuity. Taken together, the arguments and evidence presented in these chapters establish a pattern of conduct by Israel amounting to a deliberate strategy to dismantle the physical and social existence of Palestinians.

The second section looks at the political environments in Palestine and Israel before and after October 7, outlining the evolving political crises and the challenges ahead. The chapters point to the fact that the October 7 attacks exposed the vulnerability of Israel's permanent occupation and the Palestinian leadership that acquiesces to it. In Chapter 5, Tahani Mustafa lays out the stalemate in Palestinian politics, arguing that two decades under President Mahmoud Abbas have left Palestinians trapped in a collapsed peace process, incapable of protecting themselves, and beholden to a leadership compliant with the Israeli occupation. Mustafa calls on the international community to support Palestinians in deciding their own leadership and creating a government accountable to the Palestinian people as the only viable path toward real peace negotiations and future self-determination. In Chapter 6, Hanna Alshaikh examines Hamas's strategy and positions before and after October 7, outlining the group's approach to balancing governance and diplomacy amid humanitarian crises with its project of armed resistance. Alshaikh argues that Hamas's adaptability and persistence suggest that doubling down on a military strategy would only deepen the deadlock in Gaza, inflict further suffering on its surviving two million civilians, and fail to advance the interests of any responsible actor.

In Chapters 7 and 8, Shir Hever and Raef Zreik examine Israel's political dynamics and the shift to the extreme right in Israeli society. They contend that a state, society, and economy built on permanent occupation is not a recipe for a sustainable and successful endeavor. Hever addresses the political economy of genocide and the notion of Israel's "zombie economy." He argues that the Israeli economy continues to plod on through successive crises in zombie-like fashion, only because of collective failure to understand the reality of occupation and genocide. When Israel's institutional, social, and economic disintegration can no longer be ignored, he contends, the zombie will finally fall. Zreik dissects Israel's existential crisis and myth of absolute military victory, arguing that Zionism is destabilizing by its very nature. Although divisions in Israel are blurred when it comes to the Palestinians, he argues, Israel will remain anxious and dependent as long as it does not resolve the critical structural issues related to borders, demography, the role of religion, the status of Palestinians under Israeli rule, and the limits of territorial expansion. Both authors conclude that after nearly three years of bombardment of Gaza and military overreach across the region, Israel is more vulnerable and less secure than ever before.

The third section focuses on the regional environment and geopolitical factors. In Chapters 9 and 12, Imad K. Harb and Mehran Kamrava discuss the roles and strategies of Iran and the Axis of Resistance vis-à-vis Israel and the genocide in Gaza. Harb argues that Israel's war against Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, Syria, and Yemen's Houthis is fixated on eradicating any resistance to its agenda

of dispossessing Palestinians, annexing Palestinian land, and imposing a colonial hegemony over the surrounding countries. The genocidal war against the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, he concludes, is only one part—albeit an essential one—of the overall effort to clear the way for Zionist control and the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, and to eliminate any resistance to its expansionist agenda in the wider region. Kamrava outlines Iran’s two-pronged approach to Israel, noting that Iran’s use of the Palestinian cause as rhetoric and slogans weaponized for political gain is not matched with real action in support of Palestine or even Hamas, as evidenced by Tehran’s decision not to enter the war alongside Hamas. Kamrava notes that Iran is more conservative and takes a more pragmatic security approach than often believed, basing its decisions on strategic patience and power balance considerations rather than ideology. As such, he contends, Iran’s deterrence strategy has shifted in the last years away from extensive reliance on the Axis of Resistance to overt use of its ballistic missiles and to establishing administrative control over the Strait of Hormuz.

In Chapter 10, Nader Hashemi discusses the role and collusion of Arab and Muslim states over the future of Gaza. He points to the November 2025 United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2803, which endorsed Trump’s peace plan, as a major turning point in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict comparable to the Balfour Declaration. Hashemi argues that the endorsement by Arab and Muslim leaders gave regional and international legitimacy to Trump’s Gaza plan, a plan that favors Israeli interests and supports the removal of Palestinians under the “Riviera of the Middle East” framework. While ignoring international laws and past UN resolutions, UNSC Resolution 2803 shifted global attention away from Gaza and thus allowed Israel to continue its crimes and colonial project uninterrupted. In Chapter 11, Rami G. Khouri discusses the challenges facing Egypt and Jordan as they seek to navigate a new regional order while balancing their dependence on the United States with intense public opposition to Israeli-US policies in Palestine. Khouri argues that both Cairo and Amman have tried to pacify their publics with symbolic political gestures, vehemently opposing attempts to expel Palestinians from Gaza into Egypt and Jordan while protecting their strategic ties with the United States. He notes that their responses signal how quasi-sovereign Arab states choose to play by the old rules in order to survive in a new wave of colonialism in the region.

The fourth part of the book focuses on the United States’ foreign policy and domestic politics vis-à-vis the genocide under the administrations of both former President Joe Biden and President Trump. Yousef Munayyer outlines in Chapter 13 the policies of Biden and Trump and the role that the genocide played in the 2024 election. Munayyer argues that much of the killing and destruction would not have been possible without US support for Israel. Despite some differences in the Biden and Trump administrations’ policies toward the Gaza war, Munayyer contends that

they were largely aligned. He argues that Trump's 20-point plan and governance structure essentially eliminate Palestinian political life and self-determination. In Chapter 14, Heba Gowayed details the "Palestine Exception" to liberal discourse and academic freedom in the United States, which the Trump administration has weaponized to erode democratic institutions and higher education. To be sure, academic institutions also helped silence student and faculty opposition to a genocide in which they themselves were heavily invested, encouraging the Trump administration to defund noncompliant organizations, chill debate, and even carry out deportations on college campuses. As the attacks worsen on minoritized groups, Gowayed concludes that the lesson is that no one is free until everyone is free.

Drawing from his own experiences in the Democratic Party, in Chapter 15 James J. Zogby explains the changes that have taken place since 1988 in US public opinion, the role that Palestinian rights have played in domestic US politics and elections, and the reasons behind the slow progress toward change by the establishment. Zogby argues that the Democratic Party's internal fractures over Palestine as well as the widening gap between the party leadership and voters highlight how public pressure is reshaping the boundaries of acceptable policy in the party and in Washington more broadly. He concludes that a huge shift has occurred over the past four decades and change is on the way. In Chapter 16, Safia K. Southey unpacks the US statutory architecture related to supplying weapons to a state committing genocide and war crimes, specifically assessing Sections 502B and 620I of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, the Leahy Laws, and the Arms Export Control Act. Southey explains that the executive branch under both the Biden and the second Trump presidencies failed to enforce US laws with respect to arming Israel during its war on Gaza.

Chapters 17 to 20 address global dynamics and the failures of international law and governance. In Chapter 17, Phyllis Bennis examines how growing grassroots movements around the world have taken the lead despite crackdowns and how governments in the Global South have challenged US hegemony over the international order. In the context of weak global governance and the lack of political will to enforce legal frameworks to prevent the genocide in Gaza, civil society actors have worked with key governments to pressure individual states and some global institutions. Bennis proposes using the United Nations (UN) General Assembly and exerting pressure on individual states, including through the "Uniting for Peace" mechanism, as pathways to pursuing justice and accountability. Chapter 18 examines the roles of the European Union and individual member states, as Isabel Ruck argues that Europe has enabled and prolonged genocidal violence against Palestinians in Gaza through shielding Israel diplomatically in multilateral forums; continuing military cooperation and arms transfers; selectively interpreting international law; obstructing accountability mechanisms; and repressing domestic

dissent. Ruck traces European states' differing histories of involvement in Palestine and their varied responses to Israel's conduct in Gaza between 2023 and 2025, classifying them into enablers, balancers, and dissenters, and labeling Europe's commitment to international law as largely performative.

In Chapter 19, Waleed Hazbun examines the military, political, and economic infrastructure in the United States and Europe that facilitated the genocide in Gaza. Hazbun argues that rapid US transfers of weapons, munitions, fuel, and financial support to Israel were essential in enabling and sustaining Israel's genocide and war crimes in Gaza. Hazbun concludes that while the transnational networks of interests and flows of capital and weaponry that sustain Israel's machinery of violence are entrenched, growing numbers of policymakers, academics, activists, and citizens are calling for efforts to dismantle this military support infrastructure and instead pursue diplomatic solutions to regional security. Chapter 20 looks at the global order: legal scholars Susan M. Akram and John B. Quigley analyze the distinctive features of Israel's acts in Gaza that have contributed to the recognition of genocide, namely the biological genocide and scholasticide intended to annihilate the possibility of future generations of Palestinians, arguing that the entire global system intended to protect civilians has failed. In addition to the deadlock at the UNSC and US veto power used to shield Israel, Akram and Quigley note that the UNSC Resolution 2803 and President Trump's so-called peace plan have further undermined the UN system and international law. They argue that the UN General Assembly should use its "Uniting for Peace" authority to reject the Board of Peace's legitimacy, authorize a UN peacekeeping force in Gaza, and pursue reforms that strengthen the UN's ability to address international crises.

The final section of this volume offers a forward-looking assessment, analyzing the prospects of rehabilitation, reconstruction, accountability, and self-determination for the Palestinian people, and moving toward a sustainable, just, and lasting peace for people in the region. In Chapter 21, Mohammed Samhoury describes the devastating impact of the war on Gaza, including massive loss of life, widespread displacement, destruction of infrastructure and public services, and severe damage to human development, physical and mental health, and future economic prospects. He highlights the long-term risks to Palestinians' well-being, alongside environmental destruction and an estimated \$70 billion reconstruction cost. Samhoury argues that meaningful recovery is unlikely while Israel maintains full control of the Strip and that rebuilding requires first addressing the constraints imposed by occupation and political conditions. As such, he concludes that it is highly doubtful that Israel would facilitate or allow the rebuilding of a land it had deliberately destroyed, and that saving Gaza's war-torn population from falling further into destitution and despair is an urgent necessity and a test of the international community's commitment to humanitarian law. In Chapter 22, Nur Arafeh

assesses the various postwar plans for Gaza, which she notes generally sideline Palestinians either as experts or as agents in the reconstruction process and treat the destruction of Gaza as an opportunity for political and economic gain. Arafah argues that the proposals follow earlier models of counterinsurgency doctrine and disaster capitalism, which similarly repurpose humanitarian need as an instrument of control. Arafah warns that, in these frameworks, reconstruction is not a right but a reward for compliance. She argues that a sustainable reconstruction effort must address the root causes of destruction, respect Palestinian self-determination, and place real ownership and agency in Palestinian hands.

In Chapter 23, Sarah Leah Whitson outlines the various avenues of accountability for war crimes in Gaza, including International Court of Justice opinions and provisional measures, International Criminal Court arrest warrants, litigation in national courts, legal challenges to arms transfers, arms embargoes, trade sanctions, diplomatic suspensions, and sanctions against individuals. Despite the proliferation of accountability efforts around Palestine across international and national legal forums, Whitson highlights the political challenges to pursuing accountability, such as the forceful pushback by Israel and its allies and the unwillingness of powerful states to impose meaningful consequences on Israel for its actions. Whitson notes the growing momentum and breadth of accountability initiatives that have started to crack Israel's shield of impunity, and contends that holding those responsible for the Gaza genocide to account is a critical step in the enforcement of laws prohibiting genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity and in ensuring a credible global legal order. In the final chapter, Khalil E. Jahshan examines the profound shifts in Israel and Palestine following the October 7 attacks and the ensuing genocide in Gaza. He outlines the major challenges confronting both Israeli society and government and the Palestinian leadership and national movement. With Israel's political landscape becoming more extremist, paranoid, and racist, and amid growing opposition to Palestinian rights, the country faces significant challenges, including regaining security and stability, escaping the perpetual state of war, overcoming the legacy of "Netanyahu-ism," restoring international alliances, and managing the war's long-term economic costs. For Palestinians, Jahshan argues, the war represents a modern-day Nakba, and the risk of mass expulsion remains acute given widespread support for forcibly removing Palestinians among Jewish Israelis. At the same time, stalled political initiatives and Israel's expanding control and escalation of violence in Gaza and the West Bank have deepened the humanitarian, economic, and political crises. These conditions leave Palestinian leaders confronting a governance crisis, declining popular support, political fragmentation, and the challenge of advancing the national movement in the face of an Israel, international system, regional actors, and US administration increasingly comfortable with permanent Palestinian subordination.

Nearly three years after the October 7 attacks and the beginning of the genocide in Gaza, no serious effort has been made to ensure the protection of Palestinians, end Israel's mass violence, enforce international law, or address the root causes of the conflict. Collectively, the chapters in this volume not only document and analyze the dynamics of the genocide but also serve as a reminder that only a just solution can bring about sustainable peace and security for both Palestinians and Israelis. By foregrounding structural factors and human experiences, the book highlights importance of the equal application of international law, pursuing accountability measures, saving Palestinians in Gaza, and ensuring Palestinian agency in any plan for reconstruction and governance. Failure to uphold international law undermines the rules-based global order and ultimately contributes to a less secure world. A just, sustainable future can only be realized through adherence to international legal and human rights standards, a meaningful commitment to accountability, and the protection of the Palestinian people's inherent rights to life, dignity, and self-determination.



The Anatomy of Genocide: Dehumanization, Mass Atrocities, and Global Complicity

Chapter 1

The Gaza Genocide and State Complicity under International Law

Martin Shaw

Chapter 2

Violence, Deprivation, and Atrocities in Gaza: The Health and Humanitarian Toll

Yara M. Asi

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Epistemic Violence and Digital Dehumanization: Media and Tech Companies' Complicity in Genocide

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Chapter 4

The Genocidal Project and the Gendered Logic of Destruction: Gender-Based and Sexualized Violence in Gaza

Sonia Boulos

CHAPTER 1

The Gaza Genocide and State Complicity under International Law

Martin Shaw

The 1948 Genocide Convention and the 1998 Rome Statute defined genocide to mean any of five acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group: 1) killing members of the group, 2) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, 3) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, 4) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, and 5) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.¹

The Israeli assault on Gaza since October 7, 2023, has been widely regarded as meeting these criteria for genocide by an array of legal experts, human rights organizations, and international institutions. Despite this consensus, numerous states have been complicit in the genocide by offering political, diplomatic, or military support to its perpetrator. This chapter discusses how the recognition of genocide came about, why Israel's actions meet the criteria for genocide in international law, and what ramifications this classification holds for the responsibility of political leaders both in Israel and internationally.

Early Signs of Genocide

From the first days after October 7, 2023, Israeli leaders including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Isaac Herzog employed the rhetoric of genocide. They stated that there were “no innocent civilians” in Gaza, for example, and that the whole population, not just Hamas, was the enemy that they sought to destroy.² In December 2023, when South Africa brought a case against Israel for committing genocide in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Israel's lawyers argued that such

language should not be interpreted as an intention to commit the crime.³ However, in January 2024, the court's president referred to the same rhetoric in announcing its interim judgement that there was a "plausible claim of genocidal acts" in Gaza. The ICJ was sufficiently alarmed to issue instructions to Israel not to commit genocide—which would hardly have been necessary without a risk of the state committing it—and to mitigate the harm that its actions were causing to civilians.⁴ In its September 2025 report, the UN Commission of Inquiry found that statements by Israeli leaders established genocidal intent, including Herzog's October 13, 2023, statement that it was "an entire nation out there that is responsible. It is not true, this rhetoric about civilians who were not aware and not involved. It is absolutely not true."⁵ In addition to the evidence of Israel's stated intent to target Palestinian civilians and destroy life in Gaza, South Africa's lawyers were able to point to the hugely destructive character of Israel's attack. Indeed, the first months of bombardment produced a level of civilian casualties unprecedented in recent wars. Some observers, including this writer, had argued from October 2023 that Israel was beginning to commit genocide. Since 2008, Israel has conducted four previous wars in Gaza marked by extensive and recurrent violence, consistent with the euphemistically named strategy of "mowing the grass," a metaphor used by Israeli military and political leaders to describe frequent, intensive, and large-scale military operations against Palestinians.⁶ Since Palestinian armed groups had radically escalated their actions on October 7, 2023, there was every reason to expect Israel's campaign to be its most destructive ever. It was soon evident that Israel was indeed carrying out a war of revenge, not only against the armed groups but also against the civilian population, which quickly morphed into a strategic project to destroy the entire built environment and the fabric of life in Gaza.

Application of the Genocide Convention to Israeli Policies

The genocidal character of the Israeli military campaign in the Gaza Strip quickly became apparent due to Israel's clear policy of crippling Palestinian society. Even after the "ceasefire" was brokered by US President Donald Trump in October 2025, Israeli ministers openly called for the expulsion of the remaining Palestinian population from the enclave.⁷ Legal scholars and international human rights organizations found there were reasonable grounds to conclude that Israel had committed the first four of the five genocidal acts defined under international law in Gaza.⁸ This conclusion was reached after considering evidence of Israeli attacks targeting civilians and other protected persons and objects, the deliberate infliction of conditions causing death, the severe mistreatment of detainees, the destruction of structures and land essential to Palestinians, the destruction and denial of access to medical services, forced displacement, the blocking of essential aid, water, electricity, and

fuel from reaching Palestinians, reproductive violence, specific conditions impacting children, and the attack on Gaza's largest fertility clinic.⁹

By the time the supposed ceasefire took effect in October 2025, over 70,000 deaths had been directly recorded, but it is estimated that around 112,000 may have been killed and over 170,000 wounded out of a population of approximately 2.2 million.¹⁰ Thousands more have died of hunger and disease due to Israel's blocking of food and medicine and its deliberate destruction of most of the housing stock, which has forced many Palestinians to live in tents in unsanitary conditions.¹¹

To establish that these actions meet the legal definition of genocide, it is necessary to show that Israel carried out these acts with the *specific intention* of destroying the Palestinian national group, in whole or in part. Subsequent investigations found that both statements by Israeli leaders and the pattern of conduct by Israeli forces, including demolishing the schools, mosques, churches, and universities in which the group's collective life was led, provided sufficient evidence of genocidal intent.¹² The UN Human Rights Council, which investigated violations of the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in Gaza, found that Israel's airstrikes and systematic destruction of UNESCO heritage, religious, and historical sites violated international legal obligation to protect cultural property, in that these sites formed the very fabric of Palestinian society.¹³

Offices and organizations which have recognized Israel's genocide now include the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory; the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Dr Francesca Albanese; Amnesty International; Human Rights Watch; the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem; the International Association of Genocide Scholars; and almost all genocide scholars who have individually analyzed the situation, including several leading Israeli Holocaust historians.¹⁴

Israel has denied the genocide. It claims that any civilian harm is "collateral damage" from its war on Hamas, and therefore within the laws of war, which allow "proportionate" civilian harm in pursuit of military objectives.¹⁵ However, Israel has long shown its intention to subvert these rules, in its so-called Dahiya doctrine (named after the Beirut suburb which it targeted in 2006, 2024, and, despite the ceasefire, 2025), which specifically licenses "disproportionate" violence.¹⁶ Indeed, in late 2023 Israel further weakened its targeting norms to allow even larger numbers of civilians to be killed or injured while supposedly attacking even one individual Hamas fighter.¹⁷ Statistics from the Israeli military consequently reveal an 83 percent civilian casualty toll between October 2023 and May 2025, highlighting an indifference to mass civilian deaths.¹⁸ Intent can further be demonstrated by the Israeli military's targeting of children, with dozens of cases of children being shot by snipers in lethal areas such as the head or chest.¹⁹

Although the ICJ might not provide a judgment on South Africa's case against Israel until late 2026 if not later, the court's provisional measures in January 2024 instructed Israel to refrain from acts of genocide, prevent public incitement to genocide, preserve evidence of genocide, and take immediate measures to ensure the provision of humanitarian assistance.²⁰ The focus on humanitarian assistance is likely due to the fact that denial of food, water, electricity, and medical supplies was the dimension of civilian harm that was least possible for Israel to justify on military grounds, even though it was Israel's "military" acts—such as bombardment, shooting, and demolition—which most directly harmed civilians.

Israel disregarded these instructions, forcing the Court to tighten them further in March and again in May 2024, when it instructed Israel to halt military offensives immediately, open the Rafah crossing to allow the provision of humanitarian assistance, and ensure the unimpeded access to the Gaza Strip of any commission of inquiry to investigate allegations of genocide. Israel disregarded the court's instructions and continued both its campaign and its policy of starvation.²¹ In March 2025, Israel violated the US-brokered ceasefire it had agreed upon two months earlier and prohibited nearly all supplies from entry. This policy soon produced a new starvation crisis, one that prompted even wider recognition that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza.

Complicity of Other States in the Genocide

Although the Israeli government and armed forces have been the principal direct perpetrators, the Gaza genocide also raises the issue of wider responsibility within the framework of international law. The 1948 Genocide Convention commits all signatory states, which comprise the majority of UN member-states, to prevent and punish the crime of genocide.²² Reports by the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories, Francesca Albanese, and the UN Commission of Inquiry have concluded that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza and that the actions of "Third States" have enabled these acts through direct military support, material aid, diplomatic protection, and economic relations with Israel.²³ In this case, complicity is established when a state contributes to another state's crimes with knowledge of the circumstances. When support is "direct, indispensable and constitutive," it may cross the threshold from complicity to direct participation.²⁴

It is arguable that few states have made sufficiently strong attempts to prevent Israel from committing genocide, still less to punish it and its leaders for genocide. On the contrary, many states, especially the United States, have actively assisted Israel in its campaign. Even states that have criticized Israel have not, in most cases, taken clear steps to try to halt its genocide. For example, around 170 states allow visa-free entry to Israeli citizens, and few operate checks to prevent those who have

taken part in the genocide from entering their territories.

The Genocide Convention criminalizes not only the commission of genocide by political leaders, commanders, and soldiers, but also both conspiracy to commit and complicity in genocide. Given the regular, ongoing participation of US leaders in dialogue with Israel about its campaign, largely to facilitate the supply of weapons and diplomatic support, both the Biden and Trump administrations have arguably been involved in a criminal conspiracy with Israeli leaders to enable the genocide.²⁵ The Biden administration, for example, supplied tens of billions of dollars of military aid to Israel, even after President Joe Biden warned in May 2024 that he would withhold munitions if Israel launched a major offensive on Rafah. Israel ignored Biden's red line. By September 2024, the United States had supplied 57,000 artillery shells, 36,000 cannon ammunition, 20,000 M4A1 rifles, 13,981 anti-tank missiles, and 8,700 MK-82 bombs directly used in Israel's aggression. The Biden administration vetoed several ceasefire and hostage release resolutions at the UN Security Council and contributed to narratives of dehumanization and incitement against Palestinians by repeatedly citing the widely debunked narrative of beheaded babies at the hands of Hamas, among others.²⁶

The case against the Trump administration is also strong. In February 2025, President Trump proposed the "voluntary" relocation of the Palestinian population to turn Gaza into the "Riviera of the Middle East," thereby assuming a managerial role in the genocide.²⁷ In March 2025, after Hamas had not released all hostages, Trump endorsed Israel breaking the ceasefire, resuming the bombardment, and continuing its policy of starvation. Trump also encouraged the destruction of the international aid system, the loss of which exacerbated the starvation in 2025, and supported US participation in the shambolic replacement system set up by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), a US-based non-profit. Backed by both Israel and the United States, the GHF began operations in May 2025. Its chaotic distribution practices were accompanied by Israeli and US private contractors killing at least 2,600 people seeking food and injuring more than 19,000 at its sites or along aid convoy routes.²⁸

Other states have been complicit in Israel's genocide, both actively—by providing arms and diplomatic support, in the case of many Western countries—and passively—by failing to take actions to prevent it, as in the case of several Arab states. Much like US leaders, the heads of some governments, such as that of the United Kingdom, whose air force conducted the majority of aerial surveillance over Gaza in the first 12 months of the genocide and supplied the data to Israel, may have been involved in conspiracies to enable the genocide.²⁹

In some countries, non-government organizations (NGOs) and other domestic actors have filed legal cases against their governments for complicity in the genocide or in aiding and abetting Israeli war crimes against the Palestinians. For

example, in the Netherlands, NGOs successfully sued the government for selling F-35 fighter jet parts to Israel. They won the case on appeal, and the court ordered the Netherlands to halt sales. Similar cases were brought in the United States, but the court ruled that they had no jurisdiction over foreign policy, despite the judge in question acknowledging that Israel was plausibly engaged in genocide.³⁰

Conclusion

After President Trump brokered a ceasefire in October 2025, leaders who had been critical of Israel began to resume normal relations with Tel Aviv, and media that had only ever partially reported Israel's crimes reduced their coverage of Gaza to the bare minimum. Yet the putative end of hostilities was not the end of the genocide; indeed, the Genocide Convention specifies that genocide may be committed "in times of peace" as well as in war.³¹ Israel continued to bomb, to kill, and to restrict food supplies; Palestinians in Gaza continued to live in abject misery. Since the October 2025 ceasefire, more than 1,200 Palestinians have been killed and over 4,000 injured as of early August 2026, while the ongoing blockade and damage to the healthcare system have led to an increase in non-trauma deaths, including those from lack of medical care, disease, and malnutrition.³² Winter conditions have worsened the humanitarian situation for the majority of Palestinians who now live in makeshift shelters and tents. Israel maintains a presence in almost 60 percent of the Gaza Strip.³³ Plans for the future of Gaza under the supervision of Trump's "Board of Peace" have failed to envisage restoring the Palestinian society that the genocide destroyed and appear instead to be consolidating the elimination of Palestinian life with no regard for accountability under international law.

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CHAPTER 2

Violence, Deprivation, and Atrocities in Gaza: The Health and Humanitarian Toll

Yara M. Asi

Asaad al-Nasasra was one of only two paramedics to survive Israel's deadly attack on a convoy of ambulances in Gaza on March 23, 2025. Even though he was not one of the 15 murdered paramedics found in a mass grave, buried in the dirt with their crushed ambulances, he was detained by the Israeli military, his status unknown for weeks. He was released in late April 2025 with nine other Palestinian detainees; a video showed al-Nasasra still in his red Palestine Red Crescent paramedic vest.¹ He and the other detainees held in Israeli prisons, like so many thousands of Palestinians before them, reported "being tortured in 'horrific ways' and were in a bad physical and psychological state."

Al-Nasasra and many other health workers in Gaza, along with the hundreds of thousands of people needing medical care across the enclave, survived conditions that have shocked even the most seasoned humanitarian workers. Through physical destruction of health facilities, the killing and imprisonment of health workers, and the creation of inhumane living conditions, Israel's multifaceted devastation of Gaza's health sector has not only cost countless lives that could have been saved, but has also caused losses in health personnel, infrastructure, and equipment that may take decades or generations to recoup. These deficits will continue to harm the health of the Palestinians who have survived in Gaza, leading to preventable deaths and disabilities for years to come.

Deliberate Targeting and Destruction of the Health Sector

In March 2025, the story of the paramedics' killing dominated global news for days. This was due in large part to the fact that the Israeli narrative was quickly dismantled by video evidence and testimonies uncovered in investigations by the New

York Times and other outlets.² The paramedics did not pose a threat; they were clearly identified as paramedics and they had coordinated their route. It became painfully obvious that Israeli forces had purposefully killed a group of Palestinian paramedics and then attempted to cover up the crime.

Health workers were also victims in the tragic story of five-year-old Hind Rajab, who was killed in January 2024 by Israeli forces after being trapped in a car with her family, who had already been killed.³ The two paramedics sent to rescue her after she was able to call emergency services were killed as they approached her position.

Like Asaad al-Nasasra, hundreds of other Palestinian health workers have been forcibly transferred to jails in Israel, including Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, the director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, who was detained in December 2024 by Israeli forces during a raid of his hospital. Despite having no charges filed against him, in October 2025 Israeli authorities extended Abu Safiya's detention for another six months.⁴ When the NGO Physicians for Human Rights–Israel was permitted to see him in September 2025, it reported that he had lost 55 pounds due to lack of food and was being denied medical services.⁵

While the status of many detained health workers is unknown, several have already died in detention, including Dr. Adnan al-Bursh.⁶ The head of orthopedics at al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, al-Bursh was arrested in December 2023 while treating patients, and was held in Israeli detention for four months before he died. At the time of writing, Israel still had not conducted an independent autopsy or released his body.

Of course, no hospital in Gaza has been spared from bombing and other attacks. Several hospitals received direct hits; others saw bombing in their vicinity that damaged hospital facilities as well as the roads that people use to reach them.⁷ Some hospitals, such as al-Shifa, the largest in Gaza, have been attacked and invaded by the Israeli military multiple times. Israeli soldiers even smashed expensive medical equipment and set fire to rooms to prevent the hospitals from being reopened.⁸

Indeed, the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, which tracks global incidents of attacks on health care, reported that in 2024, 1,300 attacks, the greatest number recorded, occurred within occupied Palestine—36 percent of all such attacks around the world that year.⁹ This number exceeded the number previously documented in any one country or territory in a single year. Many such Gaza attacks were captured on video, including the quadruple strike on Nasser Hospital in August 2025 that killed at least 20 people.¹⁰

Israel's attacks and siege left the remaining health workers in Gaza attempting to manage daily mass casualty events with few options for their patients. These patients included people who had to have limbs amputated due to infections that

were preventable; people who brought a dying family member to a hospital in a donkey cart because there were no ambulances; and people who received operations on the hospital floor, with no anesthetics and only a mobile phone for light.

The protection of hospital infrastructure and medical workers is among the cornerstones of international law, enshrined as early as the 1949 Geneva Conventions.¹¹ But after more than two years of constant bombings, raids, ground offensives, and siege, the entire health infrastructure in Gaza—including personnel, facilities, equipment, and supplies—has been undone, leaving a displaced and traumatized population with very few medical services. The clear consequences of such destruction, and the seemingly purposeful manner in which it has been waged, have contributed to the growing consensus that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.¹²

A Long-Term Health Crisis

Aside from the more than 70,000 Gazans already reported killed, an unknown number of Palestinians have died due to lack of access to health care and inhumane living conditions.¹³ As estimated by epidemiologists who have studied the conditions in Gaza, the potential death toll from disease, maternal and infant mortality, and hunger could be many tens of thousands more.¹⁴

Beyond the unprecedented death toll, the humanitarian indicators of Gaza's fragility are numerous. More than 170,000 people have been injured, with many requiring significant treatment and rehabilitation that they are currently not receiving.¹⁵ The World Health Organization estimates that around a quarter of those injured (about 42,000 people) have sustained life-changing injuries, including amputated limbs, damage to the spinal cord or brain, significant facial and eye wounds, and severe burns.¹⁶ Shockingly, according to the International Rescue Committee, Gaza hosts the highest number of child amputees per capita worldwide.¹⁷

It is well known that communicable diseases are more likely to run rampant in conditions created by armed conflict, including overcrowding, lack of water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities, contaminated food and water, and malnourished and weakened bodies. In October 2025, the World Health Organization warned that such diseases, including meningitis, diarrheal infections such as cholera, respiratory illnesses like the flu and COVID-19, skin infections, rashes, and other ailments, are "spiraling out of control" in Gaza.¹⁸

In such dire conditions, people cannot receive their standard immunizations, including the vaccination schedule recommended for infants and children. In the summer of 2024, an outbreak of polio—a dangerous virus that had not been reported in Gaza for decades—resulted in the paralysis of at least one young child. In this rare instance, an urgent vaccination campaign was initiated, although its

final phase was interrupted by Israeli bombing of vaccination facilities.¹⁹

Lack of antibiotic supply and regulation and the sheer volume of patients entering hospitals every day have led to a second crisis: an increase in multidrug-resistant bacteria, which have developed resistance to antibiotics and thus are even more difficult to manage and treat.²⁰

Every population, including those affected by war, genocide, and other mass atrocities, faces a high burden of noncommunicable diseases. Amidst the effort to survive bombings, hunger, and snipers, Palestinians suffering from cancer, asthma, diabetes, heart and autoimmune diseases, arthritis, and dementia are unable to get the health services required to treat their conditions. One estimate suggested that at least 350,000 people in Gaza with chronic illnesses essentially have no access to the medications or treatments they need.²¹

Because of the destruction of the health system and most of its resources, the death, displacement, and detention of health personnel, and the siege of Gaza (including the conditions that preceded the October 7, 2023 attacks), at least 16,500 Palestinians required urgent medical evacuations from Gaza as of the end of 2025.²² However, aside from the complex process required to receive a permit to leave Gaza, which Israel itself controls, there have been too few nations willing to accept these patients, leaving many of them in Gaza to continue to deteriorate.

Among the other major indicators of humanitarian fragility in Gaza was the onset of a hunger crisis, which developed into famine in summer 2025. Many families reported going without food for days at a time, and more than 12,000 children were treated for acute malnutrition in one month alone.²³ The global famine monitoring initiative, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, found that more than half of Gaza's population was in emergency or critical condition regarding food insecurity and malnutrition, due largely to Israel's destruction of Gaza's food sector and its limitations on aid, including food, permitted to enter the territory.²⁴ At least 450 people, including 150 children, died due to hunger and malnutrition.²⁵

Maternal and infant mortality are among the other major causes of humanitarian burden in Gaza. A destroyed health system means that pregnant women are unable to get pre- or post-natal care and are unlikely to have a trained medical professional assist at the birth. Women have reported giving birth in crowded and unhygienic conditions with no anesthetic, including for Cesarean sections.²⁶ A 300 percent increase in miscarriage has been reported, and infant mortality rates have also skyrocketed by 75 percent, largely attributed to maternal and infant malnutrition.²⁷ By late 2024, before the onset of famine conditions, women in Gaza were already three times more likely to die in childbirth than before the war. Starving mothers have difficulty breastfeeding, and the siege has limited the supplies of essential items like baby formula.²⁸ One United Nations (UN) official reported seeing several newborns in the hospital who weighed less than one kilogram.²⁹

While the long-term impact of these health crises will depend on the pace of the reconstruction effort, current indicators and studies of Gaza after previous wars as well as in other settings of mass destruction point to the challenges ahead. Already, research has found that life expectancy in Gaza nearly halved in just the first 12 months of the genocide.³⁰

Children, especially those born to malnourished mothers, who live for months or years without proper nutrition, face potential lifelong physical and mental deficiencies because of the damage that hunger inflicts on their growing bodies. People with debilitating injuries, including amputations, will require long-term treatment and rehabilitation that is not available in Gaza. Without public health surveillance infrastructure, infectious disease will spread within the population before it is detected, while the loss of so many experienced and specialized health workers will limit the rebuilding effort. It will be decades before the surviving medical students of today will have the skill set of the generations who managed to build the system that existed and functioned despite Israel's restrictions.

Addressing Medicide: The Need for Long-Term Political Solutions

When the totality of the devastation on Gaza's health sector is considered along with the ongoing threats to human life, it becomes difficult to argue that we are witnessing only the unfortunate consequences of war. We are also witnessing what experts have described as "medicide," a component of genocide defined as "the destruction of a healthcare system in whole or in part with the aim of obliterating or damaging the conditions needed for saving and sustaining the lives of the sick and the wounded."³¹

While a massive influx of aid and materials for reconstruction is undoubtedly necessary, the terrible conditions in Gaza cannot be reversed with mere aid and a temporary (and incomplete) cessation of violence. Across occupied Palestine, humanitarian agencies have worked for decades to support health initiatives within a system controlled by Israel in every aspect and in a setting of de-development.³² Yet without taking account of the political, economic, and social determinants that limit Palestinian health risks, acquiescence to the policies of the State of Israel, the occupying power, serves as a form of performative humanitarianism that does not center Palestinian needs or genuinely improve their health.

It is vital to reckon with the reality that there can be no meaningful return to life in Gaza with the health system in its current state of destruction. Aside from the need to clear rubble and unexploded ordnance before hospitals can be recovered or rebuilt and to secure the amount and variety of medical supplies to meet baseline needs, many healthcare workers—from medical students to highly specialized physicians who are not easily replaceable—have been killed, disappeared, or left

Gaza for safety.

Short-term solutions, including medical missions from foreign physicians and the installation of field hospitals in Gaza, are not a replacement for a health system, especially amid ongoing violence. For nearly three years, there has been no shortage of reporting and testimonials detailing Israel's destruction of the health system in Gaza. But there has been a collective unwillingness by Western governments to recognize the dismantling of Gaza's health system as a part of the overall project of destruction of which multiple senior Israeli officials have boasted.³³

The sheer number of clear violations by Israel against the Palestinians, even simply those in the health sector, sets a chilling precedent for what a perpetrator can justify and avoid consequences for. What does it mean for the future of warfare and already fragile international humanitarian law that is meant to protect human life, in light of Israel's merciless destruction?

The health sector in Gaza faces a host of challenges as local and international actors take tentative steps toward reconstruction. For now, the realities of ongoing violence and siege limit our ability to imagine what an equitable and sovereign health system would look like in Gaza, and how we can get there. To even return to the health system that existed prior to October 7—one that was already inadequate—will take significant investment and effort. But the people in Gaza deserve more than a return to the status quo ante. They deserve a health system solely under their control, built to meet their needs as a population that has experienced decades of neglect. A justice-oriented response that emphasizes accountability, supported by the international community, is the only way to achieve these goals.

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CHAPTER 3

Epistemic Violence and Digital Dehumanization: Media and Tech Companies' Complicity in Genocide

Tamara Kharroub

The war of narratives has become a central component of Israel's genocidal war on Gaza since October 2023. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has described the battle to control media narratives and shape public opinion as Israel's eighth war front, underscoring the importance of the information and technology ecosystem in justifying and whitewashing Israeli crimes.¹ Three industries have played a particularly significant role in this process: mainstream legacy media, social media platforms, and the artificial intelligence (AI) sector. Bias, selective coverage, and censorship in international legacy media have contributed to the dehumanization and erasure of Palestinians. Social media platforms have amplified these dynamics through content suppression, unequal moderation practices, and the spread of incitement against Palestinians. At the same time, AI technologies have become increasingly militarized, enabling new forms of surveillance, automated targeting, and tech-driven atrocities. These industries have helped shape public perceptions and government policy, facilitated Israel's abuses, and enabled mass atrocities. This chapter examines how US and other media and technology companies have facilitated Israel's genocide in Gaza and argues that these corporations' policies and practices may render them complicit in Israel's war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide against Palestinians.

Epistemic Violence and Dehumanization in the Media: Catalysts for Genocide

Legacy and mainstream media outlets in the United States and elsewhere in the Global North have played a critical role in enabling Israel's ongoing assault on Gaza. Extensive evidence points to the systematic disparities in how the media covers

Palestinian lives and Israeli lives: Palestinian suffering is consistently ignored or justified, while Israeli suffering is humanized and contextualized. Genocide scholars have long shown that such portrayals, depicting a population as inhuman, faceless, or threatening, creates the conditions in which mass atrocities are rendered acceptable. Genocide requires the construction of an alternative reality that legitimizes these crimes, and media discourse can therefore be a precursor to mass violence.² In this way, the media industry's engagement in what scholars refer to as "alethocide," or the killing of truth, serves to construct a narrative that normalizes mass violence against Palestinians.³

The Evidence

Evidence of media bias in coverage of the Gaza genocide includes content analysis studies of the reporting as well as memorandums from the news outlets themselves. For example, a leaked internal memorandum revealed that the New York Times banned its journalists and editors from using terms such as occupation, ethnic cleansing, and genocide, and open letters from BBC journalists and others exposed the corporation's double standards and its dehumanization of Palestinians.⁴ Several quantitative and qualitative studies have confirmed this anti-Palestinian bias in media coverage. One large-scale study looking at Western media coverage during the first two years of the war found structural bias in the reporting: Palestinian experiences and grievances were downplayed or omitted, while Israeli narratives dominated coverage. The study also showed that media reports often used terms such as "precision strike," "human shields," and "self-defense" in ways that supported Israeli justifications for military action against Palestinians.⁵ Another study found double standards in coverage of the killing of Palestinians and of Israelis and Ukrainians, with more sympathetic coverage of the latter victims, despite much higher casualties among Palestinian civilians. A study of major US newspapers found that terms like "slaughter," "massacre," and "horrific" were overwhelmingly used to describe the killing of Israelis as compared to the killing of Palestinians. A study of American Sunday morning news shows found that 10 times more Israeli and pro-Israel than Palestinian and pro-Palestinian guests were invited to appear as guests.⁶ A study analyzing news articles and television segments during the first year of the Gaza war found that phrases such as "the right to defend itself" and "human shields," as well as emotive language to describe killings, were used exclusively for Israel and served to implicitly justify the killing of Palestinian civilians.⁷ In the same study, the media used the pejorative " Hamas-run " to downplay the Gaza Ministry of Health's tally of Palestinian deaths and injuries, despite US and Israeli officials' acknowledgment that its figures were broadly accurate.⁸ And media outlets seldom mentioned "war crimes" in reference to Israel's actions in Gaza, but

used it hundreds of times in reference to Russia's actions in Ukraine. These findings confirm the Western media's persistent and widespread Israel-centric framing and entrenched bias.

Categories of Bias

Studies of media coverage examine various categories to assess bias, many of which are evident in reporting on Israel's war on Gaza. The first involves a disproportionate reliance on Israeli sources and acceptance of Israeli government and military talking points as facts, with little questioning or investigation. At the same time, very few Palestinian sources are consulted, and there is widespread skepticism and interrogation of Palestinian guests. For example, the discredited Israeli story of the 40 beheaded babies was widely reported on without fact-checking, which played a critical role in justifying the genocide early on, whereas media outlets did not retract the story even after it was debunked by the Israeli government.⁹ The second type is the decontextualization of events, with a failure to mention the history or realities on the ground and a presentation of the conflict as being between two equal parties—not between a nuclear-armed occupying power that has been oppressing a stateless, defenseless population for decades and denying them any means to seek protection, rights, or accountability. This context is inevitably omitted, thereby perpetuating racist and stereotypical narratives that portray Palestinians as inherently violent or as terrorists who deserve the suffering inflicted upon them.

A third type of media bias is the selective reporting of events, in which media outlets report on Israeli deaths while omitting or downplaying Palestinian suffering. Coverage of Israeli victims often features stories about their lives, families, and dreams; the same humanity is rarely afforded to Palestinians. This double standard indicates implicit racism and dehumanization of Palestinians, whose lives are not considered newsworthy. This selective humanity is also evident in a fourth pattern: the "unchildling" of Palestinian children, which is defined as the eviction of Palestinian children of childhood for political and military goals.¹⁰ In the first two years of the war, Israel killed at least 20,000 Palestinian children in Gaza, equal to a rate of more than one child every hour of every day, but their stories hardly ever make the headlines. When they are mentioned in rare cases, such as the killing of six-year-old Hind Rajab in Gaza, she was described as a "woman" by CNN, while another child (four-year-old Ruqaya Jahalin who was killed in the West Bank) was described by Sky News as a "3 or 4 year old young lady."¹¹ A Guardian article discussed the release of "Israeli children" in exchange for the release of Palestinian "people aged 18 and younger."¹² Classifying children as adults (i.e., adultification) aims to disguise Israel's deliberate killing, maiming, and torture of tens of thousands of Palestinian children.

The fifth type of bias involves the use of emotive language like “massacres” for Israeli deaths, while bureaucratic and technical language such as “aid-related deaths” and “tragic mistakes” is used for Palestinian civilians starved, killed, or massacred by Israel. Terminology such as “ Hamas-run” hospitals and schools is also used to legitimize their military targeting by Israel. For example, during the first year of the Gaza war, the New York Times called every major city in the Gaza Strip a “ Hamas stronghold” when reporting on Israeli strikes, a framing that militarizes civilian areas to justify the killings and destruction.¹³ Most significant, the pervasive use of passive and exonerating language when reporting on Palestinian deaths—seen in headlines like “Lives ended in Gaza” or “Father loses 11 family members in one blast” without naming the perpetrator—serves to shield Israel from culpability.¹⁴

The Impact

Although these patterns of media bias are the product of a well-documented and decades-long campaign of epistemic violence and erasure of Palestinian narratives in the West, they have intensified after October 2023. The cumulative effect is a distorted public discourse that reinforces a hierarchy of human worth, reframes state violence against an occupied indigenous population as self-defense, and creates a climate of impunity for Israel. This narrative engineering is a deliberate tactic to manufacture consent for military occupation, ethnic cleansing, apartheid, and genocide. The fields of social psychology and genocide studies identify dehumanization as a critical preparatory stage of genocide, where the media portray the target group as subhuman and as a threat, to deprive them of moral principles and legitimize and rationalize their extermination.¹⁵ When the media consistently dehumanize Palestinians and justify Israeli crimes, they are actively enabling mass violence and can be held liable in aiding genocide.

A Glaring Double Standard: Social Media as Spaces for Censorship and Incitement

In the aforementioned environment of near media blackout, compounded by Israel’s targeting of Palestinian journalists and barring journalists from entering Gaza during the war, social media platforms emerged as the primary source of news from the Strip. TikTok (Chinese-owned until January 2026) became a lifeline for Palestinians and played a crucial role in bypassing traditional media censorship and gatekeeping.¹⁶ Social media postings also created a sort of digital archive of atrocities and abuses that could be used as evidence in accountability efforts. Filling the journalistic gap left by legacy media, social media users acted as investigative reporters

to fact-check, scrutinize, and refute Israel's claims, assuming the role of the fourth estate.¹⁷ They pushed back against reporting bias by fixing news headlines that did not name Israel as the perpetrator, and named and shamed media outlets that used dehumanizing discourse.¹⁸ Because of content on social media, especially TikTok, people everywhere could access news from Gaza, watching the genocide as it was being livestreamed. This information flow from Gaza contributed to significant shifts in US public opinion toward Palestine and Israel. 2026 polling by Gallup showed that for the first time, more Americans (41 percent) sympathized with Palestinians than with Israelis (36 percent), and 60 percent of Americans opposed sending additional military aid to Israel (75 percent of Democrats).¹⁹ These numbers were particularly pronounced among younger Americans, a result that apparently confirms the role played by social media content in shaping attitudes, even among conservatives: 57 percent of Republicans under the age of 50 hold negative views of Israel.²⁰

The widespread popularity of social media platforms has made them fertile ground for disinformation campaigns, hate speech, incitement, and government-funded political influence campaigns. There is also ample evidence of the suppression of Palestinian content on these platforms. Patterns of censorship include content removal, account suspension, "shadow banning" (i.e., limiting content visibility), and restrictions on account features such as engagement, interactions, and monetization. In 2023 and 2024, Human Rights Watch and the Digital Rights Index documented that Meta, X, and TikTok had suppressed digital Palestinian content, including content about Israeli human rights abuses of Palestinians, concluding that this censorship was both systemic and global.²¹ There is also documented evidence of double standards in the excessive moderation of Palestinian content and the relatively lighter moderation of anti-Palestinian hate speech and incitement. In 2023 and 2024, organizations such as Sada Social and 7amleh recorded tens of thousands of social media posts inciting violence and using genocidal language against Palestinians, especially on Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and X.²² Meta even approved Facebook ads calling for the assassination of pro-Palestine activists in the United States, while X and YouTube displayed paid advertisements from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs calling for support for Israel's actions in Gaza.²³ Social media companies have also complied with Israeli requests to remove content. For example, as of December 2024 Meta had acted on 94 percent of the Israeli government's requests to take down posts on Facebook and Instagram since October 2023, in what was characterized as "the largest mass censorship operation in modern history."²⁴ Meta also manipulated its content moderation filters to restrict posts generated in Palestine, while Google alarmingly removed more than 700 videos on YouTube documenting Israeli war crimes.²⁵ This censorship continued into 2025 and 2026.²⁶

The TikTok ownership saga confirms this deliberate attempt to silence

Palestinian perspectives. Due to the platform's popularity among younger generations and its prominence in featuring content about Palestine and from Gaza, TikTok became a target of Presidents Biden and Trump and pro-Israel US lawmakers.²⁷ In September 2025, President Donald Trump issued an executive order requiring TikTok to transfer its US operations and algorithm to US and allied entities, with tech giant Oracle (known for its anti-Palestinian bias and headed by billionaire Larry Ellison, a major donor to the Israeli military) becoming a major shareholder. TikTok hired executives and hate speech tsars who are known for their support for Israel and who served in the Israeli military.²⁸ Subsequently, users reported restrictions on their pro-Palestine posts and moderation policies that equate criticism of Israel with antisemitism.²⁹ These developments confirm that big tech companies are knowingly banning Palestinian narratives while permitting incitement against Palestinians.

The State of Israel itself has invested millions of dollars in online campaigns to manipulate information and to rehabilitate its image. Whether through paying influencers to publish pro-Israel content, commissioning a coordinated network of fake accounts to spread AI-generated disinformation targeting lawmakers in the United States and Canada, or using unprecedented surveillance-style marketing and geofencing to target US churches and Christian colleges across western states, the Israeli government is exploiting social media to control the online narrative.³⁰ The Israeli government is also manipulating generative AI models such as ChatGPT and Google's Gemini to train these models to promote pro-Israel talking points, for example through "Project 545."³¹

These efforts demonstrate Israel's determination to erase the evidence of its genocide in Gaza, effectively rewriting history. Its goal is largely enabled by the cooperation of social media companies, whether through their direct communication channels with the Israeli government or the hiring of former Israeli military and intelligence personnel—particularly from Unit 8200—in senior roles.³² The systematic suppression by social media companies of Palestinian and pro-Palestine expression and documentation contrasts sharply with their permissiveness toward genocidal rhetoric against Palestinians and the manipulation of online information spaces. Social media companies can therefore be considered active participants in aiding and abetting violence against Palestinians by selectively enforcing their own content moderation rules.

AI-Powered Atrocities: Digital Dehumanization and Automated Mass Killing

For several years, technology companies have been supplying Israel with the digital infrastructure and the AI programs needed to automate its occupation and

apartheid system in the West Bank, for example through discriminatory invasive mass surveillance systems and predictive policing technologies.³³ Recently in Gaza, these companies have been aiding Israel's genocide by providing AI technologies and cloud services to surveil the population, to store their information, to identify military targets, and to operate autonomous weapons systems. For example, the Israeli AI program Lavender generates military targets by assigning Gaza residents digital scores based on their likelihood of belonging to militant groups, with data gathered through mass surveillance of Palestinians and even relying on such obscure determinants as membership in WhatsApp groups, social media connections, or Google Photos facial recognition. The Israeli military adopted Lavender's kill lists without human oversight, despite a high 10 percent error rate, resulting in the bombing of unprecedented numbers of Palestinian civilians.³⁴ Other location monitoring tools that inform military decisions, such as "Where's Daddy," are used to track individuals and to notify the Israeli military when a target enters a specific location—often a family home—so that he or she can be attacked, resulting in the wiping out of entire families by Israeli strikes.

One Israeli AI system that generates non-human targets is Habsora ("The Gospel"), which the Israeli military used in Gaza to identify non-military structures to target. Such structures include residences, public buildings, and public infrastructure, which Israel calls "power targets," the bombing of which is intended to harm Palestinian civilians in an attempt to get them to put pressure on Hamas.³⁵ This AI system generated targets at such an unprecedented rate that it was described as a "mass assassination factory." Israel has also reportedly used unguided missiles (or "dumb bombs," i.e. not precision bombs) to target entire buildings and street blocks in indiscriminate attacks, with the Israeli military allowing 15-20 civilians to be killed for every AI-generated target and up to 100 if the target is thought to be a senior Hamas operative. One Israeli intelligence officer was reported as saying, "You don't want to waste expensive bombs on unimportant people."³⁶ Israel also uses lethal autonomous and semi-autonomous weapons (known as LAWS and semi-LAWS), such as remote-controlled quadcopters equipped with rifles and robo-snipers that use integrated autonomous target recognition (ATR), to terrorize and kill Palestinians from a close distance. These weapons include the "Bird of Prey" platform produced by Israeli company Elbit Systems. Reports show that these weapons were used primarily against unarmed civilians and children in shelters, hospitals, and residential areas.³⁷ Some drones even broadcast sounds of babies crying and women screaming to lure Palestinians out of their homes or shelters, which is a form of psychological warfare in addition to causing physical harm.³⁸

AI technologies are being increasingly militarized by Israel, resulting in the deliberate and unprecedented mass killing of Palestinian civilians and large-scale destruction in Gaza. AI-powered programs and weapons systems reduce human

beings to statistical data points while exhibiting high error rates, making innocent civilians into military targets based on inaccurate assumptions, biased information, and unreliable estimations. Such digital dehumanization has a grave impact on human rights and violates international law, specifically the requirement that warring parties must distinguish between civilian and military targets. The automation of life-or-death decisions is alarming, as these systems lead to significant civilian harm and allow perpetrators to evade accountability by alleging that machines, not specific human beings, are making targeting decisions.

These AI-powered atrocities are only feasible because of the availability of cloud computing, storage capabilities, machine learning services, and data analysis technologies supplied by big tech companies. In a report, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory named technology corporations as profiting from Israel's economy of occupation, apartheid, and genocide and exposed their complicity in enabling crimes in Gaza.³⁹ Amazon and Google, through "Project Nimbus," granted the Israeli government access to their cloud networks and AI technologies to enhance Israel's ability to collect, store, and process massive amounts of intelligence and biometric data on Palestinians. Microsoft's cloud and AI services platform Azure is used by the Israeli Ministry of Defense to store and process intelligence and surveillance data, while Palantir Technologies provides automated predictive policing tools used in programs like Lavender, Gospel, and Where's Daddy. These companies are aiding Israel's genocide in Gaza and can be held legally complicit.

Corporate Complicity in Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity

Over the past three years, major media and technology companies have facilitated Israel's violations of international law and Palestinians' human rights, especially in Gaza. Legal grounds exist to implicate these corporations and their leadership. The potential complicity must be further investigated to ensure that corporations and individuals responsible for aiding and abetting genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity face legal accountability. In early 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered provisional measures after finding it plausible that acts of genocide were occurring in Gaza, warning of a real risk of irreparable harm to Palestinians, ordering Israel to take steps to prevent acts that could fall under the Genocide Convention and allow the provision of humanitarian aid, and directing third states to prevent and to not be complicit in such harm.⁴⁰ Under the 1948 Genocide Convention, states and individuals can be liable for committing or being complicit in genocide.⁴¹ While some may argue that corporations are not named directly in this convention, the prohibition of genocide is *jus cogens*, meaning that it is a fundamental, universally-binding law with no exceptions and no impunity

for any entity, which can be interpreted as extending to corporations.⁴² Article VI of the Genocide Convention specifies that “persons” may be held liable for genocidal acts, including individual businesspersons as natural persons and potentially corporations as legal persons. Although the International Criminal Court (ICC) has no jurisdiction over entities such as corporations, it does have jurisdiction over natural persons from states that are parties to the Rome Statute.⁴³ As such, media and tech companies and their executives can be held liable for their role in Israel’s genocide in Gaza.

According to international criminal law, corporate complicity in aiding and abetting the genocidal acts of the State of Israel requires knowledge of the harm. As such, the obligation to refrain from complicity begins when corporations and their executives become aware of the risk that genocide may be committed. The 2024 ICJ provisional measures suggest that the threshold of knowledge was met in that a serious risk of genocide had been publicly recognized in a legal context and was therefore sufficiently foreseeable. Additionally, UN bodies such as the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry, major human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, professional bodies and genocide scholars, as well as Israeli organizations like B’Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, have all concluded that Israel’s conduct in Gaza amounts to genocide.⁴⁴ The arrest warrants requested by the ICC Prosecutor for Israel’s prime and defense ministers for crimes against humanity of extermination and persecution and war crimes of starvation, willful killing, and causing of great suffering or serious injury to body or health, further implicate these corporations in knowledge of such violations of international law.⁴⁵ The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory found “reasonable grounds” to believe that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza and has emphasized that the genocide is enabled by an “economy of genocide” involving corporate actors, including media and big tech companies.⁴⁶ Companies aiding the Israeli government’s conduct are therefore on notice of a serious risk of harm and could be considered complicit, including through aiding and abetting, in genocide, war crimes, and other violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Mainstream and legacy media organizations have actively and knowingly perpetuated narratives that dehumanize and marginalize Palestinians while amplifying Israeli propaganda that legitimizes its conduct, despite mounting evidence of Israeli crimes.⁴⁷ Such normalization of mass violence and the shaping of public tolerance for atrocities, effectively enabling the continuation of Israel’s conduct, may meet thresholds for complicity. Under international law, media actors can incur liability for “direct and public incitement” to genocide, as well as for complicity. Article III(e) of the Genocide Convention criminalizes complicity, while Article 20(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

prohibits advocacy of hatred that incites discrimination or violence.⁴⁸ Accordingly, media practices that erase Palestinian suffering, reinforce narratives portraying Palestinians as legitimate targets, cast doubt on documented attacks on civilians and deflect blame, and normalize mass civilian harm can be seen as contributing to an environment that enables such crimes.

Social media platforms have similarly intensified censorship efforts while permitting disinformation and online incitement to violence against Palestinians, thereby disrupting the flow of accurate and critical information and allowing Israel to continue its bombardment campaigns unmitigated. Under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), corporations must avoid contributing to human rights abuses and must mitigate harm linked to their operations.⁴⁹ Articles 19 and 20 of the ICCPR protect freedom of expression and prohibit incitement to violence—obligations applicable to both state and private actors. The Genocide Convention criminalizes complicity, while Article 25(3)(c) of the Rome Statute establishes liability for aiding and abetting war crimes or crimes against humanity.⁵⁰ By enabling incitement and disinformation while suppressing Palestinian content, disproportionately and deliberately targeting a protected group during a period of mass atrocities, social media platforms cannot be regarded as neutral actors but as aides in incitement and genocide and can be held complicit.

Israeli data-driven military technologies used in AI targeting, surveillance, and autonomous weapons rely heavily on cloud services and computational power that can store and process vast amounts of data, which are made possible by tech companies.⁵¹ The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory identified Microsoft, Alphabet (Google), Amazon, and Palantir as among the companies sustaining and profiting from the mass slaughter of Palestinians, describing them as part of a “joint criminal enterprise” embedded in an “economy of genocide” and highlighting their role in aiding Israel’s military operations. Article III(e) of the Genocide Convention prohibits complicity in genocide while Articles 7 and 8 of the Rome Statute prohibit complicity in crimes against humanity (e.g., extermination, persecution) and war crimes (e.g., targeting civilians, disproportionate attacks). Additionally, under the UNGPs, corporations must cease activities that contribute to human rights abuses. As such, the practice of tech companies in knowingly providing AI systems and cloud infrastructure that materially enable Israeli indiscriminate military operations and mass civilian killings constituting war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide meet the threshold for aiding and abetting genocide and complicity in war crimes.

In conclusion, extensive evidence demonstrates the role of legacy media, social media platforms, and technology companies in dehumanizing Palestinians, in censoring and suppressing Palestinian documentation and reporting of atrocities, in normalizing mass violence, and in enabling Israeli crimes. In the context

of mounting legal evidence of war crimes and the plausible risk of genocide, these practices have facilitated serious violations of international law. Corporations have failed to meet their obligations to international legal frameworks that prohibit complicity, incitement, and aiding and abetting genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. They bear legal responsibility for their conduct and should be held accountable—not only to advance justice, but also to help prevent the enabling of similar harms in the future.

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CHAPTER 4

The Genocidal Project and the Gendered Logic of Destruction: Gender-Based and Sexualized Violence in Gaza

Sonia Boulos

Since October 2023, the unfolding genocide has devastated life across Gaza. Israel's attempt to destroy Palestinian society in the Strip has involved multiple forms of violence, including mass killing and maiming, as well as starvation, repeated displacement, and the systematic destruction of infrastructure essential for sustaining life. As part of this campaign, gender-based violence (GBV) and sexualized violence have functioned as tools to inflict severe physical and psychological harm on individuals and to rip apart the fabric of Palestinian society.¹

What distinguishes genocide from other international crimes is the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a protected group. In the Israeli context, this genocide can be understood as the most extreme expression of the “logic of elimination” embedded in the Zionist settler-colonial project, which seeks to replace the native population of Palestine.² As Patrick Wolfe has argued, settler-colonial elimination can take different forms, ranging from the dismantling of indigenous collective identity and forced assimilation to ethnic cleansing, apartheid, mass killings, or genocide.³ As part of this broader structure of elimination, sexualized violence has long been embedded in the everyday experience of Palestinians under settler-colonial rule.⁴ Such violence intensifies during periods of heightened conflict; in Israel's current military assault on Gaza, it has become a tool of genocidal violence.

This chapter discusses how Israel has used GBV and sexualized violence to carry out genocide in Gaza. Whereas reproductive violence is a direct and visible genocidal act of imposing measures intended to prevent births, this chapter focuses on forms of sexualized and gendered violence that function in more subtle ways and are therefore often overlooked as acts of genocide.

Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Violence as Acts of Genocide

While the terms GBV and sexual violence are often used interchangeably, they are not synonymous. GBV is defined as “any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed differences (i.e., gender) between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private.”⁵ Not just women and girls, but also men and boys can be victims of GBV.

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) occurs specifically during armed conflict. The UN Security Council defines CRSV as “rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization and other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is linked, directly or indirectly (temporally, geographically or causally) to a conflict.”⁶ In the context of Palestine, the term CRSV is inadequate because it fails to account for forms of settler-colonial sexual violence embedded in the everyday lives of Palestinians beyond periods of intensified violence. The term “sexual” violence is itself problematic, as it fails to capture the power dynamics underpinning such violence—namely, the attempt to dominate, subjugate, and, at times, destroy the targeted population. For this reason, in discussions of Palestine, the term *sexualized violence* is more appropriate.⁷

GBV and sexualized violence are not explicitly listed as distinct acts within the legal definition of genocide. Article II of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the Genocide Convention) defines genocide as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁸

International tribunals have held that sexualized violence can constitute genocide when committed with the intent to destroy the protected group. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), established in 1994, was a pioneer in classifying gender-based and sexualized violence as acts of genocide, especially when it caused serious bodily or mental harm, prevented births within the group, or deliberately inflicted conditions of life calculated to bring about the group’s destruction. In the 1998 *Prosecutor v. Akayesu* case, the ICTR recognized that sexualized violence includes a broad range of coercive acts targeting bodily integrity and dignity, extending beyond rape to encompass sexual humiliation and

abuse. The Tribunal held that such acts could cause serious bodily or mental harm under the Genocide Convention and may constitute genocide when committed with the intent to destroy a protected group. When sexualized violence is carried out publicly or as part of a campaign of humiliation and terror, its effects extend beyond individual victims and contribute to the wider psychological destruction of the targeted group.⁹

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) reinforced the Rwanda Tribunal's findings. In 2003, in *Prosecutor v. Stakić*, the ICTY confirmed that rape and other forms of sexual violence fall within the category of causing serious bodily or mental harm under the definition of genocide when committed with intent to destroy a group, in part or in whole.¹⁰ International jurisprudence has also clarified that the harm inflicted need not be permanent or irreversible in order to qualify as serious bodily or mental harm. For example, in *Prosecutor v. Gacumbitsi*, the ICTR confirmed that acts such as torture and sexual violence fall within the category of serious bodily harm even when the injuries are medically remediable.¹¹

GBV and sexualized violence may also constitute genocide when they function as a measure intended to prevent births within the targeted group. In *Prosecutor v. Akayesu*, the ICTR recognized that certain forms of sexual violence directly interfere with the reproductive capacity of victims. Practices such as sexual mutilation, forced sterilization, and forced birth control physically obstruct the ability of members of the group to reproduce. Other measures, such as the forced separation of men and women or the prohibition of marriages within the group, may indirectly prevent procreation. Sexualized violence may also discourage survivors from having children due to trauma, fear, or social stigmatization. Through these mechanisms, sexualized crimes disrupt the biological continuity of the targeted population and contribute to its destruction.¹²

GBV and sexualized violence may also fall within the genocidal category of deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction. In 1999, in *Prosecutor v. Kayishema and Ruzindana*, the ICTR clarified that this category encompasses methods of destruction that do not immediately cause death but gradually weaken the targeted population. Rape can operate within such strategies.¹³

In addition to constituting genocidal acts themselves, patterns of gender-based and sexualized violence can serve as indicators of genocidal intent. Because genocide requires proof of a specific intent to destroy a protected group, courts frequently rely on contextual evidence to infer such intent. Both the ICTR and the ICTY established that genocidal intent may be inferred from patterns of conduct directed against members of the protected group. The systematic use of sexualized violence against members of a particular ethnic or national group, combined with

acts of humiliation and other degrading treatment, can reveal a deliberate strategy aimed at dismantling the group's physical and social foundations.¹⁴

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) also acknowledged that rape and other forms of sexualized violence may constitute genocidal acts (causing serious bodily or mental harm, preventing births within the group, or inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group's destruction including when committed with the specific intent to destroy a protected group.)¹⁵ The ICJ adopted a more restrictive interpretation of "serious harm," however, by requiring that the act actually contribute to the total or partial destruction of the group.¹⁶

Gender-Based and Sexualized Violence in Gaza

The UN Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel (ICI, or the Commission) has addressed GBV and sexualized violence in connection with the genocide in Gaza. Its June 2024 and March 2025 reports documented incidents of such forms of violence in detail, with the latter focusing explicitly on this form of violence. However, that report centered primarily on the underlying genocidal acts rather than on establishing the existence of the *dolus specialis* (special intent) required for genocide. It was only in its September 2025 report that the ICI provided an extensive factual record of these forms of violence within a genocide framework, addressing both the underlying genocidal acts and the special intent requirement.¹⁷

The Commission's September 2025 report documented more than 20 cases of sexualized violence and GBV against both male and female Palestinian detainees in more than 10 Israeli military and prison facilities. The report concluded that sexualized violence was used systematically against Palestinian male and female detainees as punishment, intimidation, and humiliation from the moment of arrest through detention, including during interrogations and searches. Men reported severe abuse, including forced stripping, beating, kicking of the genitals, rape, and the insertion of objects into the anus, including broomsticks and vegetables.¹⁸ In addition, men and boys were photographed and filmed in humiliating and degrading circumstances while being subjected to acts of a sexual nature, including sexual assault and rape.¹⁹

Female detainees were subjected to sexual assault, harassment, and threats of rape and death. Sexual harassment included attempts by Israeli personnel to kiss them and touch their breasts. Women reported repeated and invasive strip searches before and after interrogations; one detainee, for example, was strip-searched in her cell every three hours over a four-day detention period, and was forced to remove all her clothing even while menstruating.²⁰ Female detainees endured beatings, and they were ordered to strip completely in front of both male and female soldiers

while being called “ugly” and subjected to degrading sexual slurs such as “bitch” and “whore.”²¹ Their degradation was compounded by being photographed without consent, sometimes in their underwear in front of male soldiers, and their images later posted on social media.²²

The ICI found that Israeli security forces had publicly humiliated Palestinian women based on their gender and ethnicity, forcing them in some cases to strip to their underwear or to remove their veils in public.²³ Israeli soldiers posted videos and photos of themselves searching homes in the Gaza Strip while deliberately mocking Palestinian women. The March 2025 ICI report describes several of these cases in detail, including one such video that shows a soldier filming himself as he goes through underwear and other private belongings in a house in the Gaza Strip, directing gendered and sexualized insults at Palestinian women and referring to them as “the biggest sluts out there.”²⁴ In another video, a soldier filmed himself describing the contents of the underwear drawers he was rifling through, referring to Palestinian women as “naughty, naughty Gazans.”²⁵ The report highlighted how, from the perspective of Palestinian culture, the publication of these images can be extremely harmful and carries serious implications for the women whose private garments are publicly exposed.²⁶

The Commission’s June 2024 report documented episodes of sexual abuse during evacuations. In one incident, Israeli security forces subjected women to sexual abuse and harassment, ordering them to undress and leaving them in their underwear. A witness reported seeing several of his female relatives forced to strip and left in their underwear without their veils to cover their hair. He also observed soldiers sexually harassing multiple women while they were stripped, including a girl approximately 17 or 18 years old, and mocked and harassed the men present for being unable to protect the women.²⁷ Another witness described how a female Israeli soldier ordered two teenage boys, who had been stripped to their underwear, to dance, and recorded a video of them while laughing.²⁸

The Commission’s September 2025 report describes testimony from Gaza indicating that both women and men endured long-term psychological harm from sexual violence. Their trauma was exacerbated by the extreme living conditions in Gaza, including starvation, destroyed homes, and the loss of family members, which made recovery even more difficult.²⁹ Overall, the Commission concluded that sexual and gender-based violence against Palestinians since October 7, 2023, has been widespread, systematic, and directed at both women and men, boys and girls.

Legal Analysis of GBV and Sexual Violence in Gaza

Sexualized violence and GBV against Palestinian women and men cause not only physical bodily hurt but also severe psychological harm. The September 2025 ICI

report noted the severe psychological impact on Palestinian women who had been forced to strip or to remove their veils in public, as well as the prevalence of online sexual harassment against them.³⁰ It also alluded to the severe mental harm inflicted on Palestinian men and boys who were filmed or photographed in humiliating circumstances while subjected to sexual assault or other sexualized acts through force, threats, or coercion, even where no physical contact occurred.³¹ The nature and scale of these acts of violence do not support Israel's claims that its military operations in Gaza were conducted in self-defense, to defeat Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups, or to secure the release of Israeli hostages.³²

According to the ICI, these acts were intended not only to profoundly degrade and humiliate the direct individual victims but also to punish and terrorize the Palestinian group as a whole.³³ The March 2025 ICI report noted that:

Israeli soldiers' aggression and violence increasingly includes sexual acts intended to "feminize" or shame not only the victim but the Palestinian community as a whole, and an increasing trend to photograph or film these acts. Such acts have a clear link with entrenched gender stereotypes that continue to be intentionally used in attempts to break the sense of community and harm social cohesion, whether the victim is male or female.³⁴

Therefore, the ICI concluded in its September 2025 report that the *actus reus* (guilty act) and *mens rea* (guilty mind) of "causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group" under Article II(b) of the Genocide Convention were established.³⁵

Although the ICI recognized that rape and sexual violence may fall within the category of *deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part*, it did not analyze GBV and sexualized violence under this rubric.³⁶ The Commission thus missed an opportunity to explore how GBV and sexualized violence can in themselves become *conditions of life calculated to bring about the destruction of the group*. Such violence isolates victims and destroys social ties. As the ICI stated, these forms of abuse were instrumentalized to "fracture" the Palestinian population. As mentioned above, the ICI noted that the sexualized violence inflicted by Israeli soldiers was intended to "feminize" or shame not only the victim but the Palestinian community as a whole; the trend of photographing or filming these acts attests to this. ICI observed that such acts are clearly linked to entrenched gender stereotypes that were intentionally mobilized in efforts to break a sense of community and to undermine social cohesion.³⁷

Sexualized violence produces profound shame and guilt that can isolate survivors from their communities, which amid collective trauma may struggle to support those whom violence has placed outside social norms.³⁸ In Gaza, the systematic use of GBV and sexualized violence has left many victims and their families

isolated and traumatized. Under conditions of starvation, lack of medical and social services, repeated displacement, and widespread loss of life, such isolation further diminishes survivors' chances of survival by severing vital communal support and protection.

As for the *dolus specialis* (special intent) required for the crime of genocide, the ICI explained that genocidal intent may be established through either: (i) direct evidence, such as explicit statements expressing an intention to destroy the protected group in whole or in part; or (ii) circumstantial evidence, inferred from the overall pattern of conduct when considering the totality of the evidence.³⁹ Following the ICJ's decision in *Croatia v. Serbia*, the ICI clarified that genocidal intent may be inferred from a pattern of conduct where the only reasonable inference that can be drawn from the acts in question is the existence of such intent.⁴⁰ In evaluating Israel's overall pattern of conduct, the ICI attached significant importance to GBV and sexualized violence as evidence from which genocidal intent may be inferred. This form of violence can serve as a powerful indicator of an intent to destroy, since it cannot be explained or justified as a military necessity nor camouflaged as incidental harm. The ICI further concluded that GBV and sexualized violence were instrumentalized not only as punishment against the individual victims, but "as part of a pattern of collective punishment to fracture, humiliate and subjugate the Palestinian population in its entirety."⁴¹ It therefore found that the widespread use of this form of violence against Palestinians in Gaza indicated the intent to destroy Palestinians as a group. The ICI ultimately concluded that statements by Israeli authorities constituted direct evidence of genocidal intent and that, based on circumstantial evidence, genocidal intent was the only reasonable inference that could be drawn from Israel's conduct.⁴²

Conclusion

GBV and sexualized violence were not incidental by-products of Israel's assault on Gaza—they were deliberate tools of genocidal destruction. These violent acts inflicted serious physical injury and severe psychological harm while causing social fragmentation and long-term communal disruption. As the ICI concluded, such violence meets the definition of genocide in causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of a protected group. GBV and sexualized violence should also be understood as falling into the legal category of "conditions of life" calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction, insofar as these measures isolate victims, erode social cohesion, and undermine the community's capacity for survival under catastrophic humanitarian conditions.

Crucially, GBV and sexualized violence serve as indicators of genocidal intent. Because such acts cannot be justified by military necessity or explained as

collateral harm, their systematic use is a strong indication of the intent to destroy the Palestinian people in Gaza. The public humiliation of women, the emasculation of men and boys, the photography and online posting, and the deliberate rupture of family and communal bonds reflect a strategy aimed at degrading and fracturing the group's social and biological continuity. In this context, GBV and sexualized violence are central to Israel's project of genocide in Gaza.

Endnotes

¹ See *Detailed findings on the military operations and attacks carried out in the Occupied Palestinian Territory from 7 October to 31 December 2023, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel*, UN Human Rights Council, A/HRC/56/CRP.3 (June 10, 2024), <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session56/a-hrc-56-crp-4.pdf>; “More than a Human Can Bear”: *Israel’s Systematic Use of Sexual, Reproductive and Other Forms of Gender-Based Violence since 7 October 2023, Conference room paper of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel*, UN Human Rights Council, UN Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.4 (March 13, 2025), <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session58/a-hrc-58-crp-6.pdf>; *Legal Analysis of the Conduct of Israel in Gaza Pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Conference room paper of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel*, UN Human Rights Council, UN Doc. A/HRC/60/CRP.2 (September 16, 2025), <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session60/advance-version/a-hrc-60-crp-3.pdf>.

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⁵ “Gender-Based Violence Toolkit,” *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, n.d., https://www.unhcr.org/gbv-toolkit/_test/.

⁶ United Nations Security Council (UNSC), *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, Report of the Secretary General*, UN Doc. S/2015/203 (March 23, 2015), para. 2, <https://docs.un.org/en/s/2015/203>.

⁷ See Ruth Seifert, *War and Rape. Analytical Approaches*, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, (1993), https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/1992_War_and_Rape.pdf; Ruth Seifert, “Sexualized Violence and the Cultural Construction of War,” in *Rape Cultures and Survivors: An International Perspective*, ed. Tuba Inal and Merrill D. Smith (New York, New York: Praeger-Bloomsbury, 2018): 1–22.

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¹² *Prosecutor v. Akayesu*, para. 507-508.

¹³ *Prosecutor v. Clément Kayishema and Obed Ruzindana (Trial Judgment)*, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, ICTR-95-1-T, May 21, 1999, <https://www.refworld.org/jurisprudence/caselaw/ictr/1999/62079>.

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¹⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 157.

¹⁷ *Detailed findings on the military operations*, 2024; “*More than a Human Can Bear*,” 2025; *Legal Analysis of the Conduct of Israel in Gaza*, 2025.

¹⁸ *Legal Analysis of the Conduct of Israel in Gaza*, para. 66.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 80.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 70.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, para. 67.

²³ *Ibid.*, para. 70.

²⁴ “*More than a Human Can Bear*,” para. 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 84.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 85.

²⁷ *Detailed findings on the military operations*, 2024, para. 371.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 366.

²⁹ *Legal Analysis of the Conduct of Israel in Gaza*, para. 68.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 80.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, para. 212.

³³ *Ibid.*, para. 80.

³⁴ “*More than a Human Can Bear*,” para. 81.

³⁵ *Legal Analysis of the Conduct of Israel in Gaza*, para. 82.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 84.

³⁷ “*More than a Human Can Bear*,” para. 81.

³⁸ Seifert, “Sexualized Violence and the Cultural Construction of War.”

³⁹ *Legal Analysis of the Conduct of Israel in Gaza*, para. 158.

⁴⁰ *Croatia v. Serbia*, 2015.

⁴¹ *Legal Analysis of the Conduct of Israel in Gaza*, para. 213.

⁴² *Ibid.*, para. 220.



The Impact of October 7 on Palestinian and Israeli Political Landscapes

Chapter 5

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CHAPTER 5

Palestine's Political Predicament: An Urgent Need for Reform but No Clear Way Forward

Tahani Mustafa

Nearly three years after Hamas's unprecedented attack on Israel launched from the Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023, Palestinian politics remain completely deadlocked. The divisions that had paralyzed politics before that fateful day continue, and in fact have become more entrenched than ever, even after the destruction that Israel has wreaked on the Gaza Strip, the massive escalation of Israeli settlement and military activity, and the consequent mass dispossession of Palestinians in the West Bank.

There is no clear way forward for the beleaguered Palestinian Authority (PA). The July 2025 New York Declaration demonstrated clear international support for reinstating the PA in the Gaza Strip, which has been administered by Hamas since 2007.¹ However, advocates of reinstating PA control over Gaza also recognize the critical need for reform within the PA itself; they condition such a reinstatement on sweeping changes to strengthen governance, institutions, the security sector, and the economy. Many Palestinians also advocated these measures even before October 7, 2023, although such changes seem as unlikely to happen now as they did before.

The PA's failure to reform is ultimately the result of the coinciding interests of its president, Mahmoud Abbas, and Israel. Abbas has blocked all attempts at reforms that inevitably would undermine his power and position. Israel, for its part, benefits from a Palestinian administration that is weak and divided, quiescent despite the violence of Israel's occupation and expanding settlements. An unreformed PA allows Israel to decry "the absence of a peace partner" and provides a convenient scapegoat for the absence of a peace process.²

This chapter details how events since October 7, 2023, have deepened the paralysis that has long afflicted Palestinian politics. To overcome Palestinian fragmentation, the international community needs to support reforming the PA

while recognizing that political renewal and prospects for peace do not depend on Palestinians alone.

The Elevation of Abbas, the Enervation of Palestinian Politics

From the beginning of his term as PA president, Abbas took a very different approach from his predecessor Yasser Arafat, who out of caution chose to mitigate the extent of his cooperation with Israel rather than pursuing full-throated cooperation, but who spent the last two years of his life in Ramallah besieged by Israeli forces. Backed by Israel and the United States as a more compliant successor to Arafat, Abbas chose a different course and adhered closely to the role that the Oslo Accords had set out for the PA. He prioritized Israeli security and pinned his hopes on Israeli goodwill to deliver the substantive concessions that Palestinians needed to build a viable state at some unspecified future date.³ Abbas's cooperation, however, was no more successful than Arafat's more confrontational strategy in obtaining the concessions that Israel had promised.

In tandem with his conciliatory approach, Abbas moved to consolidate his personal hold on power, thereby undermining the democratic institutional basis of Palestinian politics. Over the last two decades of his rule—and now more than 15 years after his electoral mandate has expired—Abbas has systematically extended his control over the PA and eroded the independence of its institutions. Early in his presidency he sidelined the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and has ruled by presidential decree ever since.⁴ He amended the PA's Basic Law to strengthen his executive powers, blocked presidential and parliamentary elections, and promoted his supporters to head the PA's security forces and its 11 West Bank governorates.⁵ Not even the nominally independent judiciary has escaped his power grab: judges are now appointed and dismissed by presidential fiat and the constitutional court has been turned into a rubber stamp for the presidency.⁶ Concurrently serving as the PA president, the chairman of Fatah (historically the dominant Palestinian party), and the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO, the forerunner of the PA), Abbas blurred the lines that previously separated the three institutions, in the process plunging all of them into a crises of legitimacy and identity as they became, in effect, vehicles for Abbas's personal power.⁷ The PLO, the internationally recognized representative body of the Palestinian people, has been rendered symbolic and largely toothless. Fatah and other political factions, once the beating heart of Palestinian politics, have survived only as pale vestiges of their former selves after the Oslo Accords made them irrelevant and they lost the financial support that had once sustained their vitality.

Under pressure from Israel and from Abbas's security forces, Palestinian civil society has fragmented under continuing persecution and has been prevented from

holding Abbas or Israel to account, much less from fostering anything resembling a national dialogue.⁸ Divided and marginalized as it has become, civil society has still managed to agree on reforms that would point the way forward. Their agreement has centered on the removal of Abbas—or at least his sidelining to become no more than a titular head—and on the formation of a new independent technocratic government to be agreed upon by the independent factions in a reformed PLO, which would then prepare for democratic elections to be held.

Abbas has responded to Palestinian calls for reform by launching initiatives for elections and then either by failing to follow through after impossible conditionalities were imposed by him or by Israel, or by ‘refreshing’ his administration by appointing new Abbas loyalists. Palestinian politics has become a zero-sum game in which Abbas has ensured, to the extent that it is possible, that he holds all the cards.⁹ Like Arafat, Abbas consolidated his position by using both coercion and the financial power of the PA presidency to dispense patronage and to buy loyalty. However, general donor fatigue and the withdrawal of critical US and Saudi funding has since 2017 created an economic crisis exacerbated by such punitive Israeli policies as the withholding of tax revenues collected on behalf of the PA.¹⁰ The PA consequently has plunged into a financial crisis from which it has not yet recovered.¹¹ The crisis has severely undermined Abbas’s ability to coopt dissent or to buy support, and has led to severe cuts in the essential and generally popular services provided by the PA to Palestinians in the West Bank.

What remains after two decades of Abbas’s rule is a fragmented, brittle order representing the mere façade of a statehood devoid of legitimacy, incapable of improving the lives of its citizens or protecting them from Israeli oppression, and trapped in a collapsed peace process that offers not national liberation but the entrenchment of a violent and immiserating Israeli occupation.¹² The PA itself is beginning to fragment into localized institutions that are only nominally in control of scattered and poorly administered territorial enclaves, even as Abbas keeps a firm grip on the weakened central institutions. Local officials and community leaders are now struggling to fill the gaps in service provision.

The only unifying figure left in Palestinian politics is Marwan Barghouti, who has languished in an Israeli prison for almost 24 years after a flawed trial.¹³ His release is unlikely, not least because—in another convergence of interests—the PA has actively lobbied against it: Barghouti could conceivably threaten Abbas’s position as well as that of his anointed successor, Hussein al-Sheikh, who has served as PA Vice President since April 2025. A poll held in October 2025 found that a three-way electoral contest among Abbas, Barghouti, and Khalid Mishal of Hamas would see Barghouti win an electoral plurality just short of an absolute majority: 49 percent, versus 36 percent for Mishal and a paltry 13 percent for Abbas.¹⁴ Barghouti has beaten Abbas as a preferred leader in every poll run by the Palestinian Center

for Policy and Survey Research since it first posed the question in 2006, a year into Abbas's presidency.¹⁵

Hamas Out in the Cold

Isolated and marginalized even before October 7, 2023, Hamas is now an international pariah. However, it has long been the only organized opposition to Abbas and his Fatah movement and, as such, it had become a lightning rod for dissent and a channel to express frustration and opposition. Hamas boycotted the 2005 presidential election, allowing Abbas to run unopposed, but made a pragmatic decision to participate in parliamentary elections for the first time in 2006 on a moderate platform to end its political marginalization and realize its goal of ending the occupation from within Palestinian institutions.¹⁶

Hamas won the 2006 PLC elections on the back of a massive protest vote against PA corruption and inefficiency, and the failure of the peace process. However, its victory did not please Israel or the PA's Western backers, who encouraged Fatah to move against the new Hamas government in a move that led to the June 2007 civil war.¹⁷ Fatah then took control of the West Bank and Israel imposed a punishing blockade on Hamas-run Gaza. Each faction subsequently consolidated control over its respective territories through overtly authoritarian tactics.

Reconciliation attempts began shortly after Hamas's initial electoral victory, but Abbas has ensured that none of the over a dozen initiatives launched since then have produced substantive results.¹⁸ In another coincidence of interests, Israel aborted negotiations for a permanent truce with Hamas that would have made reconciliation hard for Abbas to resist or to undermine by assassinating Ahmed Jabari, head of Hamas's military wing, who was leading the talks.¹⁹ Israel also inadvertently assisted Abbas by assassinating Hamas moderates who would have been willing to push the group to make meaningful concessions in exchange for reconciliation with the PA.²⁰

While it is in Abbas's interest that Palestinians see him as serious about Palestinian unity in the face of Israeli expansionism and the excesses of the occupation, any actual concessions that he makes to unity would likely lead to a diminution of his power. Abbas would almost certainly lose any free and fair elections. Among Palestinians, the violence of Hamas's attack on October 7 did not put the group beyond the pale as it did for Western leaders. Palestinians have long been accustomed to the violence of Israel's occupation.

The dilemma of current attempts to reform the PA, which all parties agree is a necessary precondition for governing Gaza again, is that they must include buy-in from Hamas to be credible. Even Western states recognize that the group could act as a spoiler if excluded from any reconciliation agreement. However, Abbas

has created obstacles to the participation of Hamas and other Palestinian political factions in the PA, such as requiring all candidates in the April 2026 municipal elections to recognize the State of Israel and all other agreements the PLO has made with Israel without reservation.²¹ This is difficult for Hamas and many other factions, as the current Israeli government is actively working to undermine the possibility of a future Palestinian state and stands accused of committing a genocide in Gaza.

While Hamas understood long before October 7 that serious opposition from Israel and its Western allies meant that it could never play a role in front-line Palestinian politics, it did insist on representation in a revitalized PLO. However, in recognition of its weakened position since October 7, 2023, the group has made it clear that it is willing to hand over the governance of Gaza, to play a subordinate role in Palestinian politics, and turn over its arms to an established Palestinian state—disarmament would be carried out internally if a Palestinian state is established.²²

The Way Forward

Even before Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, international and regional frustration with Abbas's leadership had already led to numerous attempts at reform. Israel's brutal war and siege on Gaza once again placed the issue of day-after governance and Palestinian political reform at the top of the international agenda.

Under mounting pressure, Abbas has recently worked to frustrate reforms that would undercut or threaten his position. In April 2025, he created the post of vice president of the PLO Executive Committee for his unpopular but loyal lieutenant Hussein al-Sheikh. The move, in effect, anointed al-Sheikh as Abbas's successor, a step that was widely criticized by Palestinians, but that addressed a key international concern that Abbas had no obvious replacement considering that he had undermined all legitimate constitutional avenues to select a successor. To please his US patron, in February 2025 Abbas eliminated support payments to prisoners and to the families of those killed by Israeli forces, a decision opposed by many within his own Fatah movement.²³

Abbas's approach to the New York Declaration adopted at the July 2025 UN conference co-chaired by Saudi Arabia and France has been similar.²⁴ The Declaration sets out a 15-month plan to create a sovereign, demilitarized Palestine incorporating both the West Bank and Gaza; it calls for strengthening Palestinian institutions, political renewal (including new elections), reform of the security sector, and economic revival. Palestinians themselves generally support initiatives for reform but would oppose any measures imposed on them from the outside and not led by Palestinians.²⁵

The weakness of the New York Declaration lies not in its substance but in its

implementation, and this is what Abbas has seized on with alacrity. Abbas initially welcomed the declaration but then sought to implement its provisions in such a way that he could either control or undermine it. In July 2025, he issued a presidential decree calling for elections to the Palestinian National Council, the legislative body of the PLO, and in February 2026 decreed that the vote would take place on November 1, 2026.²⁶ He also announced PA local elections for April 2026 and the formation of a Constitutional Committee to oversee institutional and democratic reforms, noting these measures pave the way for holding PA general elections.²⁷ Next, he stuffed the committee with his own loyalists.

Abbas's moves have been roundly criticized by Palestinians as political theater.²⁸ Considering the current situation in Gaza and the West Bank, the timetable for elections is scarcely credible, and given that the electoral process is monopolized by Fatah, the elections are hardly likely to be transparent. Additionally, Israel has a history of obstructing Palestinian elections and election-related activities in both the West Bank and East Jerusalem.²⁹ Once again, Abbas's personal interests coincide with those of Israel. The Israeli government has no interest in a revitalized and assertive PA.

These concerns are more pressing given recent developments. In October 2025, US President Donald Trump revealed his 20-point plan, which the Trump-established Board of Peace is tasked with implementing.³⁰ This three-tiered structure will be headed by Trump himself as permanent Chairman for life, supported by hand-picked leaders from the fields of business and politics. A second-tier international Executive Board is responsible for supervising the lower tier National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, composed of Palestinian technocrats, which will administer Gaza in the interim. The 20-point plan makes no provision for the return of PA rule to Gaza but notes that "when the PA reform programme is faithfully carried out, the conditions may finally be in place for a credible pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood, which we recognize as the aspiration of the Palestinian people." In contrast, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2803, which endorsed Trump's plan in November 2025, did mention the return of the PA to Gaza, contingent on its "satisfactory completion" of a reform program, although otherwise mirroring the Trump plan's language on the possibility of a credible path to Palestinian statehood.³¹ This wording creates considerable uncertainty over what PA reform means, how and by whom the reforms will be certified, what the parameters of potential Palestinian statehood would be, and how those parameters would be agreed. These uncertainties are critical given Israel's credible threat to dismantle the PA as part of its agenda for annexing the West Bank and controlling Gaza indefinitely, as well as Abbas' apparent determination to stay at the helm of the PA even if the prospect of Palestinian statehood looks to be sinking.³²

Conclusion

Neither Abbas nor his lieutenant al-Sheikh would win a free and fair popular vote.³³ But such a vote offers the only possibility of restoring legitimacy and creating a government accountable to the Palestinian people. Palestinians have not had such a government for the last 18 years, when the international community colluded with Abbas to prevent a moderate Hamas government from assuming power. This democratic denial is the root cause of everything that followed—Abbas's authoritarianism and undermining of legitimate Palestinian institutions of governance, the death of the peace process largely at Israeli hands, the division between Gaza and the West Bank, the long siege of the Gaza Strip, and the increasing radicalization of Hamas that resulted in the attack of October 7, 2023.

The international community needs to support Palestinians in deciding their own leadership. Beyond Barghouti, Palestinians are actively seeking to elect new, accountable leaders through free and fair elections who could breathe new life into the moribund politics of Palestine. Democracy now represents the most viable path toward real peace negotiations and future self-determination for Palestinians.

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Hamas in Gaza Before and After October 7: Moving the Parameters of Governance, Resistance, and Diplomacy

Hanna Alshaikh

Israel's post-October 7 campaign to decapitate Hamas has targeted its military leadership, tunnel infrastructure, and missile capability, and has extended to assassinations of Political Bureau members across the region. Hamas, however, has survived these unrelenting attacks and has participated in sporadic US attempts to negotiate over phase two of US President Donald Trump's 20-point "peace" plan. To understand the negotiating position of Hamas, its survival, and its demands, and to anticipate its future moves, a grounding in its governance role in blockade-era Gaza before October 2023 is necessary.

What emerges is a framework for understanding Hamas's calculations in the lead-up to October 7, 2023. Throughout the pre-October 7 blockade era—beginning in 2007, when Israel imposed a blockade on Gaza after Hamas's victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections and its subsequent governance of the territory—Hamas sought to balance governing and diplomacy amid a humanitarian crisis with its project of armed resistance. During Israel's genocide, Hamas has continued this adaptive strategy despite the destruction of most of the Gaza Strip and severe blows to its military organization and infrastructure. Accordingly, since the October 2025 ceasefire, Hamas has pivoted to an insurgent mode of military activity while insisting that it will not demilitarize, despite Israeli and US demands. Hamas has accepted technocratic rule in Gaza under Trump's plan but has already started restoring governance and filling the security vacuum to counter persistent criminal gang activity: an indicator that postwar arrangements premised on annihilating or bypassing Hamas are likely to fail.

This chapter argues that Hamas's decision-making and calculus for balancing governance and armed struggle are characterized by adaptability and hybridity. During the pre-October 7 blockade period, Hamas functioned both as an armed

resistance movement, waging what it described as a war of national liberation against Israel, and as the governing authority for more than two million people. October 7 was not a sudden break in Hamas's operational trajectory, but the outcome of pressures that had intensified during the pre-October 7 blockade era: economic strangulation, Israel's destructive wars with only minimal reconstruction, a humanitarian crisis, and failed attempts at reconciliation with Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (PA). For Hamas, governance and resistance reinforced one another. Governance provided the security infrastructure and controls, as well as the political space that allowed it to develop increasingly sophisticated military capabilities, and while the movement valued governance as a means to improve the day-to-day conditions of Palestinians, governance was always subordinated to the larger armed resistance project.

Between Governance and Resistance

Resistance, for Hamas, was never a fixed concept existing outside of the movement's broader context. The parameters of resistance—defining legitimate targets and which means to use, where, and to what end—were shaped and continuously renegotiated based on the political and humanitarian conditions, the decisions of its leadership, and the demands of its base and the Palestinian public more generally. Hamas consistently has articulated its resistance program as a means to achieve self-determination for Palestinians and the return of exiles and refugees to their original lands. In its 1988 founding charter, Hamas identified itself as a segment of the broader Palestinian national cause while also appealing to Muslims around the world. The Charter framed Palestine as a Muslim cause and defined the scope of resistance as the total liberation of historic Palestine; it rejected negotiated settlements as incompatible with this goal.¹

In a 1996 memorandum, Hamas grounded the legitimacy of its resistance in the universalism of international law and human rights principles, pointing to the principle of self-determination in the UN Charter and referring broadly to resolutions passed in the 40th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).² Hamas outlined the parameters of its resistance program, which included limiting its armed operations to Israeli military targets and “armed formations that support them,” self-defense against soldiers and armed settlers, and operations that “avoid” civilians such as “women, children, and the elderly.” It also sought to uphold “the respect of humanity on the other side,” including such measures as the banning of “mutilation, defacement, or over-killing” regardless of Israel's actions, as well as attacks on Western “individuals or interests” within or outside the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), and prohibited operations outside of historic Palestine.³

At times, Hamas changed these parameters in reaction to Israel's policies, for example in using suicide bombings as a retaliatory tactic following the Ibrahimi Mosque Massacre in Hebron (1994), and later, during the Second Intifada (2000-2005). In 2005, however, as part of the Cairo Declaration, Hamas joined 12 major Palestinian factions in agreeing to halt the use of this tactic.⁴ During this period, Hamas began developing its rocket program, and by the time that Israel had formally instituted its blockade over the Gaza Strip in 2007, Hamas was already developing its missile capabilities and tunnel infrastructure. The October 7, 2023, attack nevertheless represented a significant departure in scale, methods, and targets from any prior operations conducted by Hamas.

In 2007, Israel imposed a blockade on the Gaza Strip after Hamas won the 2006 legislative elections that produced the short-lived Palestinian Unity Government under Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh. The United States and Israel then provoked brutal fighting between Hamas and Fatah in 2007 that fractured the Palestinian body politic, leaving the Fatah-dominated PA governing the West Bank and Hamas governing Gaza.⁵ From the outset, UN agencies and officials, international law experts, and human rights organizations warned that the humanitarian crisis caused by Israel's blockade was unsustainable and constituted collective punishment, a violation of international law.⁶ By late 2022, more than 15 years of blockade and four major wars by Israel had created an untenable situation for the 2.2 million Palestinians in Gaza. Unemployment stood at 47 percent, youth unemployment exceeded 60 percent, more than 60 percent of the population faced food insecurity, and electricity averaged 12 hours daily.⁷ Although it collected tax and customs revenue, the government struggled to compensate public employees due to economic strangulation and a cash shortage. Drawing on its decades-long experience with grassroots social welfare work before becoming Gaza's governing authority, Hamas was adept at overcoming these challenges and at administering municipal services.⁸ Hamas expanded its bureaucracy, hired more civil servants, and ran ministries of education, finance, health, and the interior.⁹

Hamas's foreign policy and military strategy were inextricably linked to Gaza's economic crisis. Between 2014-2021, Hamas withstood pressures that were particularly consequential for its staying power, military trajectory, and governance. The year 2014 marked a turning point as humanitarian conditions significantly worsened due to Israeli policy and the blockade on one hand, and Egypt's sealing of the Rafah Crossing starting in August 2013 on the other. Another dimension to Hamas's regional isolation was tensions with Iran, which reduced military support to Hamas over the Political Bureau's departure from Syria in 2012. Consequently, these circumstances pushed Hamas into national reconciliation talks with Fatah. In April 2014, the parties agreed to form an interim technocratic government until new elections could be held. To ease the blockade's humanitarian burden

and to provide space to refocus on its military-political strategy, Hamas pledged to integrate with the PA and to join the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) for the first time. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the agreement, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refused to negotiate with a unified Palestinian leadership and suspended talks with the PLO.¹⁰ Just weeks after PA President Mahmoud Abbas announced the agreement, Israel launched its July 2014 war on Gaza, killing more than 2,000 Palestinians, including more than 500 children.¹¹ Israel's war sabotaged Palestinian unity, but Hamas's ability to endure and conduct guerrilla warfare strengthened its position despite sharpened regional isolation.

Senior Hamas leaders were candid about the relationship between governance and resistance. In 2024, Khaled Meshaal recalled the heated debates of the 2014-2021 era. When detractors and supporters asked whether governing offered any benefit, Meshaal responded “no, apart from one”. “We took advantage of our position in power to build the resistance with all its tools,” he stated, adding that “Hamas [sought] an authority of resistance.”¹² Governance provided the social order and political cover needed to build resistance infrastructure without internal threats—ideally, national unity would serve this goal. Yahya Sinwar, who joined Hamas's Politburo and became the group's leader in Gaza in 2017, also pursued national unity, rallying the public around resistance by improving relations with various segments of Palestinian society, while pursuing inter-factional reconciliation. Addressing tribal leaders, Sinwar described reconciliation as “a struggle-driven step on the path of liberation and return,” arguing that the Palestinian national project required “accumulating power in all fields” including military strength, political unity, and cohesive governance, rather than treating them as competing priorities.¹³ Governance was a tactic in a broader strategy; inter-factional unity was an ideal, but was never intended to replace armed resistance.

Strategic Restraint and Cautious Diplomacy under Blockade

The failed attempts at Hamas-Fatah reconciliation brought further economic hardship to Gaza, with Abbas imposing funding cuts and measures affecting electric supply and salaries in 2017. Gaza's humanitarian crisis worsened under the first Trump administration, which cut funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in 2018, threatening vital services for more than 1.4 million registered refugees in Gaza.¹⁴

After a decade of Israel's blockade, Hamas leadership was adept at exploiting narrow political openings. By 2017, Hamas improved ties with Iran following its Politburo's late 2012 decision to leave Syria and gradually improved relations with Egypt. Hamas secured fuel deliveries via Gaza's Rafah Crossing following

talks with a former adversary, the ousted PA security chief Mohammed Dahlan, and negotiated openings of the crossing for Palestinian travel. After Abbas cut ties with the Trump administration over the US Embassy move to Jerusalem in 2018, Washington pivoted to a “Gaza first” approach to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, encouraging indirect Hamas-Israel negotiations for a long-term ceasefire and improving conditions in the Gaza Strip as a way to pressure the PA.¹⁵ Despite hardline rhetoric from Washington earlier in 2018, Hamas found itself in a stronger position by the end of that year.¹⁶

Amid an international outcry over Israeli sniper attacks on unarmed protesters during the Great March of Return (2018-2019) and a failed covert Israeli incursion into Gaza, Hamas chose not to escalate despite Israeli airstrikes. Instead, it worked to secure cash transfers from international sponsors to pay civil servant salaries, permits for laborers to work in Israel, increased aid and commercial goods, and relaxed travel restrictions. By holding its fire, Hamas signaled that it would determine the timing of major confrontations with Israel, accounting for the needs of the population, its military strategy, and wider political considerations.¹⁷ This calculus was apparent in 2021 during the time of Israeli attacks on worshippers at the Aqsa Mosque and efforts to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from Jerusalem’s Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. When Palestinian protesters in East Jerusalem took to the streets calling on “Gaza” to help, Hamas adopted an offensive posture issuing an ultimatum to Israel to end these provocations, which Israel ignored.¹⁸ Striking Israel marked Gaza’s participation in the Unity Intifada, an unprecedented mobilization of Palestinians from the Strip, Jerusalem, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestinian citizens of Israel, transcending Israel’s physical fragmentation of Palestinians. Thus, Hamas asserted itself as a defensive force for *all* Palestinians—a turning point, even though it later exercised restraint during Israeli provocations in 2022 and 2023.¹⁹

By the second decade of Israel’s blockade, deepening human suffering was one of the few constants in Gaza. As the governing authority, Hamas balanced the resistance project with the demands of administering daily life under siege. The years between 2017 and 2023 witnessed sharp contradictions. Improved relations with regional powers opened (limited) avenues for Hamas to engage in diplomacy and provide some economic relief to the population, but humanitarian conditions in Gaza continued to deteriorate.²⁰ Hamas faced isolation on the stage of formal Palestinian politics but enjoyed a temporary surge of popular support among Palestinians following the May 2021 war with Israel.²¹

The apparent tensions within Gaza in the final years leading up to October 7, 2023, and Israel’s genocidal war are consistent with longstanding dynamics in the blockade era. While Palestinians in Gaza evaluated their government negatively according to the same metrics against which any other public evaluates its

governing authority: its performance on public services, infrastructure, corruption and transparency, and the economy, more than half of Palestinians (55 percent in the Gaza Strip and 54 percent in the West Bank) continued to view armed struggle, Hamas's foundational principle, as the most effective way to end Israel's occupation.²² Therefore, Hamas faced pressure from within and outside its base on two fronts simultaneously: to deliver improved governance, under blockade, without the ability to unilaterally end its harsh constraints; and to sustain resistance to Israeli aggression against Palestinians, grounding its popular legitimacy in its resistance project. In the absence of inter-factional reconciliation, these dynamics reinforced Hamas's hybrid character during the blockade era, where governance functioned as a mechanism to protect the resistance project.

October 7 and Hamas's Calculus

To understand Hamas's decision to launch the October 7 attack on Israel, it is important to consider the context of Israel's actions throughout the OPT and the rapidly shifting arena of regional diplomacy in the final years of the blockade era. The first four major Israeli wars on Gaza—in 2008-09, 2012, 2014, and 2021—claimed the lives of nearly 3,000 Palestinian civilians, including more than 800 children.²³ These wars were characterized by aerial bombardment and by the targeting of civilian infrastructure and human life. Israel sabotaged the Palestinian national unity agreement by ending talks with the PLO and launching the 2014 war on Gaza. Two weeks into this 51-day assault, Hamas offered Israel a 10-year truce to end hostilities on all sides in exchange for an Israeli tank withdrawal from Gaza's border, the release of Palestinian prisoners, an end to the blockade on Gaza, and allowing the construction of a seaport and airport in Gaza. Francesca Albanese, now the UN special rapporteur on the OPT, observed in 2014 that Hamas's proposal included points to which Israel had already agreed during negotiations over the 1993 Oslo Accords and the 2012 Gaza ceasefire and in previous agreements.²⁴ But within the span of five months, Israel rejected de-escalation and diplomacy with both Hamas and Fatah, preferring to wage war on Gaza and to enable settler violence in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. Such decisions are emblematic of Israeli policy and escalated severely in the years prior to October 7 and the genocide in Gaza.

Regardless of their differences, Palestinian leaders in Gaza and the West Bank shared the recognition that diplomatic opportunities were narrowing, and the question of Palestine was increasingly marginalized in the region and on the international stage. The path to a Palestinian state was effectively closed, as the Oslo framework had failed to produce results. In fact, in December 2016, in the final weeks of Barack Obama's presidency, then-secretary of state John Kerry declared his

reservations about the viability of the two-state solution due to Israel's settlement expansion.²⁵ Conditions on the ground and the status of diplomatic engagement deteriorated further under the first Trump administration. Without underestimating the toll of the ruptures of Trump policy between 2017-2021—such as UNRWA funding cuts, the US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and the relocation of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem—it is worth considering how decades of US policy geared towards conflict management instead of viable conflict resolution enabled these decisions.²⁶ The Biden administration largely continued Trump's legacy vis-à-vis the Palestinians, not only backing the 2020 Abraham Accords, but also attempting to expand them by pursuing normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel while ignoring Palestinian rights and lives.²⁷ Hamas perceived a heightened threat in the possibility that Saudi Arabia, the home of Islam's two holiest sites, would normalize relations with Israel, as this could legitimize Israel and encourage more Arab and Muslim-majority states to follow suit, thereby foreclosing Palestinian leverage and removing Palestine from the regional agenda for the foreseeable future.²⁸

In late 2022, Israel formed the most right-wing governing coalition in its history. Cabinet ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich openly called for West Bank annexation, the expansion of settlements, and the forced displacement of Palestinians. Smotrich faced accusations of advocating for a “second Nakba.”²⁹ Settler violence in the West Bank reached levels unseen in two decades, with armed settlers raiding Palestinian villages at a rapidly increasing pace and minimal Israeli military restraint, not to mention international silence and Israeli impunity. Following the October 7 attack, Hamas leaders frequently cited the convergence of these pressures as motivating factors for its assault: one century of violence at the hands of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel, the Gaza blockade, the commitment to defend Palestinians and Jerusalem, the unchecked escalation of Israeli military and settler violence, settlement expansion, the overall deterioration of conditions for Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and under blockade in Gaza, the closing diplomatic horizon, and increased pressure on regional powers to normalize with Israel. From Hamas's perspective, the attack was meant to disrupt a geopolitical trajectory whose destination would be the permanent sidelining of Palestinians in regional affairs and the liquidation of the Palestinian national cause and basic rights.³⁰

Understanding Hamas in the Aftermath of October 7

Israel's disproportionate response to the October 7 attack was little surprise after nearly two decades of collective punishment and wars on Gaza. The dehumanization of Palestinians by defense minister Yoav Gallant, calling them “human animals”

as he announced a “complete closure” of Gaza, made Israel’s intentions clear.³¹ Now, after nearly three years of genocidal violence against the Palestinians in Gaza, and the killing of more than 70,000 people and the near total destruction of the strip, Israel has failed to achieve its stated goal of eliminating Hamas.³² Widescale destruction inflicted heavy casualties on Hamas’s military ranks, damaged its tunnel infrastructure, and reduced its arsenal, but did not force the group’s demilitarization. Israel’s decapitation strategy also failed. The assassinations of leaders such as Saleh Arouri and Haniyeh did not disrupt the movement’s ability to make decisions, and the failed September 2025 assassination attempt on Khalil al-Hayya and other Hamas leaders in Doha backfired.³³ The political and military wings adapted. The Politburo appointed a temporary committee to carry out Sinwar’s role after he was killed, until elections could be held, with Politburo Deputy Chairman al-Hayya publicly representing Hamas. Meanwhile, the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades adjusted its battlefield strategy to withstand new pressures. Israel’s indiscriminate bombardment degraded the Qassam Brigades’ capacity, leading to a shift in fighting posture from organized battalion-level operations to insurgency: smaller-unit ambushes, attacks on armored vehicles, and dispersed command structures designed to absorb leadership losses.³⁴ Operational flexibility was not a battlefield improvisation, but the product of an institutional tradition that endured since the group’s founding.

The US-brokered January 2025 ceasefire tested Hamas’s post-war capacity to govern. During the two-month ceasefire, Hamas redeployed police forces, resumed security escorts for aid convoys, and commenced rebuilding administrative functions in locations from which Israeli forces withdrew. After the October 2025 ceasefire, Hamas expanded these efforts: deploying more police, offering an amnesty window to criminal gang members, and appointing district governors and police commanders to replace those killed.³⁵ The Arrow Unit—a youth initiative established in Gaza to counteract the growing threat of Israeli-armed criminal gangs, looting of aid trucks, disorder at aid distribution sites, and price gouging in markets—had been adopted by the Ministry of Interior in 2024, and was activated widely as Hamas redeployed across Gaza in late 2025.³⁶ Overall, the pattern across both ceasefire windows confirmed that Hamas retained its pre October 7 blockade-era approach: governance and resistance capabilities were not separate functions, but expressions of the same institutional resilience—albeit adapted to new, extreme conditions.

Hamas also carried out talks on several levels throughout the war with Palestinian factions, with Arab states, and (indirectly) with Israel. Having rejected disarmament as a precondition, Hamas made its central demands a permanent end to the war, a comprehensive prisoner exchange, and a full Israeli withdrawal. Hamas maintained its historic willingness to offer concessions that do not endanger its resistance project. Hamas demonstrated flexibility by releasing more Israelis

than required, releasing US-born Israeli soldier Edan Alexander as a “gesture of goodwill” to Washington, and by accepting phased Israeli withdrawals from Gaza.³⁷ Washington and Israel insisted that Hamas disarm, but senior Hamas officials maintained that disarmament was non-negotiable, citing Israel’s ceasefire violations and its refusal to uphold phase-one commitments.³⁸ Intra-Palestinian talks focused on interim technocratic rule based on national consensus, such as the Beijing reconciliation agreement of July 2024, and the Egypt-brokered Community Support Committee (CSC) agreement in December 2024 to appoint technocrats to administer Gaza on an interim basis.³⁹ Elements of the CSC carried into the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), established through Trump’s ceasefire plan.

Hamas’s cooperation with these proposals is consistent with its flexibility on governance so long as its armed wing is not jeopardized. On paper, these arrangements remove Hamas from governance, but Hamas will not negotiate itself into extinction because it is rooted in Palestinian society. For nearly two decades, Hamas employed over 40,000 civil servants. According to Israeli military assessments, by February 2026 Hamas had reestablished its authority in all areas of its control from the ministerial to the municipal levels, filling vacancies left by Israel’s assassinations and killings as Palestinians awaited the activation of the NCAG.⁴⁰ Hamas instructed civil servants to “cooperate” with the NCAG, while demanding that 10,000 of its police officers be included in the NCAG force. Basem Naim, a senior Hamas political leader deeply involved in ceasefire negotiations, rejected claims that Palestinian factions agreed to disarm, reiterating the longstanding Hamas position that it will only negotiate demilitarization in the framework of a serious process toward a Palestinian state with a military to defend its people.⁴¹ The bottom line is clear: Hamas is flexible on governance, but firm on its security role.⁴²

Conclusion

The October 7 attack was not a sudden break with Hamas’s political trajectory. Despite Israel’s strategy of decapitating the group’s leadership, there is little evidence that such assassinations have changed Hamas’s institutional structure. As Hamas reemerges as a police force and a governing authority in Gaza, and as progress towards establishing the NCAG and the International Stabilization Force (ISF) stalls, Washington must contend with the reality on the ground. Following the October 2025 ceasefire, it appears that Hamas will continue to assert its authority amid Israel’s lack of accountability and repeated ceasefire violations. Postwar governance arrangements that seek to bypass Hamas are likely to fail. For example, the success of the NCAG depends on cooperation from the corps of civil servants and civilian police whom Israel would seek to disqualify based on affiliation or past

cooperation with Hamas. Ultimatums will not succeed in forcing demilitarization where Israel's bombardment failed. US policy must now be brought into alignment with the realization of at least some in Washington that Hamas cannot be eliminated through military force; doubling down on a military strategy against Hamas will, at best, entrench the impasse in Gaza. The endless cycle of Israeli aggression, ceasefire collapse, diplomatic stalemate, and resumed bombardment serves the interests of no responsible party.

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CHAPTER 7

Israel's Zombie Economy: The Political Economy of Genocide

Shir Hever

The genocide in Gaza has precipitated an unprecedented contradiction in Israel's political economy. Israel's war machine marches forward even as its social, economic, and psychological foundations disintegrate. Although many Israelis predicted that the end of the State of Israel would be brought about by crossing the red line into genocide, a policy of revenge, and a collapse of Israel's diplomatic standing in the world, somehow the Israeli economy has not collapsed. This chapter synthesizes four interconnected dimensions of what I term Israel's "zombie economy": the four failures of institutional governance, social cohesion, productive capacity, and the perception of reality. The first three failures explain the crisis of Israel's economy, and the fourth failure—the breakdown in perceiving reality—in part solves the puzzle of this zombie-like endurance: why the crisis has not stopped the genocide.

Institutional Failure: Short-Term Fiscal and Monetary Manipulation

Historically, Israel's military and economy have been structured for short, decisive wars. The Zionist leadership understood from the movement's inception that prolonged military engagement threatened the sustainability of their colonial project.¹ As in all cases of settler colonialism, the existence of the colony depends on maintaining an illusion of normalcy. When the illusion shatters, outside investment recedes, trade falters, and foreign relations suffer.

The genocide in Gaza is the longest war in Israel's history, demanding unprecedented conscription of reservists for an unprecedented length of time. The economic burden has become unbearable for Israel's neoliberal economy. In contrast

to the social-democratic welfare state established for Jewish citizens between 1948 and 1985, the period from 1985 to 2023 saw rapid privatization, welfare retrenchment, growing inequality, and the deregulation of capital flows. After that transformation, the willingness of Israelis to endure prolonged recession and declining living standards has eroded substantially. Now, emigration offers a viable alternative for Israel's elites.²

The erosion of living standards was further exacerbated by Israel's far-right government; driven by its hyperfocus on messianic fervor and caught up in its own propaganda, it failed to finance emergency reconstruction and medical services (especially mental health) in the aftermath of Hamas's attack on October 7, 2023.³ The state budgets for 2024 and 2025 were hastily drafted and passed very late; they prioritized political spending to buy consent from certain segments of the population rather than stabilizing the economy. The cost was increased debt.⁴

Israel's armed forces are also facing a deepening crisis, which also led to harmful financial measures. Over two thousand Israeli soldiers have been killed and thousands injured. Moral injuries caused unprecedented levels of trauma, with almost 300 confirmed attempted suicides. Thousands of soldiers emigrated with their families.⁵ For example, an anonymous reservist testified that of his 100-soldier battalion, only six remained.⁶ In August 2024, then-Defense Minister Yoav Gallant revealed that the Israeli armed forces needed 15,000 additional soldiers and recalled to service soldiers who had previously been relieved or exempted.⁷ After Gallant's dismissal over disagreements with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the drafting of Ultra-Orthodox Jews to military service as it would threaten Netanyahu's far-right coalition, new Defense Minister Israel Katz clashed with new Commander-in-Chief Eyal Zamir, who kept insisting that he was unable to follow the government's orders with so few soldiers.⁸

As a result, the Israeli Ministry of Defense implemented a secret policy known as "reserve duty day tokens," which was exposed in March 2025. Unlike Israel's traditional reserve system which compensates reservists at their civilian wage rates, the new system paid NIS 29,000 (nearly \$8,000) each month—more than double the average wage and quadruple the minimum wage.⁹ Unit commanders could use these tokens to recruit additional personnel. Reservists extended their service for hundreds of days, effectively transforming themselves into mercenaries. Haaretz military correspondent Amos Harel described the reservists as soldiers who were "abandoning their civilian lives in favor of the war."¹⁰ Tens of thousands of households facing bankruptcy, unemployment, and displacement became dependent on this income.¹¹

Reserve duty tokens became an alternative currency. The Ministry of Defense issued far more tokens than its budget allowed, flooding the market with purchasing power unconnected to any productive activity. Israeli economist Esther

Alexander's analysis of the 1980s banking crisis provides a theoretical precedent for these dynamics.¹² Alexander argued that the banks effectively created an alternative currency by manipulating share prices—basically equivalent to printing money—and causing Israel's hyperinflation. When panic spread in October 1983, the stock market bubble collapsed, and all Israel's largest banks were nationalized as they faced imminent bankruptcy. The parallel to today is compelling. Just like in the 1980s when share prices created an influx of purchasing power without an increase in production, leading to inflation, reservists have an income windfall while Israel's productivity is in decline, thus leading to demand outstripping supply. The executive director of the Finance Ministry raised the alarm that the tokens could bring catastrophe to the Israeli economy.¹³

The Failure of Social Cohesion

Israeli society has survived crises in the past through national mobilization and a willingness to make collective sacrifices, even among the hegemonic Jewish Ashkenazi elite. As in Hegel's master-slave dialectic, the master's willingness to die gives him power over the slave.¹⁴ As an apartheid state, however, Israel goes through an inevitable process of social disintegration when different groups struggle over status in a hierarchy which becomes increasingly complex over time. Apartheid encourages a never-ending competition over status and privilege, causing social groups to break down with internal divisions. When faced with discrimination, targeted minorities in an apartheid system find that embracing privileges which are accessible to only part of the minority group is a more effective means of increasing one's status than by building coalitions for equal rights. In the case of Israel, the discrimination against Arab Palestinian citizens prompted some Jewish Mizrahi groups to embrace a nationalist, chauvinistic path to privilege rather than solidarity with other Arab groups.

Israel's July 2018 "Nation-State Law" codified apartheid and ended hopes of legal equality for non-Jews.¹⁵ Apartheid systems offer no inalienable rights, only privileges that are tiered, precarious, and unpredictable. Israel's racist discourse explicitly frames Palestinian citizens' access to senior positions as privileges for which they should be grateful, not rights they inherently possess.¹⁶ This regime of privileges generates competition between different communities, which explains why protests against Netanyahu's government excluded Palestinian participation and banned Palestinian flags.¹⁷

Former President Reuven Rivlin famously called for reconciliation among the four tribes—secular Jews, national religious Orthodox Jews, ultra-Orthodox, and "Arabs"—an appeal that implicitly acknowledged the failure of Israel's "melting pot" fantasy.¹⁸ In reality, far more than four tribes exist, as apartheid's privilege-based

logic generates increasingly complex hierarchies. Israel's long-standing political crisis—in which no coalition has completed a full term since 2015—stems from this tribal fragmentation. Netanyahu has thrived by forging ad-hoc coalitions—different party combinations lured by promises of upward mobility in the privilege hierarchy—which repeatedly collapsed over their inability to find common ground.

This tribal breakdown manifests most critically in Israel's military. Yagil Levy documents the internal hierarchies within Israeli armed forces, particularly in his concept of Israel's two armies: the 'sophisticated army' (air force, intelligence, drones, medical corps), predominantly Ashkenazi, secular, middle-class, Jewish and associated with liberal Zionism; and the 'brutish army' (infantry, artillery, armor), comprised predominantly of Mizrahi, religious, lower-class Jews associated with the right wing.¹⁹ This hierarchy has created a struggle over the identity of the army, causing the military to descend into a mob mentality, as the 'second army' rebels and operates without support from the first, as evidenced by the February 2023 settler pogrom in the Palestinian town of Huwara in the West Bank. This event triggered officers to warn about the military's collapse.²⁰

The genocide in Gaza further contributed to the disintegration of the military. It blurred distinctions between regular soldiers, reservists, and volunteers. Soldiers decorated uniforms with religious and political symbols, against regulations.²¹ Throughout the genocide, soldiers often faced neither punishment nor investigation for insubordination, committing atrocities, or deserting.²² The July 2024 Sde Teiman torture and rape scandal epitomized this collapse: When chief military prosecutor Yifat Tomer-Yerushalmi leaked the video of the abuse in order to generate support for an investigation into the allegations, the Israeli public branded her a "traitor." Levy observed that her elite identity—Ashkenazi, secular, well-educated, and belonging to the 'sophisticated army'—eroded her authority.²³ In Israel's divided society, identity politics serve to repress calls for accountability. Without a functioning judicial system, Israel turns from a state into an angry mob.

Less than half of 18-year-old Israelis serve in the military, but a large majority of Jewish Israelis express support for the war, even calling for the expulsion of Palestinian citizens and a "Biblical" policy in Gaza (in other words, genocide).²⁴ This discrepancy between political opinion in support of the war and colonization on one hand and the reluctance to enlist and sacrifice on the other, and even more so as a third of right-wing Jewish Israelis want to leave the country, shows that Israeli "society" exists only as a thin veneer that can quickly fall apart.²⁵

Economic Failure and The Illusion of Stability

Understanding Israel's economic collapse requires examining the foundations of its political economy, not just superficial indicators. In wartime, for example, Gross

Domestic Product (GDP) is nearly meaningless. Israel's 2006 Lebanon invasion, considered a military defeat, was accompanied by 6% growth in GDP because hotel costs, insurance compensation, and property repairs all contribute to economic activity despite being symptoms of economic damage.²⁶ Military economist Brigadier General Reem Aminoach has estimated that the costs of the Gaza war will "exceed a trillion Shekels"—approximately 56% of Israel's 2024 \$540.83 billion GDP (the equivalent of 1.7 trillion shekels). This spending will inflate GDP when eventually disbursed.²⁷

Israel's most recent and ongoing economic crisis started in January 2023, when the far-right Israeli government eschewed the mask of liberal democracy completely. The dismantling of Israel's judicial system and subversion of state institutions (such as the police) to serve sectarian and extremist groups has eroded the trust of domestic and international investors. Israel's tech sector employees, for example, often come from Israel's highest socioeconomic elite class, but their hegemonic status is being challenged by the far-right's ideological ambitions.²⁸ As such, Israel entered a stage of "Shutdown Nation," a term used to describe the economic crisis in Israel as a result of its policies toward the Palestinians and boycott measures, juxtaposed against the slogan "Startup Nation."²⁹ The genocide exacerbated the economic crisis, but also gave the government an excuse to ignore the long-term consequences as long as the war continued.

Every aspect of Israel's wealth production has suffered. The "Palestine laboratory" model—marketing weapons as "battle tested"—lost credibility as Israeli forces switched to US-made weapons during their longest, hardest war.³⁰ Energy capacity diminished when Colombia banned coal exports to Israel, and later when Iran damaged Israel's oil refinery, forcing dependence on natural gas that Israel then sold to Egypt for quick cash despite economists' warnings about undermining long-term energy security.³¹

Most critically, Israel's workforce has hemorrhaged its most valuable members. Israeli emigrants who leave with their families are disproportionately young and educated. Israel's middle and upper-middle classes possess superior emigration capacity through international work opportunities, study possibilities, and second passports.³² Economist Dan Ben-David has warned that Israel's economy rests on approximately 300,000 leading doctors, scientists, professors, and business leaders. If enough of them leave, Israel will not exist as a developed economy—and probably will not exist at all.³³

Traditional macroeconomic indicators—such as 46,000 business bankruptcies, downgraded credit ratings, and rapidly increasing national debt—are all important but do not tell the full story.³⁴ As the government collects taxes from reservists paid by the government, the circular accounting generates the illusion of full employment and a solid tax base. Furthermore, after Intel cancelled a \$25

billion investment plan and major tech companies WIZ and CyberArk were to be sold entirely to foreign investors, the stock market became financed predominantly by small amounts of domestic money. The stocks do not necessarily trend downwards, but they become more volatile.

Beneath the surface of these statistics, people suffer. The cost-of-living has skyrocketed due to inflation, import difficulties, and reduced domestic production.³⁵ Approximately 40 percent of households spend in excess of their income each month, accumulating debt and finding themselves unable to rely on Israel's crumbling public services.³⁶

The Failure of Reality Perception

Are Israelis aware of the dead-end into which Israel has driven itself? Israelis cling to the belief that recovery is around the corner, especially following the October 2025 ceasefire imposed by US President Donald Trump. But if that belief is based on delusion, Israelis will inevitably face a rude awakening. This delusion, however, is inherently tied to the Israeli claim that there is no genocide and that Israeli soldiers act “morally.” If the atrocities are not real, there will never be any accountability and Israel's economic hardships will quickly pass.

The disinformation, collective delusion, and ignorance are a moral minefield. To ignore them is to ignore how consent for the genocide was manufactured. Claiming that Israelis are not aware of the horrors, or that they have simply been brainwashed or manipulated, allows them to abdicate responsibility for crimes against humanity. Stanley Cohen's operationalization of the concept of the colonial gaze, employed as dual gaze, provides a liminal analytical framework for understanding how Israelis simultaneously know and do not know.³⁷ Israelis avoid exposure to international media because they know that Israeli media will give them an interpretation of events with which they can live. The dual gaze is deeply rooted in Israeli culture, from the contradiction between denying the Nakba and threatening Palestinians with a second Nakba in the same breath.³⁸ This duality developed during the genocide to “It's all fake— and they deserved it!”³⁹

Roger Owen's concept of “willed ignorance” describes a deliberate government strategy of collecting faulty evidence to construct ostensibly rational plans which serve concealed secondary goals.⁴⁰ In Israel's case, the willed ignorance extends to the general public as well. As Stanley Cohen described in the Mauthausen concentration camp, the authorities tried to conceal the horrors from the public and in exchange the public agreed not to attempt to find out.⁴¹ A livestreamed genocide cannot be concealed. Instead, the dual gaze focuses on shifting the blame and misrepresenting facts. Israeli disinformation became more efficient by accusing Palestinians of committing the very crimes which Israel has committed. This

pattern has become regular: it simultaneously denies Israel's crimes and justifies them through false accusations.⁴² The systematic misuse of the term "hostages" to describe all Israeli captives (including active-duty soldiers who meet the legal definition of prisoners of war) while refusing the same designation for thousands of Palestinians held without trial exemplifies this mechanism.

Israeli media, the government, and the military also feed this collective denial by blaming technology. Social media is blamed for compartmentalizing information, leaving Israelis in bubbles of disinformation. When Haaretz reports atrocities, writers in the comments section immediately accuse the authors of being Iranian bots. When confronted with civilian killings, Israelis respond that their soldiers were manipulated by artificial intelligence (AI) technologies that use data and algorithms to assign military targets (such as Lavender, the Gospel, the Alchemist, Where's Daddy) into believing that civilians were in fact Hamas fighters.⁴³ Even Sebastian Ben-Daniel, a known critic of the Israeli government, has blamed the genocide on AI.⁴⁴ But AI does not commit genocide. People do.

The dual gaze has been stretched beyond its breaking point. Knowledge has become genuinely perilous, as revealed by the number of soldier suicides. Psychiatrists warn about "moral injuries."⁴⁵ Israelis slowly realize that the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement is not going away with the ceasefire, because the Israeli military did in fact commit war crimes and crimes against humanity.⁴⁶ The wall of denial is starting to crack. If the three failures (institutional, economic, and social cohesion) can no longer be buttressed by delusion, the zombie will finally fall.

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CHAPTER 8

The Gaza War and Israel's Existential Crisis: The Search for Absolute Victory

Raef Zreik

Israel's war on Gaza erupted against the backdrop of a country deeply divided over the question of judicial overhaul. In early 2023, the government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu proposed a series of reforms aiming to weaken the Supreme Court, to increase political control over the judiciary, and to eliminate legal checks on the power of the legislature.¹ Netanyahu's efforts prompted sizeable protests and polarized public opinion.

These political divisions built upon longstanding rifts among the Israeli population: between right and center-left, religious and secular, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi, descendants of second or third generation settlers and those from the first and second generations, the periphery (including developing towns and settlements in the West Bank) and the Tel Aviv urban center.² However, these splits did not extend to the occupation, settlements, or the Palestinian question, upon which a widespread consensus prevailed. The leaders of protests against Netanyahu's judicial reforms did their best to maintain neutrality on such questions in order to allow right-wing Israelis to join the movement. The price of their participation was, of course, the exclusion of Israel's Palestinian citizens.

As a result, the opposition to Netanyahu has made no real effort to draw links between debates about the Israeli constitution and judicial reform on one hand and issues such as the occupation, settlements, and the future of Palestine on the other. Fundamental questions about the nature of the Israeli political system—not least the open question of whether its regime is indeed democratic—have been kept distant from the issue of the ongoing occupation. “External” questions have been deliberately kept separate from “internal” questions. Even within the liberal camp, many people who protested against the judicial overhaul continue to believe that Israeli democracy can be saved without ending the occupation or the settlement

project, as if these issues were not intimately connected by simple logic as well as by politics.

Although Netanyahu's government and the opposition differ on constitutional procedure and in political style, they converge on the question of Palestine, albeit with slight internal debates over how best to manage the occupation and stymie any meaningful Palestinian sovereignty. No alternative political vision has emerged, let alone crystallized. The deeper crisis therefore lies not in Netanyahu's personal fate but in unresolved structural questions: borders, demography, the role of religion, the status of Palestinians under Israeli rule, and the limits, if any, of territorial expansion. If in the future "internal" divisions over Israel's political system converge with "external" questions such as Palestine or foreign relations more generally, an opening for real structural change may appear. Without such a shift, Israel will remain anxious, and dependent, forever in search of a normalization that constantly eludes its reach. As things stand, there is no indication that such an opening is likely to take place anytime in the near future.

New Dynamics Emerge After October 7

The war on Gaza has united Israelis against Palestinians. Many Israelis who had led the protests against the judicial overhaul were immediately drafted. Gaza has been bombarded by the Israeli Air Force, most of whose members lean center-liberal, rather than toward the religious messianic settler movement. The war papered over many divisions in Israeli society: people who considered themselves part of the left and supported some kind of compromise with the Palestinians found themselves shifting their allegiances to the political right. They became convinced that no solution to the question of Palestine was on the horizon and that Israel was facing a total war necessary to win at all costs. The war thus prompted many Israeli Jews to adopt a mindset of existential threat. Meanwhile, the Israeli government did not stop its attempts to overhaul the judiciary and continued to pass bills that restricted the ability of other branches of government to restrain its actions.³ Although Israeli center-liberals joined the war effort, the ultra-right government continued its controversial constitutional reform. Israel's ultra-right wing today is fundamentally different from the conservative right wing that came to power in the late 1970s. Today the revolutionary right neither seeks to unite the nation nor shies away from dividing it. It is in many ways not dissimilar to right-wing populists in the United States and other countries, who claim to speak in the name of the people but incite distrust among the population.

The war on Gaza has a unique dynamic in Israel. Unlike previous wars, such as the 1982 Lebanon War, dissenting voices on Gaza appeared only very late. Israel initiated the 1982 war, whereas in 2023 the government was perceived to be reacting

to an external assault and therefore to have been embroiled in a war imposed upon the Israeli state and society from the outside. Support for the Gaza war was consequently long-lived; only after two years did we hear significant voices of opposition. Despite the widespread support for the war, the issue of the Israeli hostages held by Hamas created a certain division within Israeli society and gave rise to debate and even to protests. Early on, public opinion was strongly opposed to releasing Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Israeli hostages, but as the war went on that position changed.⁴

Saving hostages has always been a sacred imperative in Israeli politics, one that reflects a certain conception of solidarity widespread in Israeli society and arguably is most densely concentrated in the armed forces.⁵ This principle appears to have been unsettled during the war. Many of the hostages were center-left or liberals who had actively campaigned against the Netanyahu government before October 7. Some Israelis felt that returning the hostages was not a high priority for the government, resulting in a crisis of trust among one section of voters.⁶

A disregard for the value of human life, even extending to the lives of Jewish soldiers, emerged during the war. The logic that previously prevailed was that Jewish soldiers' lives were worth significantly more than those of Palestinians. This imbalance explains the marked disparity in hostage exchanges, in which one Israeli soldier often is swapped for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. In many ways, this logic was broken by the war. The total indifference to the lives of Palestinian civilians, resulting in the killing of tens of thousands, has been paralleled by disregard for the lives of Israeli and Jewish soldiers. Of course, there is no comparison between the extraordinary death toll in Gaza and the limited number of Israeli soldiers who have been killed in action, but this point is still worth noting.

While most Israelis continued to support the war, they were aware that it had a personal dimension: Netanyahu had his own reasons to want to keep the Gaza conflict going indefinitely. Most of those objecting to the war's continuation were guided by the desire to see the return of Israeli hostages, and much less than by the number of casualties and the level of sheer destruction on the Palestinian side.

Another major issue that resurfaced forcefully during this war was the military recruitment of Haredi Orthodox Jews. The question of the exemption of Orthodox Jews from military service has been on the political agenda for several decades.⁷ Some secular parties, among them Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid Party and Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu Party, made their name demanding that Haredi Jews be drafted.⁸ But the recent Gaza war raised this debate to a new intensity, given that the military itself argued that drafting these groups was necessary. The need for more soldiers to fuel the war effort coincided with the increasing number of Haredi Orthodox Jews employed in the Israeli government bureaucracy, where they controlled budgets and exerted influence. Pressure to draft Haredi Orthodox Jews is

growing as they gain increasing power in the Israeli government apparatus without serving in the army. A new draft bill was proposed after the Israeli Supreme Court decided that military service should be extended to Orthodox Jews, but opposition from Orthodox-based parties means that this legislation still faces many obstacles before it can pass.⁹ What has become clear now, following the ongoing wars, is the tightening of the citizen-soldier nexus in a way that it became almost unimaginable to think of the category of the citizen outside the category of the soldier. Narrowing this gap threatens the whole idea of Israeli citizenship and puts Palestinian citizens of Israel outside the citizenship discourse completely.

The Myth of Absolute Victory

The Gaza war is far from over, but the Strip has been damaged severely, if not destroyed. The number of deaths is estimated at between 70,000 to more than 100,000, with injuries around double the latter number.¹⁰ Despite a series of what appeared to be successful military strikes against Hamas and Hezbollah and getting the US to join a war on Iran, there is no sense of celebration or relief among Israelis, who feel that the war has still not concluded. In the meantime, Israel continues to target the population in Gaza even after the so-called October 2025 ceasefire.¹¹

The problem of ending the war is that there is still no clear end to it. The idea of absolute security—and absolute victory—is a myth, a dangerous fantasy. It is an abyss without a bottom. From an Israeli perspective, absolute security and total unconditional victory can only be achieved with the annihilation of Hamas, the Palestinians, Hezbollah, and Iran. Total victory would require not simply deterring future attacks on Israel, but rendering those actors incapable of mounting such attacks ever again. Despite Israel's military achievements, the risks that it took escalated and its understanding of what “security” should entail expanded even further. Even if Israel calls the war one of self-defense, it has sought to destroy, annihilate, and ethnically cleanse the Palestinians in Gaza. That goal has not been achieved—which explains the feeling shared by many Israelis that the ceasefire came too soon.

No Alternative Opposition Vision

This war has revealed that there is no opposition in Israel capable of challenging the current government. Even if a viable electoral opposition begins to form, no alternative political vision has emerged. Opposition factions may be united in their wish to replace Prime Minister Netanyahu, but beyond that, it is not clear how much they differ or how significant those differences are. Certain differences do exist regarding domestic issues such as judicial reform, the separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary, and the free press. But both the government

and the opposition reject any compromise with the Palestinians over a Palestinian state, whether a sovereign or demilitarized micro-state.¹² There is no questioning of the settlement project in the West Bank or the war on Gaza. While an alternative government led by Naftali Bennett (who served as prime minister in 2021-22 and seeks to replace Netanyahu) or another candidate might choose a different way to manage the conflict with a slightly lower level of violence, the current government considers any de-escalation, be it in Gaza, Lebanon, or Iran, to be a sign of capitulation. For that reason, it aims to continue the war indefinitely to achieve a total, unconditional surrender—whatever that might mean in practice and is surely an impossibility. This explains the prevailing feeling in the current government that the war has stopped too early.¹³

Another potential minor difference bears on external relations. Hardly any differences can be found regarding the war on Iran and policy toward Hezbollah and Syria. But some Israelis think that Netanyahu's government is behaving provocatively towards such so-called moderate Arab states as Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. They argue that there are more constructive ways to develop relations with these countries, rather than inciting a string of unnecessary crises.

The difference between the current government and possible alternatives might be explained by two factors. The first factor is that Bennett would build a coalition different to the current one, potentially including such centrist figures as Yair Lapid, Gadi Eisenkot, or Yair Golan. Such a coalition might tilt the government into a more moderate position, at least in tactics, if not in strategy. Furthermore, Netanyahu's ongoing criminal trial has kept him under pressure and incentivized him to create agendas to distract the public from his legal troubles and to keep the whole country on a crisis footing.

The underlying issues go far beyond the question of whether or not Netanyahu's government will be replaced: the crisis facing Israel's state and society extends deep into the essence of the country. In Israel, even the most basic issues are incapable of being settled: whether they be on the system of government, borders, demography, the role of religion, or relations with the Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. Israel is in no position to swallow the West Bank or even to withdraw from it. As a country, Israel is an ongoing project of expansion that recognizes no geographic or political limits. No matter which coalition leads the country after the 2026 election, these basic questions will still need to be addressed in the future. In this regard, it is hard to see any alternative vision emerging.

The Destabilizing Nature of Israeli Zionism

For the near future, the question of greatest interest is how internal splits will

influence Israeli politics. Will these divisions continue to be marginal compared to the unity displayed during the war, or will they re-emerge in powerful ways that might upturn Israeli politics? Will the Netanyahu government's forays into overhauling the judiciary, blurring the separation of powers, and undermining basic civil rights prompt an opposition capable of connecting the "internal" question of democracy to the "external" question of settlements and occupation? Will Israelis come to see that the internal is intertwined with the external, and that the external is laced through by the internal?

There was some earlier hope, however minimal, that by the end of the war the internal conflicts would have taken center stage and that Israel would witness renewed mass protests. This has not happened. Instead, the government and opposition trade recriminations, as do the government and the attorney general, the minister of justice and the head of the Supreme Court, the prime minister and the state comptroller, the government and the chief military prosecutor, and so on.¹⁴ At the same time, special police units and the security services are investigating Netanyahu's close aides for unlawful ties to Qatar. Netanyahu himself still faces criminal proceedings and bribery charges.¹⁵

To be sure, these developments may seem insignificant from a Palestinian perspective. They do not indicate any ideological or political divides inside Israel that might deliver a different approach to the Palestinian question. But these internal splits and conflicts do mean that Israel is not stable and that politics may develop in other directions. Even if Israel won the battles of the last war, Israelis have few strategic grounds for optimism. Israel might be tactically secure, at least temporarily, but it is at war with an entire region. The negative sentiments that Israel has created among the people of the region are unprecedented. The war against Iran has a double edge: Israel clearly showed a high level of technological military capacity, but it earned a new level of insecurity in the long run. Israel is far from what the early Zionists had in mind when they sought to normalize Jewish existence as that of one nation among many. Rather, Israel today is less "normal" and less secure than ever before, especially when considering long-term security. The level of enmity with the region has left Israel entirely dependent on US support; the country could not survive without Washington's backing. This is not good news for many Israelis, for whom the combination of enmity and dependency induces elevated anxiety. Some middle-class Israelis are leaving the country as many people do not want to live with ongoing war; winning the war and living without war are two different things. For all these reasons, Israel does not offer a rosy picture for future generations. All of this means that the project of Zionism is still in its opening chapters; the end of the book has yet to be written.

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Regional Spillover and the Role of Arab and Muslim States

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CHAPTER 9

Israel and the Axis of Resistance: Regional Military Overreach as Policy

Imad K. Harb

The period following October 7, 2023, witnessed the intensification of the conflict between Israel and the Iran-backed Axis of Resistance in the Middle East—composed of Syria before the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, Lebanon’s Hezbollah, Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Iraqi Shia militias, and Yemen’s Houthis (also known as Ansar Allah).¹ Israel initially used the October 2023 Hamas attack as an opportunity not only to end the Palestinian resistance movement but also to eliminate what can be argued is the very idea and last vestige of resistance to its expansionist agenda in the wider region. Needless to say, such an agenda found a willing supporter in the United States, which provided Israel with political, diplomatic, and military support amounting to some \$21.7 billion between October 2023 and September 2025 alone.²

Israel’s war against those challenging its hegemonic designs is a culmination of a decades-old plan to remove any threat to its expansionist settler colonial project at the expense of the Palestinians and others in the Middle East. Thus far, this war has been inconclusive, but it has adversely impacted occupied Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iran, as well as these countries’ ability to resist the Zionist state. Given the composition of the current Israeli government led by Benjamin Netanyahu—reliant for its survival on the support of ultranationalist right-wing and religious parties bent on realizing Zionist supremacy—it is likely that this war will continue for a considerable period to come.

The Israeli Approach to the Axis of Resistance

There is no escaping the fact that Israel is unwilling to recognize the real reasons for resistance to its agenda, policies, and practices—namely a toxic combination

of denying Palestinian civil and national rights, illegally and criminally occupying Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese land, and advancing a program of supremacist hegemony over the Arab world and the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Israel describes resistance as a utilitarian Iran-inspired strategy and portrays the members of the Axis of Resistance as proxies in the Islamic Republic's purported quest to destroy Israel and Jews.³ Absent from the Israeli narrative are such issues as the Palestinians' legitimate right to resist occupation and seek freedom and independence, and the Arab peoples' and others' solidarity with the Palestinians and resistance to Zionist domination and expansionism.

The war that Israel has waged against Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria, Yemen's Houthis, and Iran is thus focused on the idea of eradicating any resistance to its agenda of dispossessing Palestinians, annexing Palestinian land, and imposing a colonial hegemony over the surrounding countries. In its recent 2026 war on Iran, Israel succeeded in enlisting the assistance of the American military. President Donald Trump declared his administration's goals of regime change in Tehran and denying the Islamic Republic the ability to develop nuclear weapons, among other objectives.⁴ Following months of confused warfare and ceasefires between Iran and the United States, the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was to pave the way for a complete cessation of hostilities. But on July 8, 2026, President Trump announced that the MOU was "over" and that resuming talks with Iran might be a "waste of time."⁵

To be sure, the genocidal war against the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank is only one part—albeit an essential one—of the overall effort to clear the way for Zionist control over Palestine and the regional environment, near and far. Israel's tactics in Gaza have caused outright destruction of the Strip, killed tens of thousands of civilians, and starved the entire population, all signs of an obvious genocidal intent to prepare for the full ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Israel's continuing war in Lebanon has practically destroyed its south and dispossessed over one million people, who now live as refugees in other parts of the country.

Israel's War on Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen

In its war against Hezbollah, Syria, and Yemen, Israel has shown similar brutality it has used against Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. It has not refrained from attacking civilian targets, destroying infrastructure, and degrading the environment, nor has it restricted its military operations to areas adjacent to its borders. Israel's operations have brought destruction to practically all areas of Lebanon and Syria in addition to Yemen, where they targeted seaport facilities and government buildings. The message Israel has sent, and continues to send, is that no matter the cost to the targeted countries and despite its serious violations

of international law, Israel's supremacy over the MENA region must remain unchallenged.

Lebanon

Israel's war on Lebanon and Hezbollah began with what the Israeli government called retaliation for the party's support of Hamas after its attack on October 7, 2023.⁶ The first Israeli attacks occurred along the Lebanon-Israel border but quickly expanded to other areas of the country, especially those inhabited by the Shia community, which is Hezbollah's main constituency, where Israel believes the party to have hidden the bulk of its weapons. South Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut have consequently suffered the brunt of the Israeli attacks during the conflict.⁷

Israel's war on Hezbollah and Lebanon continued until the summer of 2024, at which point its campaign moved in a different direction, and focused on assassinating party personnel. Between June and September 2024, Israel succeeded in killing many of Hezbollah's senior political and military leaders, including Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah.⁸ On September 17 and 18, 2024, a Mossad operation killed scores of party operatives and innocent bystanders, and wounded thousands more, by detonating thousands of pagers and walkie-talkies that the party had been using for years since acquiring them.⁹ These operations exposed Hezbollah's lack of preparedness for a long confrontation with Israel, despite it being a pivotal component in the Axis of Resistance.

Following US and French mediation efforts, on November 27, 2024, Israel and Hezbollah reached a ceasefire agreement that specified the conditions for a cessation of hostilities.¹⁰ Among the most important provisions of the agreement were commitments by Hezbollah to withdraw its fighters and weapons beyond the Litani River, some 30 kilometers from the Israeli-Lebanese border, and an Israeli commitment to withdraw from areas it had occupied in southern Lebanon within the next 60 days. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) was to take responsibility for ensuring Hezbollah's withdrawal and disarmament in South Lebanon. Despite the ceasefire, Israeli forces continue to violate Lebanon's sovereignty in daily attacks on the party's fighters, installations, and suspected weapons stores. Furthermore, Israel has also not withdrawn from the areas it occupied in southern Lebanon.¹¹ According to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Israel has conducted some 10,000 air and ground attacks on Lebanese territory in one year since the ceasefire, killing over 125 civilians.¹² On November 23, 2025, one such attack succeeded in killing Hezbollah's chief military commander, Haitham Ali Tabatabai, and five other people and injuring 25 others.¹³

Paramount in Israel's continuing war on Hezbollah is its goal of disarming the

group, a task assigned to the LAF in the ceasefire agreement. But Israel's demand to disarm Hezbollah includes all its weapons not only in the south, but across the whole of Lebanon. With the Trump administration's support of Israel's demands, the Lebanese government and armed forces find themselves in a difficult position: they cannot fully accede to US and Israeli demands without upsetting Hezbollah's constituency, potentially leading to disturbances, unrest, or even civil war.¹⁴ In the absence of assurances of Israeli respect for Lebanese sovereignty, disarming Hezbollah would also leave Lebanon with no deterrent to renewed Israeli attacks. The LAF submitted a Hezbollah disarmament plan to the government, but Israel continued to push for a speedier completion and an expansion of the mission to include the entire country.¹⁵ Indeed, Israel promised that if the Lebanese government and army did not finish the job of disarming Hezbollah, it would start a new war to complete the task for them.¹⁶

Tensions between Israel and Hezbollah increased in 2026 as the former continued its attacks and pushed further into Lebanese territory. In March and April 2026, and in tandem with the US-Israel war on Iran, the Israeli military began a campaign of expansion north of the Israeli border, reaching in June and July beyond the Litani River.¹⁷ On June 27, 2026, Israel and Lebanon signed a trilateral framework agreement, with the United States as sponsoring third party, that ostensibly set the parameters for future Lebanese-Israeli talks on normalizing relations.¹⁸ The agreement made Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon contingent upon the Lebanese government's ability to disarm Hezbollah, an improbable outcome given the Lebanese army's weakness vis-à-vis the group and the risk of igniting a civil war in the country. Since the renewal of the war in March 2026, more than 4,200 people have been killed in Israeli attacks on Lebanon while some 12,000 others have been injured. Over one million Lebanese have been displaced from their homes in the south in what can be described as a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing by Israeli forces.¹⁹

Syria

Israel's belligerency against Syria cannot be attributed only to its continuing war on the Axis of Resistance, as Damascus is no longer part of that alignment. Before the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024, Israel conducted periodic operations against both Hezbollah and Iran-backed forces in Syria.²⁰ Such operations did not cease after Assad's departure but took on a different tone and involved other objectives. Immediately following the regime's collapse, Israeli forces entered the demilitarized zone between Israel and Syria on the occupied Golan Heights under the pretext that the Disengagement Agreement of 1974 had collapsed when Syrian soldiers abandoned their positions in the area.²¹

This policy of encroachment into Syrian territory has continued since then. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other officials have personally made the trip to the occupied zone.²² In the first year since the collapse of Assad's regime, Israeli forces have invaded Syrian territory more than six hundred times.²³ In June 2026 alone, Israeli forces violated Syrian territory some 300 times.²⁴ One serious incursion occurred on November 28, 2025, when they raided the town of Beit Jinn near Damascus and killed 13 civilians. This time, however, local fighters resisted the invading soldiers, injuring six, three of them seriously.²⁵

While Israel is arguably most interested in fighting the Axis of Resistance, its strategic calculations extend to weakening the military capabilities of its neighbors. This objective was exemplified by the Israeli air force's systematic operations on December 16, 2024, against Syrian military assets, destroying jets and airports, air defense systems, radar installations, drones, and other equipment.²⁶ Israel's obvious goal was to deprive the new regime led by former members of the now disbanded Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham—a forerunner of which had been affiliated with al-Qaeda—of the military strength that would allow it to deter Israeli expansionism. It is unclear whether the new Syria and its Islamist leaders can master the power and skills to become a strategic challenger to Israel; but for now, Syria remains outside of the gambit of normalization with Israel that began with the 2020 Abraham Accords.²⁷

Yemen

On October 19, 2023, Yemen's Houthi insurgents entered the war against Israel in support of the Palestinians by conducting missile and drone attacks on the Port of Eilat and other locations in the south. The Houthis also began to attack Israel-bound ships in the Red Sea, disrupting maritime commerce in one of the region's most important trade routes. While this intervention was part of their commitment to the Axis of Resistance, it took on strategic dimensions as it impacted the international economy and invited a response from the United States, Great Britain, and others. In January 2024, the United States organized Operation Poseidon Archer, in which twenty countries launched mass airstrikes against Houthi-controlled territories in Yemen, with the stated goal of restoring freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.²⁸

Israel's response to the Houthis' attacks has been no different than its brutal approach to Hezbollah operations to the north. Between October 2023 and September 2025, the Israeli Air Force conducted multiple operations against Houthi targets that devastated areas under their control, including al-Hodeida Port and the capital Sanaa.²⁹ An Israeli attack on the Houthi leadership in Sanaa toward the end of August 2025 killed the insurgents' prime minister and several of his ministers, despite a US-Houthi ceasefire deal signed in May 2025.³⁰ Following the

October 2025 ceasefire in Gaza as part of President Trump's so-called peace plan, the Houthis halted their attacks on Israel and Red Sea shipping until after the start of the US-Israeli war on Iran in February 2026.³¹ The group resumed these attacks in March 2026 after Israel and the United States struck Iran but halted them in April. In June 2026, the Houthis launched another barrage of missiles on Israel and declared a total ban on Israeli shipping along the Red Sea route.³²

Conclusion

Israel's active campaigns against the factions constituting the Axis of Resistance reveal two closely connected goals. First, the primary mission of the Israeli military is to eliminate resistance to the Zionist plan of settling Palestine and ethnically cleansing Palestinians. For this reason, the Israeli war machine will continue its wars of destruction against Palestinian areas in historic Palestine as well as neighboring states. Second, in the absence of a cohesive and coordinated Arab plan to resist Israeli aggression, Israel will continue to extend its borders by force and secure its strategic dominance in the MENA region at the expense of Arab countries.

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CHAPTER 10

Collusion over Palestine: How Arab and Muslim Leaders Facilitated Trump's Takeover of Gaza

Nader Hashemi

The Israel-Palestine conflict is more than a hundred years old. It has been defined by key dates that represent critical junctures that have fundamentally shaped the direction, debate, and contours of the conflict. A shortlist of these dates would include: November 2, 1917 (the Balfour Declaration); November 29, 1947 (the UN Partition Resolution); June 5, 1967 (the Six Day Arab-Israeli War); June 6, 1982 (Israel's invasion of Lebanon); September 13, 1993 (the Oslo Accords signing); January 25, 2006 (Hamas's electoral victory); December 27, 2008 (the first of several Israel-Gaza Wars); October 7, 2023 (the Hamas attack on Israel and start of the Gaza genocide); and finally, November 17, 2025.

The significance of this last date is understood only by a handful of experts. Yet future historians will surely recognize it as a turning point in the history of the conflict. On that fateful day, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) voted 13-0 (with two abstentions) to endorse President Donald Trump's peace plan for Gaza, which is based on a plan devised by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and former British prime minister Tony Blair.¹

According to the text of UNSC Resolution (UNSCR) 2803, Gaza is to be governed by a Board of Peace which "will be headed and chaired by President Donald J. Trump, with other members and heads of state to be announced, including Former Prime Minister Tony Blair."² In passing this resolution, the international community has effectively ceded ownership of Gaza to Trump. Ultimate political authority in Gaza now lies in the hands of just one person: the US president. The United Nations has formalized a new US mandate for Palestine that echoes the British Mandate established by the League of Nations more than a hundred years ago. The critical variable that connects these two mandates is the absence of Palestinian sovereignty, let alone input in crafting the plan or its presentation before the Security

Council. History has come full circle. Western powers are in full control while native populations are subjugated. How did this occur?

In this chapter, I argue that the collusion of Arab and Muslim leaders was critical to producing this outcome. Their endorsement gave Trump's plan for Gaza international legitimacy. With support from the Arab-Islamic world, Trump could proclaim that instead of a US-Israeli colonial project for Palestinians, he was following through with a plan endorsed by the global community, particularly by Arab-Islamic states. To understand the significance of the role played by Arab and Muslim states, we must go back to the origins of Trump's peace plan and trace its evolution from its inception to the passing of UNSCR 2803.

Jared Kushner's Vision and the Ethnic Cleansing of Gaza

On February 4, 2025, soon after returning to the White House, President Trump dramatically announced his intention to seize control of Gaza and transform it into "the Riviera of the Middle East." At a news conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump said that he wanted "all of them [the Palestinians]" to leave while pointing out they would be "thrilled" to go somewhere better because Gaza was a "demolition site."³ Trump also said that he aspired to a "long-term ownership position" of Gaza in which Palestinians would play no role in future governance. Gaza would then be a place "not for a specific group of people but for everybody."

The origins of Trump's vision for Gaza can perhaps be traced back to Kushner, Trump's key Middle East advisor. Roughly a year prior to Trump's Gaza proclamation, Kushner gave a talk at Harvard University in which he described the unfolding genocide in Gaza as "a little bit of an unfortunate situation there, but from Israel's perspective I would do my best to move the people out and then clean it up." His reasoning was that "Gaza's waterfront property could be very valuable." He suggested that Palestinians could be moved into the Negev Desert in southern Israel; alternatively, "with diplomacy" they could be transferred to Egypt.⁴ This broad outline effectively defined US policy for most of 2025, notwithstanding the fact that forced population transfers constitute a clear war crime according to Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949).⁵

Arab and Muslim states responded by holding an emergency summit in Riyadh at which they rejected Trump's plan, but without mentioning the US president by name. Foreign ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation then held a special meeting where Palestinian solidarity was rhetorically affirmed, while Trump's Gaza plan was mildly criticized and rejected. As an alternative to Trump's plan, both meetings agreed to endorse a nebulous Egyptian plan to rebuild Gaza under the leadership of the Palestinian Authority.⁶

On March 18, 2025, Israel broke the ceasefire that had been in place since January of that year, and the genocide resumed. Mass starvation and other war crimes continued, heightening global outrage. To facilitate Trump's Gaza vision, the Israeli cabinet approved a plan "to prepare for and facilitate the safe and supervised passage of Gazans for voluntary exit to third-party countries."⁷

Given that Trump's Gaza policy was premised on the removal of Palestinians, the question of to where they might be displaced remained unresolved. When Egypt and Jordan rejected the possibility of accepting Palestinian refugees, reports surfaced that US officials were exploring other locations as a final destination for population transfer, including Ethiopia, Libya, Indonesia, Somalia, Somaliland, Sudan, and South Sudan.⁸ In this context, US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee told the BBC that "Muslim countries have 644 times the amount of land that are [sic] controlled by Israel... so maybe, if there is such a desire for the Palestinian state, there would be someone who would say, we'd like to host it."⁹

September 2025 and Trump's 20-Point Plan

On September 2, 2025, the Washington Post reported on Trump's hosting of a White House meeting with Kushner, Blair, and other foreign policy advisors.¹⁰ They gathered to discuss an Israeli plan to develop Gaza in the image of Dubai, and to pay Palestinians to leave. Included in the plan was a link to a detailed, 38-page planning document that adhered to Trump's basic "Riviera of the Middle East" framework. At this stage, no Arab or Muslim states leaders were formally involved in the discussion. That changed on September 9, 2025, when Israel bombed Qatar.¹¹

The target of Israel's attack was a senior Hamas leader, who escaped unharmed, although a Qatari security official was killed.¹² Qatar's Emir was furious at this brazen violation of Qatar's territorial sovereignty and threatened to withdraw as the primary negotiator in Gaza ceasefire mediation efforts. Qatar's outrage was amplified by Arab and Muslim leaders who were close US allies. Fearing the unraveling of US Gaza policy, the Trump administration moved quickly to stop the bleeding. Netanyahu would be reined in, while Arab and Muslim leaders would be brought on board to support an updated version of Trump's Gaza plan. In an exclusive interview on the television program 60 Minutes, Kushner explained what happened after the Israeli attack on Qatar:

We thought, 'We need to take a whole new approach. And perhaps with all of this chaos can come an opportunity.' And so we decided to take the previous [August] ceasefire proposal and then the end of war proposal...and merge it together into one document, and then focus on seeing if we can get the Qataris and the Arab world on board.¹³

After intense diplomacy, including a pivotal September 24, 2025, meeting with Trump and Arab and Muslim leaders at the United Nations, the United States was able to secure their much-needed support. A document emerged known as Trump's 20-point peace plan for Gaza. It was formally announced at the White House five days later, with Trump describing the occasion as "potentially one of the great days ever in [human] civilization." Arab and Muslim leaders responded by issuing a joint press release that acknowledged Trump's moral "leadership and his sincere efforts to end the war in Gaza."¹⁴ The full text of Trump's Gaza peace plan appears in the annex of UNSCR 2803.¹⁵

An honest reading of the 20-point plan reveals that it is essentially a reiteration of Trump's "Riviera of the Middle East" framework with minor cosmetic touches that reference Palestinian rights. Israeli security concerns remain paramount and are repeatedly acknowledged. The plan grants Israel veto power over all aspects of Palestinian life in Gaza, while Trump is to hold ultimate legitimate authority that will determine the administration of Gaza as a trusteeship in perpetuity.

While it seems that no Palestinians were consulted in the drafting of the 20-point plan, the text bears all the hallmarks of an Israeli-centric plan. As Article 1 states, "Gaza will be a deradicalized terror-free zone that does not pose a threat to its neighbors." There are no references to international law in the plan, nor language that recognizes the status of Gaza as an occupied territory. Of additional and grave concern, there is no acknowledgment that Gaza is a massive war crimes site that must be secured and protected for the purpose of evidence-gathering for legal prosecutions. A final noteworthy element of the plan is that it states that Arab and Muslim leaders, along with other international partners, will work with Israel and the United States to create an "International Stabilization Force" that will "be the long-term internal security solution" and will train "vetted Palestinian police forces in Gaza." In other words, Arab and Muslim leaders pledged to help Israel achieve its core military objectives in Gaza: the defeat and disarmament of Hamas.

Arab-Islamic Endorsement

Since the unveiling of Trump's plan, Arab-Islamic leaders have consistently lauded Trump's leadership. Their praise was on display at a summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt on October 13, 2025, when 30 world leaders and top officials, including many Arab and Muslim leaders, gathered to celebrate Trump and his contributions to advancing peace in the Middle East.¹⁶ The highlight of the event was the joint signing of a document by Trump and the leaders of Egypt, Qatar, and Turkey (representing the Arab-Islamic world). The Trump Declaration for Enduring Peace and Prosperity said that "the undersigned, welcome the truly historic commitment and implementation by all parties to the Trump Peace Agreement... We support and

stand behind President Trump's sincere efforts to end the war in Gaza and bring lasting peace to the Middle East." Specifically, the document affirmed that "we are united in our determination to dismantle extremism and radicalization in all of its forms" because "no society can flourish when violence and racism is normalized."¹⁷ On January 22, 2026, a similar celebration of Trump's Gaza plan took place in Davos, Switzerland, and was attended by world leaders, including many from Arab and Muslim countries.

Arab and Muslim leaders have justified their support for the Trump plan by claiming that it stopped the genocide in Gaza, provided aid to starving Palestinians, helped secure the release of Palestinian detainees, and prevented the annexation of the West Bank.¹⁸ Yet none of these claims stands up to critical scrutiny. A very different picture emerges from evidence on the ground in Gaza during the months after a ceasefire came into effect on October 10, 2025.

According to the UN, since the ceasefire more than 1,000 Palestinians have been killed and 3,600 injured as of July 2026.¹⁹ Israel has violated the ceasefire almost daily and has faced neither censure nor penalties.²⁰ Although 600 aid trucks were supposed to enter Gaza each day according to the Trump peace plan, Save the Children reported that an average of 120 trucks had been permitted to deliver aid.²¹ While the famine ended, hunger and malnutrition persist, as 75 percent of the population "are projected to face extreme levels of acute food insecurity and critical malnutrition risks."²² In this context, a January 2026 UNICEF statement observed that "more than 100 children have been killed in Gaza since the ceasefire of early October. That is roughly one girl or boy killed every day. During a ceasefire."²³ A month and a half after the supposed halt to the Gaza war, Amnesty International said that "Israeli authorities are still committing genocide against Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip, by continuing to deliberately inflict conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction, without signaling any change in their intent."²⁴

In terms of the broader picture in Palestine, the promises made by Arab and Muslim leaders to defend Palestinian human and national rights have not been met. While almost 2,000 Palestinian detainees were released from Israeli detention after the ceasefire, nearly 10,000 remain in jail, including 350 children and 51 women. Israel continues to hold the bodies of 726 slain Palestinians.²⁵ It is noteworthy that no Arab or Muslim countries have objected to this state of affairs. The global focus was exclusively on Israeli hostages in Gaza. Two months after the ceasefire, Israel announced 19 new settlements and outposts in the West Bank.²⁶ No concerns were publicly raised by Arab and Muslim leaders, nor is there any record of them protesting the new settlement expansions to the Trump administration.

The behavior of Arab and Muslims states in undermining Palestinian rights is not difficult to fathom. First, it is not new. Since the dawn of the Israel-Palestine

conflict, the Arab and Muslim states have demonstrated a high level of incompetence, malfeasance, and collusion. In his book *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, Rashid Khalidi documents how these characteristics have been an enduring feature of the politics of the League of Arab States since the 1940s.²⁷ A more charitable interpretation suggests that the foremost concern of each Arab and Muslim state is to advance its national interest. A robust defense of Palestinians' human and national rights is a minimal consideration.

In the case of Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan seeks to purchase F-35 strike fighter planes from the United States. Erdoğan also aspires to dominate post-Assad Syria by reducing the influence of US-backed Kurdish-led forces. By supporting Trump's Gaza plan, Erdoğan hopes that Trump will accommodate these requests.²⁸

Qatar's calculations are similar. Still reeling from a 2017 blockade led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Qatar is deeply vulnerable in terms of its national security.²⁹ This vulnerability was exemplified by the Israeli attack of September 2025. As a result, Qatar sought and obtained new security guarantees from the United States. Trump signed an executive order pledging that the United States will defend Qatar in the event of external attack and elevating its status to major non-NATO ally. It is no coincidence that this order was signed on September 29, 2025—the same date that Trump's 20-point peace plan was officially announced.³⁰

Indonesia's capitulation is simpler to comprehend. Indonesia's leaders are motivated by greed, and policy is determined by corrupt senior leaders. The new president, Prabowo Subianto, hails from the Indonesian military: He is the former son-in-law of the ousted dictator General Suharto and has a history of arresting, torturing, and killing pro-democracy activists.³¹ At the recent Sharm el-Sheikh Summit, Subianto was caught on a "hot mic" moment whispering to Donald Trump, asking for his son Eric's telephone number to discuss business opportunities.³² Eric Trump manages Trump's business empire while his father serves as president. The supposed purpose of the Sharm el-Sheikh summit was to end the war in Gaza. This conversation between Subianto and Trump took place within driving distance of the unfolding genocide.

Conclusion

November 17, 2025, marks a key turning point in the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict. On this date, the UN Security Council voted to effectively cede the ownership of Gaza to Donald Trump. UN Resolution 2803 jettisoned the international legal framework and previous UN resolutions that pertained to Gaza, replacing them with a neo-imperial plan reminiscent of the 1922 British Mandate for Palestine. According to Martin Griffiths, the former United Nations under

secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, the resolution reduces Palestinians to the status of “implementers of the decisions of others,” leaving them “once again not at all the masters of their own fate.” By contrast, Griffiths said, the UNSC resolution places Israel “at the top table,” while Palestinians are “deprived and excluded.” Griffiths added, “They are nowhere to be found, except at the very bottom of this pyramid of power.”³³

In commenting on this historic development, Norman Finkelstein draws a comparison to the 1884-85 Berlin Conference, the moment when European powers divided Africa in a brazen land grab. Trump’s Board of Peace, Finkelstein observes, “[is] a throwback to the Berlin Conference of 1884–85 when the Great Powers handed title over the Congo to...one of Europe’s richest men, King Leopold II of Belgium. He was then declared the Congo’s sole owner... It was an auspicious precedent,” Finkelstein notes, “and the Security Council passed the baton to a deserving heir.”³⁴

Critically, all of this was made possible by the collusion of Arab and Muslim states. Four of these states served on the UN Security Council at the time of the UNSCR 2803 vote, with all four voting in favor. In explaining why Russia did not veto the resolution, the Russian ambassador stated that his decision was informed by “the position of concerned Arab and Muslim countries in support of the American document.”³⁵

In short, Arab and Muslim leaders provided political cover to advance the US and Israeli conquest of Gaza. More than one hundred years after the Balfour Declaration, history has come full circle. The Palestinians are back at the starting line, occupied and stateless, in large part due to the collusion and complicity of leaders from the Arab-Islamic world.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER 11

Egypt, Jordan, and the Gaza Genocide: Balancing New Levels of Old Vulnerabilities

Rami G. Khouri

During the first two years of Israel's genocide in Gaza, Egypt and Jordan arguably faced greater threats than other Arab states. Their heightened vulnerabilities include their land borders with Palestine/Israel, their peace treaties with Israel, widespread popular opposition to normalization with Israel, ties between Hamas and other Islamist groups and some of their domestic political forces, and reliance on US support for their economic and military interests and for regime survival.

This challenge is not new for Jordan or Egypt, which have navigated this turbulent landscape for decades. They have sought to balance their reliance on the United States with intense public opposition to Israeli-US policies in Palestine (and sometimes elsewhere in the region, such as Iraq or Lebanon). But never before have the two governments faced a situation like Israel's genocide in Gaza, which constitutes a deliberate and ongoing attempt to eliminate Palestinian life, culture, and national identity in the Strip.¹

This unprecedented predicament has left Egypt and Jordan squeezed between seeking national wellbeing by appeasing their own citizens' sentiments and implementing the wishes of the despised US-supported Israeli colonial campaign to erase Palestine. In responding, they have relied on tactics that have served them since the Arab-Israeli conflict first engulfed the region in the late 1940s. They have kicked the can down the road, pacified their publics with symbolic political gestures, and demonstrated that protecting strategic ties with the United States and Israel remains their priority.

A Delicate Balancing Act

Since the Gaza genocide began, Amman and Cairo have set critical goals: protecting their sovereignty, prioritizing internal security, maintaining strategic ties

with the United States and Israel, preserving domestic and regional stability, and ensuring state survival.² In order to achieve these goals, they have refused to accept Palestinians from Gaza or the West Bank ethnically cleansed by Israel. They have insisted on a permanent ceasefire and a path toward the “two-state solution” and have used their limited humanitarian aid and diplomatic mediation capacities to relieve Palestinian suffering and to end the genocide.³ At the same time, the Jordanian and Egyptian governments have cracked down on their citizens who protest Israeli and US actions or express support for the Palestinian cause, seeking to maintain their peace accords with Israel at any price.⁴

Jordan and Egypt took similar measures during earlier periods of regional tension when popular opposition to Israeli and US policies toward Palestine sparked intense domestic protests that, if sustained, could have threatened regime stability. After all, past political leaders in both countries (including King Abdullah I, President Anwar Sadat, and Prime Minister Wasfi al-Tall) were assassinated because of their policies toward Israel. In consequence, neither state wants to risk enraging their domestic populations.⁵ They have had to contain public fury at Israel's treatment of Palestinians, a fury that has been shaped by the historically strong links between Hamas and Islamist movements in both countries and by Jordanians of Palestinian and Transjordanian origins who routinely join secular opposition groups to express solidarity with the Palestinian cause.⁶

The ruling elites in Jordan and Egypt persist because they have relied upon the survival techniques used in past regional crises (such as the 1967 war, the 1978 Camp David Accords, the 1993 Oslo Accords, the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, and the 2010-11 Arab uprisings). These techniques include unleashing their powerful artillery of declarations and votes at the United Nations (UN) and the Arab League; repeatedly affirming Palestinian national rights; rejecting new waves of Palestinian refugees; attempting to muster wider Arab and global diplomatic support; and, when necessary, reinforcing their borders.⁷

This time, however, both regimes felt more directly threatened because of the publicly stated Israeli-US plan to expel Gaza Palestinians to Jordan and Egypt, whether temporarily or permanently, which reportedly included a US threat to withdraw aid if they did not comply.⁸ When that approach failed, the genocide coalition explored expelling Gazans to such distant lands as Indonesia and South Sudan.⁹ Jordan and Egypt's fears were heightened by the spectacle of total destruction across Gaza, which demonstrated what an Israeli and US-led genocide coalition was willing to do to achieve its goals.

These fears were coupled with concern in Cairo and Amman about the futility of turning to the UN and other international mechanisms that were supposed to affirm the primacy of law, human rights, limits on warfare, and sovereign state rights. They responded by briefly postponing high-level meetings with US and

Israeli officials, by recalling ambassadors, and by making further symbolic gestures that did not seem to impress Washington or Tel Aviv.¹⁰

The only potentially consequential position that Egypt and Jordan took was when they surprisingly indicated that if Israel forced Palestinians into exile across the Jordanian or Egyptian borders, they would reconsider their peace treaty obligations with Israel. Jordan even said it would view such a move as “an act of war.”¹¹ At the same time, they tried to avoid such a doomsday scenario by sending aid to Gaza by land or air, by pursuing diplomatic efforts for a ceasefire, by providing medical treatment and evacuations for wounded Gazans, and by fortifying their borders (for example, Egypt began constructing a walled buffer zone in North Sinai near Gaza) to make forced expulsions more difficult.¹²

Navigating a New Regional Order

The Gaza genocide, however, caused tensions with the United States and Israel that were different from previous crises. The balance of power in the Middle East was evolving quickly, which limited options for Cairo and Amman. This development was significant because vulnerable Arab countries had for decades played global and regional powers against each other to ensure their own survival.

But the sands have shifted. Russia has been busy with Ukraine. China is not interested in direct intervention in the Gaza war, beyond trying to promote a unified and legitimate Palestinian leadership. Europe has remained floating aimlessly in its universe of nostalgia and ineffective policy proposals. Turkey and Saudi Arabia have emerged as regional powers with clout. Iran’s regional role had diminished following the demise of its Syria alliance, the weakening of Hezbollah, and the Israel-US war and military attacks against it. Egypt itself had long relinquished its claim to political and military influence in the region as it survived on cash handouts, investments, and security ties with a few friends who could hobble it at will. What remained is a United States under President Donald Trump seeking to define a new order in the region that aligns with Israel’s expansionist colonial agenda and that revolves around promoting the interests of high-tech and carpet-bagger real estate investors in a highly transactional fashion.

Egypt and Jordan quickly learned that they had very limited capacities to block Israel’s genocidal aims. They realized that they were in a new geo-strategic hardball environment in which they could only rely on their softball ways of the past, presenting their value as vital for regional stability, and offered their services to fight terrorism and smuggling, to help rebuild Gaza and train its security forces, and to counter the influence of Iran and other Islamist forces.¹³ They even proposed themselves as the West’s digital, trade, and transport gateway to the rest of the Middle East and to South Asia. Their publics learned the harsh lesson that strategic

military and economic links with Israel and the United States were their governments' top priorities.

Like most Arab countries, these states had diluted or even relinquished their sovereign right to decide on crucial national issues without the approval of the United States, or even of Israel, in cases of what kind of advanced military equipment they are permitted to purchase from the West. From 1967 to 2010, Arab countries quietly assumed a new status as semi-sovereign states that could only survive if they played by the old colonial rules. The fates of Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, and Syria—to mention only the most extreme cases—were warnings that resistance to the new colonial rules came with a high risk of national weakness, fragmentation, or disintegration. The 2020 Abraham Accords signed during Trump's first term offered a peek into the new order that was to follow. All Arab states that remained reasonably functional had to play by the harsh rules: to acknowledge Israeli security primacy in the Levant and beyond, and to pursue policies that reflect Washington's values and strategic aims rather than their own citizens' rights and interests.

The combination of the Israeli genocide and the policies of the second Trump administration has ushered in a new era of colonial savagery, one propelled by high-tech militarism and self-serving demands by the Israeli and American leaderships and by their power elite's violent racism. How long this era will last remains to be seen. As does the extent to which the US and Israel will pressure traditional allies like Jordan, Egypt, and others to adopt policies on Gaza and wider Palestinian matters that are strongly opposed by their own citizens and Arabs across the region. The past three years suggest that the stability and cooperation of countries like Jordan and Egypt remain significant for the US and Israel, who will pressure, entice, and threaten both countries, but ultimately will refrain from pushing them to breaking point.

Prioritizing Securitized Governance

How and when the Gaza genocide ends—and what new arrangements may emerge in Palestine and the wider Arab-Israeli arena—will help answer the question of whether widespread Arab and global opposition to the US-Israel genocide can limit or halt the current plans for US-Israeli colonial tutelage for Gaza, the rest of Palestine, and parts of Lebanon and Syria.

Observers should closely watch the responses of Jordan and Egypt in this respect, because they are the best available indicators of how semi-sovereign Arab states react to the mighty new colonial wave across the region. Today's actions by Western colonial powers in the Middle East could well spread to other parts of the Global South, as was the case with European colonial expansion into Asia and

Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The Gaza genocide and its ultimate geopolitical outcomes will clarify some of the critical actors and global forces that could shape the century ahead. The possibilities map onto Jordan and Egypt's principal fears: What land borders will define Israel, Palestine, or any other confederal or new entity that emerges there? Will Palestinians achieve their right to self-determination and statehood, or be relegated to the status of guest workers in Bantustans with Abrahamic names? Will today's Arab peace treaties with Israel persist, expand, contract, or disappear? Will anti-Israel normalization sentiments among Arab, Iranian, Turkish, and other Middle Eastern citizenries force new policies by their governments? What is the future of Hamas, other Islamist movements, and Arab opposition and resistance forces? Will Arab states always rely heavily on US support for their economic, military, and general regime security, or will they one day become fully sovereign?

Countries and national leaders are tested most intensely in moments such as these that generate crisis, danger, and fear. How they respond clarifies much about their true character. In Gaza and in the wider Arab-Israeli conflict, Jordan and Egypt are the best available microcosm of how the erratic condition of the modern Arab state deals with this predicament. Both still reveal the painful balancing acts between their own national interest and the dictates of foreign powers that political elites have had to navigate since the birth of the modern Arab state system after World War I.

Both Egypt and Jordan survive, but with vulnerable economies and declining conditions for their citizens in essential realms such as education, energy, environment, employment, social justice, rule of law, and human rights.¹⁴ This situation reflects the primacy of military and security institutions in Jordan and Egypt—a common feature of modern Arab states—and explains why these regimes prioritize safeguarding strategic ties with the United States and Israel despite the genocide next door.

Since October 2023, Jordan and Egypt have successfully addressed several of their main concerns: ensuring the survival of their states and regimes and maintaining strong strategic ties with Israel and the United States. In the key realms of sovereignty and regional security and stability, Jordan and Egypt have a mixed record. Their continued failure to provide basic economic and security needs for their people mean that their home fronts will remain stressed and precarious for years to come.

In conclusion, Jordan and Egypt's official reactions to Gaza reflect the patterns of the past, which nevertheless have allowed them to persist as independent, stable states in a region where others have suffered war, fragmentation, or even collapse. In the wake of the Gaza genocide and the ongoing recalibration of the regional order, the legacy of security-heavy governance and economic systems that preserve

the structures of statehood rather than protect the security of citizens face their biggest ever test in the Arab region. Prioritizing security and strategic relations with Israel and the United States at the expense of building their own functioning sovereign states and serving their citizens' needs might come back to haunt Egypt and Jordan in the long run.

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CHAPTER 12

Iran and the Gaza War: Tehran's Two-Pronged Approach to Palestine/Israel, 2023-2025

Mehran Kamrava

Iranian policy toward Palestine is rife with contradictions. These contradictions have been particularly apparent since the start of the Gaza war and the mass killing of Palestinians by Israel. This chapter examines the root causes of these contradictions by assessing Iran's policies and behavior toward Palestine.

In making Palestinian liberation a central plank of its ideological profile soon after the 1979 Revolution, in the 1980s the Islamic Republic made a rhetorical enemy out of Israel at the very same time as it was buying weapons and arms supplies from Israel.¹ In the 1990s and the 2000s, the two rhetorical enemies turned into strategic adversaries, with Iran trying to surround Israel with allied non-state actors and Israel trying to encircle Iran with its own friendly actors to ensure Tehran's continued international isolation. Iran's resort to non-state actors was, and remains, part of its deterrent strategy to mitigate the possibility of an Israeli attack on its soil.² Tehran explained away frequent Israeli attacks on its non-state allies on grounds of "strategic patience."³ In late 2023, it became evident that Tehran was using non-state actors as instruments of deterrence. Although Israel launched a war on Gaza and set out to physically and militarily eliminate Hamas, it was only after Israel bombed the Iranian consulate building in Damascus, Syria, and later assassinated Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, that Iran retaliated with missile strikes on Israel and announced an end to its doctrine of strategic patience. After launching mutual missiles and airstrikes against one another, Iran and Israel appeared to enter a new phase in their deterrence strategies, one based less on the shadow wars they had waged since the early 1990s and more on a balance of terror resulting from the exchange of direct strikes on one another. Iran will continue its rhetorical support for the liberation of Palestine, but its primary focus is on devising new means of deterrence against Israel.

Iranian leaders' approach toward Israel has manifested itself in Iran's backing of the anti-Israel Axis of Resistance composed of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Lebanon's Hezbollah, and Hamas. The consequence has been an exponential increase in the hostility between Iran and Israel, and a proliferation of deterrence strategies on both sides. Since the start of the 2023 Gaza war, this deterrence has been tested to its limits and has undergone a profound transformation from shadow wars to direct attacks. Throughout, what is forgotten is how the whole Iran-Israel conflict began—over the promised liberation of Palestine—having in the meanwhile morphed into a stalemate with potentially mutually destructive consequences, for the time being held at bay through a balance of fear.

Iran and Israel

At the broadest level, Iranian policy toward Israel can be summarized as holding conferences on the liberation of Palestine; support for Palestinian organizations; opposition to the US-led peace process; support for Hezbollah; and supporting Palestinian resistance. Iran's approach was initially dogmatic and ideological, rooted in its rejection of the legitimacy of the existence of the State of Israel. Over time, its approach became steadily more pragmatic, practical, and security focused. As such, Iran has sought to confront Israel both directly and indirectly. In essence, Iran has had a two-pronged approach to Israel, one ideological and the other security-oriented, with Palestinian liberation forming an overall ideological umbrella and a security approach characterizing Iran's assumptions about Israel. This security approach, grounded in practical, realist assumptions, has been the more dominant of the two.

Over the last thirty years, Iran's deterrence against Israel has become increasingly forward-leaning and aggressive, as manifested in a number of developments: strengthening the country's nuclear program; enhancing its military technology and prowess; increasing the frequency of verbal attacks against Israel; strengthening the alliance of state and non-state actors against Israel; strengthening Iran's defensive and offensive capabilities against Israel; engaging in proxy wars through Hezbollah; signing a joint defense pact with Assad's Syria; and working against Israel's efforts to normalize relations with regional states.⁴

A key turning point in Iranian foreign and security policies was the January 2020 assassination of General Qassem Soleimani, for which Tehran blamed both the United States and Israel and argued that this confirmed its position that Israel posed a direct threat to Iran.⁵ In May 2020, the Iranian Parliament passed the Law to Counter the Hostile Actions of the Zionist Regime Against Peace and Security, which prohibits any cooperation or even discussion with Israel, and any use of products from companies which have branches in Israel.⁶ Soleimani had devised a

two-pronged security-political strategy: increasing Iran's military power and influence, and defending the country's sovereignty in the face of persistent attacks by Israel and the US.⁷ Soleimani's killing deepened Iran's sense of insecurity, added to its strategic mistrust of the United States and Israel, and resulted in a strengthening of the missile program. With Soleimani's assassination, Iran's conflict with Israel entered a new and more serious phase.

Confronting the "Octopus"

Although Israeli leaders believe they have succeeded in isolating Iran diplomatically, they still considered Iran to remain the biggest threat to their national security. Israel's primary strategy in confronting Iran has been to increase the power of its land, sea, and especially air forces. Through ongoing military purchases from the US, Israel has sought to counter Iran's air defenses and missile program, as well as the capabilities of Iranian proxy groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas.⁸ Moreover, Israel has tried to forge military alliances with Iran's neighbors. Israel has also long been involved in building up its intelligence activities inside Iran and near Iranian borders, including in the Republic of Azerbaijan and in the United Arab Emirates. In early 2022, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett came up with the Octopus Doctrine that sought to attack Iran, the supposed head of the octopus, directly, by going after targets inside the country.⁹ The campaign started in earnest by an attack on a drone airbase in February 2022 in the province of Kermanshah, followed by a spate of assassinations of intelligence officers in Tehran and elsewhere.

One of Israel's primary objectives in repeatedly attacking Syria toward the end of the regime of Bashar al-Assad was to increase the costs of Damascus's alliance with Iran.¹⁰ Israel wanted to entangle Iran in regional security issues to gain the upper hand in its military competition with the Islamic Republic. Through its attacks, Israel pursued three goals: eroding the military capabilities of Hezbollah and other proxy groups affiliated with Iran; destroying the infrastructure of Shia proxy groups in southern Lebanon and previously in Syria; and driving a wedge between Iran and Assad's Syria.

Israel's deterrence strategy against Iran is therefore multi-faceted. It is based on military power, nuclear capability, cyber security, and, most importantly, alliance with the United States. Israel is one of the biggest advocates of US economic pressure and sanctions on Iran, in addition to being deeply involved in media and cultural activities against Iran and providing financial and logistical assistance to anti-Iran terrorist groups.¹¹ Moreover, in keeping with its "periphery doctrine," Israel has cultivated an arc of friends and allies around Iran from Azerbaijan to the north to Kurds in the west and Bahrain and the UAE to the south.¹²

Iranian leaders are cognizant of Israel's superior military capabilities. They

are aware, for example, that for more than a decade Israel had the ability to attack Iran's nuclear facilities but did not do so until June 2025. Israel's air force prepared for the campaign by enhancing its intelligence and attack capabilities. Since Iranian leaders believe Israel does not have strategic depth, Israeli military tactics are aggressive, based on overwhelming response, and intended to extract a heavy price from adversaries. Moreover, in addition to its immediate, "defensible" land borders, Israel has sought to expand its strategic depth via a secondary layer of air defenses achieved through incursions into Syrian and Iraqi airspaces. There is also the threat of Israel's nuclear weapons. Because of small geographies, Israel may not be able to use a nuclear bomb against its neighbors, but it can use the bomb against Iran.

Israel's military strategy revolves around the notion of "preemptive deterrence" and resort to first strike in cases of imminent threat. Israel further believes in a quick and decisive victory that would prevent a prolonged war of attrition. It is in a war of attrition, Iranian leaders believe, that Israel is most vulnerable. With limited resources, considerable sensitivity to civilian casualties, and limited or no strategic depth, Israel has been unwilling and unable to accept even the smallest of tactical defeats. As its repeated engagements in Lebanon and Gaza have demonstrated, the probability of such defeats increases the longer that Israel is involved in conflict. This vulnerability, Iran believes, was also apparent in the 2023 Gaza war.

Israel's military doctrine is based on several key principles, the most important of which are deterrence; early warning; agile military decision-making; and civil defense.¹³ Since October 2023, Iran believes, Israel has suffered setbacks in each of these areas, having to therefore resort to indiscriminate punishment and a destructive war as a form of deterrence.¹⁴ Unwittingly, Israel entered into a war of attrition in Gaza. Although a war of attrition and asymmetric warfare are bound to harm members of the Axis of Resistance, their cumulative harm on Israel is greater and more likely to weaken it from within. The conflict has also impeded the country's drive toward diplomatic normalization and has further darkened its international reputation.

Iran and the Gaza War

The 2023 Gaza war brought to bear Iran's pragmatic, realist approach to Israel and Palestine in a most stark way. Despite the carnage and mass killing of Palestinians by Israel, the Islamic Republic—the loudest champion of the Palestinian cause for decades—took no tangible steps to stop the war. Instead, Tehran merely intensified its slogans against Israel and its general rhetorical support for the Palestinian cause. In fact, it was only six months after the war started, and only after Israel hit Iran's consulate building in Damascus, that Iran retaliated with an attack that

seemed more symbolic than substantive, only intended to send a message. Dubbed “Operation True Promise,” Iran’s April 2024 missile attack on Israel was justified as representing Tehran’s “legitimate and legal defense of its rights to defend its territory under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.”¹⁵ For Iran, Israel’s attack on its diplomatic compound and the killing of 14 Iranian officials amounted to a declaration of war. In light of the inability of international institutions to prevent the attack, not to mention egregious Israeli aggressions on multiple other fronts, Iranian leaders assumed they had no choice but to abandon their doctrine of “strategic patience” and to militarily engage with Israel directly.

In October 2024, Iran again launched missile attacks on Israel, fully a year after the start of the Gaza war, in response to the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran a month earlier. Again citing international law, the Iranian government presented several justifications for its attack: Israeli violations of Iranian sovereignty and its targeted assassinations; violations of human rights and international law, and extrajudicial killings; its violation of the Palestinian people’s right to resistance; and the inherent right of the Islamic Republic to a proportionate response to Israeli attacks. Once again, Iran’s missile attacks were presented as calibrated to be proportionate to the killing of Haniyeh. From a balance of power perspective, Iran was aware that any expansion of the war beyond its immediate theater would only serve to prolong the political career of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and further erode the capabilities of Hamas. There was also a deep belief among Iran’s policy elites that the Gulf sheikhdoms would welcome a war between Iran and Israel in which they believed Iran would suffer tremendous damage.¹⁶

Iranian policymakers may have abandoned their strategic patience, but they have not given up on their belief in the long-term unviability of Israeli actions and policies. More specifically, they assumed that Israel’s massive over-reaction to Hamas’s October 7 attack had several deleterious consequences for the country. They believed it halted normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia, at least temporarily; brought the Palestinian issue to the forefront of international attention; deadlocked Israeli policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories; increased tensions among Israel’s military, intelligence, and political institutions; damaged Israel’s military-intelligence capabilities; destroyed Israel’s image of invincibility; and enhanced Iran’s reputation in the Arab world.¹⁷ The fact that Hamas had still held on to Israeli hostages in 2025 after two years of relentless Israeli bombardment and wanton destruction was interpreted as a sign of Israel’s intelligence failure. The October 7 attack also sparked multiple political and diplomatic crises for Israel; Israel’s leaders and its international allies have not reached a consensus on how to manage these crises. There was also an assumption that the October 7 operation itself and Hamas’s continued resistance ever since betrayed Israel’s underestimation of the Axis of Resistance.

Conclusion

This analysis yields several insights into Iranian foreign policy in general and Iran's policy toward Palestine and Israel in particular. First, Iran's strategic culture is more conservative than often believed. This conservatism prevented Iran from entering the war with Israel on behalf of Hamas. Iranian policymakers have shown a record of realism in dealing with regional crises and issues, irrespective of their slogans and the emotions that these developments might have provoked among the Iranian people. Throughout its existence, at the same time as it has loudly championed the rhetoric of Palestinian liberation, the Islamic Republic has based its policies toward Israel and Palestine on calculations related to the strategic balance of power.

Second, Iran still sees itself as responsible for the material and ideological support of two key members of the Axis, Hezbollah and Hamas, even in their weakened state in the aftermath of the 2023 war with Israel. For Tehran, Hamas and Hezbollah have been especially helpful in deepening Iran's deterrence strategy. Iran's close collaboration with and leadership of the Axis of Resistance is meant to challenge the prevailing international order. It is also meant to create an alternative discourse, one of resistance, to the vision of a US-dominated Middle East. From Tehran's perspective, the combined efforts of Iran and its allied militia groups have confronted Israel with an existential threat.

Third, Iran's policies have been far from resounding successes. What Tehran sees as leadership, its adversaries see as hegemony. Iran justifies its regional strategy on grounds of countering the threat of unilateral regional hegemony. Ironically, however, even observers in Iran agree that Tehran practices hegemony in Baghdad, Sanaa, and previously in Damascus. Iran's strategic pursuits have greatly undermined its soft power in most Arab states. More fundamentally, there has been debate among Iran's policy community as to whether the government's unconditional support for Palestine has been in Iran's national interest.

Finally, the deterrence strategies that Iran employed up until 2023 are undergoing profound changes. The depth of these transformations was evident in Iran's two direct missile strikes on Israel in April and October 2024. No longer would Iran rely solely or extensively on its militia allies to attack Israel on its behalf; it would do so itself, directly and dramatically. Never one to take a punch, Israel reciprocated in kind against both attacks.

In June 2025 and again in February-March 2026, in fact, Israel, assisted and joined by the United States, launched a long-anticipated direct attack on Iran in what came to be known as the Twelve-Day and the Ramadan Wars. Israel's 2025 war against Iran, which had been preceded by a devastating Israeli military campaign against Hezbollah that left the group completely depleted, revealed several important points. Most notably, with two of its most potent members in tatters, namely

Hamas and Hezbollah, and with Bashar Assad overthrown, the Axis of Resistance was at worst no longer existent and at best seriously depleted as a proxy force for the Islamic Republic. The 2025 war revealed an important shift in Iran's deterrence strategy from reliance on the Axis of Resistance to overt use of its ballistic missiles. Equally revealing was Iran's willingness to attack American bases not just in Iraq, which it had done in 2020, but now in neighboring Arab states to its south, as evidenced by the attack on the US CENTCOM headquarters in Qatar. Finally, despite sustaining massive and widespread damages due to Israeli bombardment, Iran's retaliatory missile attacks on Israel proved extremely accurate and even lethal. By 2026, Iran's deterrence strategy appeared to have also shifted away from extensive reliance on the Axis of Resistance to establishing administrative control over the Strait of Hormuz.

Israel and the United States never clearly articulated their military and political objectives when they jointly attacked Iran in 2026, apart, of course, from the rhetorical desire to rid the world of Iran's nuclear program. Washington and Tel Aviv both appear to have assumed, wrongly as it turned out, that the Islamic Republic would collapse under the weight of massive and sudden military attacks following deadly campaigns to "decapitate" its top leadership. When the "regime change" strategy failed, Iran and Israel entered into a new stalemate, one that is held together by a balance of terror based on the knowledge that each side could inflict serious damage on the other but not overwhelm it. It would not be unlikely for Israel to attack Iran again. Despite the costs involved, Iran has shown a penchant for retaliation when attacked. If it does, that decision is arrived at through cost-benefit and balance of power considerations, not how it serves the cause of Palestinian liberation. Ultimately, rhetoric and slogans notwithstanding, Iranian foreign policy in general and especially in relation to Israel and Palestine is based on realist, interest-based calculations, not the ideals of the Islamic Revolution.

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IV

US Policy Toward Gaza and the Reshaping of Politics, Law, and Public Opinion in the United States

Chapter 13

US Policy Toward Gaza: Supporting Israel's Genocide from Biden to Trump

Yousef Munayyer

Chapter 14

The Palestine Exception and Trump's Assault on American Democracy

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US Support of the Gaza Genocide: The Statutory Framework and Violations of US Laws

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CHAPTER 13

US Policy Toward Gaza: Supporting Israel's Genocide from Biden to Trump

Yousef Munayyer

This chapter reviews and assesses US policy toward Israel's conduct in Gaza since October 7, 2023. It examines three key phases: 1) President Joe Biden's administration before and during the Gaza war; 2) the 2024 US election; and 3) President Donald Trump's return to the White House. At the time of writing, a Trump-brokered "peace" agreement for Gaza has led to a reduction in the volume of killing by the Israeli military but by no means represents a real ceasefire. Palestinians are still being killed on a regular basis. The destruction wrought by the Israeli military continues to pose daily risks to the sustainability of life throughout the Strip. Access to aid and supplies remains insufficient, and reconstruction has not begun. We have arrived at this point in large part due to the role of US policy: Washington is deeply and tragically complicit in the horrors of the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The Pre-War Context and the Biden Embrace

To understand US foreign policy during the genocide, it is important to contextualize the US-Israel relationship before the al-Aqsa Flood operation of October 7, 2023. In May 2021, early in the Biden administration, the United States and Israel experienced a moment of crisis over Gaza. The 2021 protests in Jerusalem triggered a broader Israeli-Palestinian confrontation; it expanded to involve Palestinians in Gaza and Palestinian citizens of Israel and saw Israel launch a bombing campaign in Gaza. After Israel attacked high-rise buildings in Gaza housing the offices of the Associated Press and Al Jazeera, the Biden administration told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government to conclude its bombing.¹ The Biden administration's handling of Israel during this period raised important questions. The most right-wing Israeli government in history was pushing for judicial reforms

that were widely understood as a theocratic power grab from secular Israelis and that sparked unprecedented domestic unrest in Israel characterized by regular and massive protests.²

The political divide in Israel overlapped with a divide in the global Jewish population, particularly in the United States, where most Jewish Americans belong to the Reform Judaism movement and represent one of the most reliable voting blocks for Democrats. Despite a growing partisan cleavage in US public opinion on Israel, the domestic turmoil in Israel did not pose a significant challenge to the Biden administration's policy toward Israel. To the contrary, the administration worked to provide Israel with numerous perquisites, including entry into the US Visa Waiver Program, without getting much of anything from Israel in return. Biden was also pursuing a Saudi-Israel normalization deal. His administration had largely dropped calls for a renewed Israeli-Palestinian peace process and criticized Israeli settlement expansion in far more muted tones than that of the previous Democratic administration of President Barack Obama. At the time, I concluded that only a deep ideological affinity for Zionism at the very top of the US government could explain the intensity of the Biden administration's pro-Israel policy.³ In addition, the Biden administration misread the regional importance of the Palestine issue, perhaps having bought into the Abraham Accords narrative of a "new Middle East." This warped perspective was captured in remarks by the National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in late September 2023. At a moment when more Palestinians had been killed by Israel in the West Bank than at any time in the last 20 years, Sullivan quipped that "[t]he Middle East region is quieter today than it has been in two decades now," and added that "[t]he amount of time that I have to spend on crisis and conflict in the Middle East today compared to any of my predecessors going back to 9/11 is significantly reduced."⁴ Just eight days later, the October 7, 2023, attack occurred and the centrality of Palestine, and its capacity to shake the world, became known to all. In the two years that followed, Israel would engage in a seven-front war that would drag the United States into direct military confrontation with Iran and see US regional allies come under fire and massive US military assets deployed to the region.⁵ Global pro-Palestine protests would take place.⁶ Ultimately, Palestine would become a factor in returning Donald Trump to the White House.⁷

The Biden administration's misreading of Palestine's importance as a domestic and a global issue, as well as its deep ideological affinity with Zionism, shaped its policy toward the Gaza genocide. In the days after October 7, Biden's approach of embracing Israel was paramount. This approach has been called a "bear hug" strategy, but this is a misnomer as it suggests an effort to restrain the other party through a tight embrace. While Biden gave Israel such an embrace, there is no evidence that he succeeded in restraining the Netanyahu government. Instead, the opposite

occurred.⁸ A more appropriate characterization would be a “blank check” policy, as Biden became the first president to visit Israel during a time of war, facilitated an unprecedented amount of military aid to Israel, mobilized significant US military assets to the region to provide military cover for Israel’s genocide, and delivered the solitary veto of several United Nations (UN) Security Council ceasefire votes. This “blank check” approach enabled Israel to continually expand its murderous campaign, to refuse to extend a brief ceasefire agreement reached in November 2023, and to bring Gaza to the brink of starvation.

The failure of Biden’s strategy became more evident over time. His administration failed not only in preventing Israel from killing masses of Palestinian civilians, but also in avoiding the conflagration of a wider regional conflict and in compelling Israel to allow adequate humanitarian aid to reach Gaza. In spring 2024, Biden cautioned Netanyahu against launching a full-scale ground invasion of Rafah, but in this context, it was no wonder that Israel ended up ignoring Biden’s supposed red line. Biden’s summer 2024 humanitarian pier episode was a microcosm of his administration’s ineptitude: the US government spent more than \$230 million to build a floating pier off Gaza for the delivery of humanitarian aid only to see the structure malfunction and then be dismantled after just three weeks of operation.⁹ Despite acting as Israel’s leading military, diplomatic, and political supporter, the Biden administration could not even summon adequate leverage to force Israel to let humanitarian aid enter freely; instead, Washington suffered the embarrassment of its pier project literally falling apart. What was perhaps the most consequential factor shaping US policy toward the Gaza war, however—the November 2024 presidential election—was yet to come.

The 2024 Election

Some practitioners of national security policy argue that domestic politics should not factor into crucial foreign policy decisions, but this is not always true; on matters related to US foreign policy toward Israel, it almost never is.¹⁰ The October 7, 2023 attack occurred 13 months before the 2024 US presidential election, a period throughout which Israel’s genocide would dominate headlines, day in and day out.

Biden was on shaky electoral ground as the 2024 contest began. His disapproval ratings were high going into the election year as Americans were reeling from the impact of inflation on the cost of everyday goods.¹¹ Despite winning in 2020 with a comfortable margin and record turnout, in 2024 Biden could not rely on a similar outcome. In 2020, Biden ran by contrasting himself with Trump, whom he portrayed as an irresponsible and chaotic actor and a risk to US national security. In a nation amid an unprecedented pandemic crisis, this message resonated with many voters. But 2024 was a different story. By then, Biden, at the time the

oldest US president ever elected, was looking to run again while appearing more out of touch with the voters than ever.

The 2024 election shaped US policy toward Israel's genocide in at least two important ways. First, the Biden administration avoided pressuring Israel because it believed that it would pay an electoral price for doing so. Second, Netanyahu's understanding of that belief allowed him to exploit as much political space as possible to expand the genocide in Gaza. Biden and his team seemingly believed that pressing Israel to end the genocide would offer political ammunition to Trump and thus cost them some votes and donors. But the opposite was true. In fact, Biden's perception was based on an outdated analysis of American politics, as opinion polls in 2024 repeatedly showed that Americans opposed Israel's actions in Gaza and that this sentiment was widespread.¹² Ultimately, many voters either refused to support Biden or voted for Trump because of Biden's policy of supporting Israel's genocide. Vice President Kamala Harris, who became the Democratic nominee after Biden dropped out of the race in July 2024, made it clear that she would not deviate much from Biden on Gaza, signaling to American voters that electing her would mean extending Biden's unpopular policy.¹³

It was no surprise that the ceasefire that Biden had failed to get Netanyahu to accept in the spring of 2024—despite framing it as Israel's idea—became possible only after Trump had won the election. The agreement went into effect the day before Trump took office for the second time, an immediate gift from Netanyahu to start his term.

The Second Trump Administration Takes Power

During his 2024 campaign, Donald Trump repeatedly said that had he been president on October 7, the war on Gaza never would have happened, but Trump never specified what he would do differently from Biden once in office.¹⁴ He hinted that Israel needed to finish things up in Gaza quickly, suggesting that he was unhappy with the situation, but offered little more than that.¹⁵ After a ceasefire finally came into effect on January 19, 2025, just before Trump was sworn in, images of Israeli captives being released flooded the airwaves. Netanyahu succeeded in delivering to Trump the first images supporting his promise to govern as a peacemaker.¹⁶

But Trump failed to deliver more than images. In March 2025, Israel collapsed the ceasefire agreement after the first phase, precisely because it refused to permanently stop the genocide, a requirement of the deal. Trump failed to use his early days in office to press Israel to extend the ceasefire and instead allowed Netanyahu to seek his "total victory." What followed was the darkest stage of the genocide, which took place with complete American support, as Israel strangled the Strip by cutting off all humanitarian aid, inducing famine.¹⁷ Trump continued to shield

Israel by providing US military assets, weapons transfers, diplomatic cover, and other support. Moments of frustration between Trump and Netanyahu occasionally appeared, but ultimately the two leaders stuck to a similar script. By June 2025, an Israeli-launched war on Iran quickly drew in US forces when Trump ordered the bombing of Iranian nuclear sites. The attack on Iran did nothing to bring the genocide in Gaza to an end, but rather emboldened Israel to continue. As summer 2025 drew to a close, Israel's global isolation had reached a point at which numerous US allies were starting to take diplomatic initiatives on their own, either to recognize the State of Palestine or to create distance from Israel.¹⁸ At the September 2025 UN General Assembly, several countries announced their recognition of a Palestinian state. Around the same time, Israel finally crossed a line that would turn out to be consequential when it attacked a building in Doha, Qatar, targeting a Hamas delegation which was meeting to review the latest US ceasefire proposal. The strike against a US ally sent the message that the Israelis were hell-bent on expanding chaos in the region by crossing all boundaries in pursuit of restoring their badly bruised reputation after October 7, 2023.

Perhaps it was due to the growing isolation of Israel that America could not contain, or due to the Doha strike that reinforced its isolation as condemnation poured in from across the globe, but it was at this moment that Trump was finally able to get Israel to commit to a ceasefire agreement in which Israel agreed to end the Gaza war.¹⁹ At the time of writing, the ceasefire deal awaits progress on its second phase. The Israeli military remains on the ground in more than 50 percent of Gaza and routinely kills Palestinians in Gaza in the other half of the territory.²⁰ While the rate of killings has gone down significantly, it remains unacceptably high, and the survivors of genocide in Gaza continue to live in destitute conditions with no shelter or real protection from the elements, let alone accountability.

Conclusion

Tens of thousands of Palestinians, perhaps more, have been killed and the infrastructure of Gaza has been destroyed.²¹ The impact of Israel's genocidal campaign will last for generations. Most of this destruction would not have been possible without the support of the United States. Despite some differences in the Biden and Trump administrations' policies toward the Gaza war, overall, they are largely aligned. Ultimately, it was Israel's own overreach that led to enough of a shift in Trump's position to reach the October 2025 ceasefire agreement—if it can even be called a ceasefire. Key questions concern what impact this deal will have, and whether the destruction wrought by US support for Israel will lead to a reevaluation of Washington's policy. We will likely learn much more about the answers in the months to come, but what we have seen thus far is not promising. While the

rate of killing has declined, the conditions on the ground in Gaza are dire, humanitarian aid is still restricted, and key disagreements remain, largely due to Israel's demands for controlling Gaza and dictating its future while denying Palestinians any agency or political role. The last sticking point, regarding who will shape the future of Gaza moving forward, is perhaps the most consequential and dangerous. With Trump's 20-point plan and governance structure under the Board of Peace essentially eliminating Palestinian political life and self-determination, Israel may well seek to end the "Palestinianness" of Gaza, under the White House banner of "Peace in the Middle East."²²

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CHAPTER 14

The Palestine Exception and Trump's Assault on American Democracy

Heba Gowayed

The “Palestine exception” to free speech refers to the sanctioning of those who speak against the occupation, apartheid, and genocide of Palestinians, even in otherwise progressive spaces and in contravention of US laws and rights. Today, the Trump administration is weaponizing this longstanding exception to liberal discourse to erode the country’s democratic institutions in the name of “fighting antisemitism.” What is worse, a key battleground for this assault is American higher education, a longtime target of conservatives for its imagined role in promoting a counter-hegemonic narrative.

This chapter examines how many academic institutions, themselves invested in the genocide of Palestinians through their silencing and repression of those opposed to that investment, have empowered the Trump administration to repress *all* within the nation, inviting not only attacks on First Amendment rights and academic freedom, but also the pioneering of the mass deportation schemes on college campuses.

The Palestine Exception and Activism on Campus

Students on campuses across the United States have been protesting for the liberation of Palestine since before the Nakba in 1948.¹ But since October 7, 2023, these efforts have been redoubled as the world witnessed a horrific genocide unfold in Gaza, claiming tens of thousands—by some accounts, hundreds of thousands—of lives and upending the lives of all two million Palestinians who live there. Students, observing this atrocity unfold and heeding the call of the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement, demanded that their universities cut ties with Israeli higher education and divest from Israeli industries and other institutions that support genocide.

Students at Columbia University led the charge, setting up an art exhibition and a nonviolent protest in November 2023. In response—and in violation of Columbia's policy and in a textbook case of the Palestine exception—the university suspended Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace.² The following semester, students set up an encampment on their campus and in doing so sparked a global movement. In an unprecedented move, Columbia administrators requested the New York Police Department (NYPD) to come onto campus.³ The NYPD deployed its Strategic Response Group—heavily armed riot police—to violently disperse students on the campuses of both Columbia University and the City University of New York (CUNY), where an encampment had also formed. Other institutions soon followed suit. As tensions increased, in one particularly awful incident, students at the University of California, Los Angeles were attacked by a Zionist mob with little to no protection from authorities.

The leaders of academic institutions across the country, including Columbia's President Minouche Shafik, wrote email after email casting the student protesters as antisemitic, abhorrent, and disruptive, and reaffirmed their commitment to *not* divest university monies from Israel.⁴ More student groups were suspended, and numerous students were expelled.

Although most students across American universities overwhelmingly support both Palestine and the protests, the university crackdown is partly a product of the corporatization of academia, which has left higher education institutions unaccountable to their students.⁵ First, as governor of California in the 1960s and 1970s and then as President in the 1980s, Ronald Reagan slashed public funding for higher education, causing universities to turn to private funds. Since then, universities have cut tenure-track positions in favor of cheaper adjunct roles, creating faculties that are more precarious and thus more docile. The United States has also seen a rise in the costs of attending university and an increase in student debt. Furthermore, universities have installed boards of trustees who have a fiduciary duty to institutional investments, but no commitment to the well-being of faculty or students or even to academic integrity. This situation leaves many institutions susceptible to pressure from wealthy donors—as was the case at Columbia, where donors pressured New York City Mayor Eric Adams to send police to campus.⁶ This structural assault on academic freedoms and First Amendment rights advances conservative ideological goals of crushing the pro-Palestine movement, waging anti-Black assaults on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and Critical Race Theory, and attacking trans rights.

How the Trump Administration Weaponized the Palestine Exception

While running for office in 2024, Donald Trump distanced himself from Project 2025, a Heritage Foundation right-wing vision for the United States that many experts argue will corrode the country's democratic institutions. Since Trump returned to office on January 21, 2025, his administration has used this document as a blueprint for new policies.⁷ Among the goals spelled out in Project 2025 are limiting academic freedom, eroding First Amendment protections—in particular the right to assembly—and ramping up the mass deportation of immigrants.⁸ The Trump administration has recognized an opportunity to accomplish these goals in the festering rot of the Palestine exception.

Immediately upon taking office, Trump issued a flurry of executive orders including the January 29, 2025, authorization targeting pro-Palestinian activists for deportation as a way to “combat antisemitism.”⁹ On March 7, 2025, the Trump administration cancelled \$400 million in Columbia’s federal contracts, “due to the school’s continued inaction in the face of persistent harassment of Jewish students.”¹⁰ A follow-up letter laid out the conditions by which Columbia University had to abide to negotiate with the federal government. Unsurprisingly, these conditions centered upon increasing “law enforcement authority” on the campus, fitting with the goals of stifling dissent. They also included placing the Middle East, South Asian, and African Studies departments under academic receivership, also fitting with the goal of limiting free discourse on college campuses, especially when it comes to race. Activists for First Amendment rights across the country wrote a swift rebuke, identifying these demands—which were in full alignment with Project 2025—as steps toward autocracy.¹¹

That same week, the Trump administration delivered another blow to higher education in the name of combating antisemitism by expanding its mass deportation regime.¹² On March 8, 2025, in a deeply unsettling video, Mahmoud Khalil, who had just received a graduate degree from Columbia University, comforted his then-pregnant wife Noor Abdalla as he was being led away from a Columbia building by masked, plain-clothed men. It was later revealed that the men were Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents who had no judicial warrant authorizing the arrest. Khalil would be detained for the next 104 days in a for-profit detention center in Louisiana that was notorious for prisoner abuse. His lawyers battled in the courts for his freedom.

When Secretary of State Marco Rubio was required by a judge to justify Khalil’s detention, his office issued a one-and-a-half page memorandum stating that he was authorized to deport Khalil, a US legal permanent resident, via a 1952 provision of the Immigration and Nationality Act that authorizes the Secretary of

State to remove anyone whom he deems to pose “potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences” based on their “past, current, or expected beliefs, statements or associations that are otherwise lawful.”¹³ The memorandum went on to explain that Khalil had engaged in “antisemitic protests and disruptive activities” and that his presence in the country “undermine[s] U.S. policy to combat anti-Semitism around the world and in the United States, in addition to efforts to protect Jewish students from harassment and violence in the United States.”¹⁴

It is fitting that Rubio harked back to this obscure McCarthy-era provision. In that dark moment in US history, as today, immigrants were targeted for deportation (as well as denaturalization) on the basis of their perceived political beliefs. In the United States, people facing deportation lack the protections available in the criminal legal system: they can be detained without a warrant, they do not need to be informed of their rights in custody, and they are not guaranteed access to a lawyer or even constitutional protections against cruel and unusual punishment.¹⁵ ICE’s establishment after the 9/11 attacks ushered in an era of a dramatic expansion of the state’s removal capacity, as well as the casting of immigrants—particularly Muslim immigrants—as threats. For these reasons, it was easy to make an example of Khalil.

In an op-ed, Khalil pointed a finger at Columbia University for laying “the groundwork for [his] abduction” by refusing to divest from Israel, sending “countless emails” wrongly condemning the protests as antisemitic, and turning over student records to Congress.¹⁶ Khalil also wrote about how prior to the arrest he had asked Columbia to protect him, saying he was being doxed by faculty member Shai Davidai, who had called for his deportation, as well as David Lederer, a Columbia affiliate.¹⁷ An investigation into pro-Israel alumni group chats also revealed the involvement of faculty, such as engineering professor Gil Zussman, in attempting to identify student protesters. Group chat members fed their names to Canary Mission, a notorious organization that targets Palestinian rights advocates and critics of Israel.¹⁸ It was later revealed that the Department of Homeland Security had formed a “Tiger Team” that used the Canary Mission list to identify people to detain, including Mahmoud Khalil, Yunseo Chung, Leqaa Qordia, Badar Khan Suri, and Rumeysa Ozturk.¹⁹ The empowering of hate groups also occurred on other campuses. At New York University, the president’s office was in close communication with Mothers Against College Antisemitism, another Facebook-based group, which had also called on their members to report pro-Palestine students to ICE.²⁰

The Wider Implications

Since October 7, 2023, at least two tenure-track faculty members have been fired due to their pro-Palestine positions, including Maura Finkelstein, who was employed at Muhlenberg College, and Sang Hea Kil, a professor at San Jose State

University. Katherine Franke, a Columbia Law School professor, reported that she was forced to retire. Steven Salaita was denied his position at the University of Illinois more than a decade ago for the same reasons.²¹ Others, such as Steven Thrasher at Northwestern University, were denied tenure. Across the country, hundreds of people have lost their jobs, including the “fired four” at CUNY, adjuncts whose contracts were not renewed in retaliation for their pro-Palestine speech, and Natalie Abulhawa, a fitness trainer who lost her job when her employer found her name on the Canary Mission list.

Colleges have responded to demands from the Trump administration in various ways and have appeared before Congress to answer questions regarding “antisemitism” that conflate the term with opposition to Zionism and criticism of the State of Israel. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism, which writes this conflation into policy, has been adopted by many institutions, and is being considered by others across the country. Meanwhile, universities maintain their ties and investments in Israel, as the United States maintains its investment in the genocide of Palestinians.

Authoritarians target higher education because it provides space for discourse that resists the status quo. The Trump administration’s assault—and indeed, the decades-long fractures in US institutions—is a vehicle to destroy the freedoms of the nation as a whole. As many Jewish organizations have pointed out, the Trump administration and its acolytes do not care about antisemitism. Their weaponization of antisemitism is cynical and calculated, using the language of anti-racism to destroy protections put in place to safeguard free expression and support minorities—and using mass deportations to physically whiten the country.²²

But even beyond academic institutions, investment in Israel, particularly in the Israeli weapons manufacturing and military technology industries that fuel the occupation of Palestine, has a direct impact on people’s lives, including Americans. In September 2024, for instance, ICE signed a contract with Paragon, an Israeli-founded cyber surveillance company which produces software that allows it to hack all phones within a certain radius. Rights groups warn that such technology has a history of being used against the dissenting voices of journalists and activists and violates the right to privacy.

The Palestine exception is just one part of the story. We have also seen attacks worsen on transgender people and on DEI within and beyond college campuses. As the attacks worsen on minoritized groups—immigrants from Somalia, Haiti, Nicaragua, and elsewhere, or on other Black folks, trans people, LGBTQ+ individuals, women, and other categories of people—the lesson to be learned time and again is that none of us are free until all of us are free.

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Palestinian Rights in the Democratic Party: How US Public Opinion and the Gaza Genocide are Changing Conventional US Politics

James J. Zogby

At the 1988 Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, this author represented presidential candidate Jesse Jackson's campaign in discussions about how the party platform should talk about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Jackson wanted Palestinian rights to be mentioned, and his campaign team was prepared to introduce an amendment to that year's platform. By today's standards, the amendment was modest in calling for mutual recognition, for territorial compromise, and for self-determination for both Israelis and Palestinians. But the team of the Democratic nominee, Michael Dukakis, refused to include it. The Dukakis representative warned that "if you even put the 'P' word [Palestinians] in the platform or mention it in the convention, you'll destroy the Democratic Party" and "hell will break loose."¹ Despite vehement opposition from the party leadership, Jackson insisted that I introduce our plank, resulting in the first-ever debate on Palestinian rights from the podium of a national convention.² Dukakis lost—not because of Palestine—and the Democratic Party was not destroyed since Democrats went on to win five of the next nine presidential elections.

While much has changed in the 38 years since that platform debate, the Democratic Party establishment is still struggling with and still failing on the issue of Palestine. This chapter explains the changes that have taken place since 1988 in American public opinion, especially among Democrats; the role that Palestinian rights have played and will continue to play in domestic US politics and elections; and the reasons behind the slow progress toward change by the establishment, despite the shift in voters' attitudes that has occurred. The Democratic Party's internal fractures over Palestine—and the widening gap between the political establishment and voters—highlight how public pressure and debates over Palestine are reshaping the boundaries of acceptable policy within the party and in Washington more broadly.

Shifts in US Public Opinion on Palestine

Public opinion is often described as the “pulse of a nation” as it can shape electoral outcomes, set the public and political agenda, and affect policy decisions. For many years, US public opinion polls have demonstrated that while most Americans viewed Israel favorably, they nevertheless were opposed to many Israeli policies toward the Palestinians. For example, a 2021 Arab American Institute poll showed that despite 58 percent of Americans holding a favorable view of Israel, a plurality was opposed to Israeli settlement expansion and 51 percent supported reducing US military aid to Israel.³

During the nearly three years of Israel's genocide in Gaza, a significant shift has occurred. Overall support for Israel has declined. In February 2026, a Gallup poll demonstrated that, for the first time in US public opinion polling history, Americans sympathized more with Palestinians than with Israelis. From 2001 to 2025, Americans' sympathy with Israelis was consistently double-digit figures ahead of sympathy with Palestinians. In 2026, this changed: 41 percent of respondents said that they sympathized more with Palestinians as opposed to only 36 percent who named Israel.⁴ This stands in marked contrast with results to the same question asked by Gallup in 2023, when 54 percent of respondents said that they sympathized more with Israel, and only 31 percent said that they were more sympathetic to Palestinians. In April 2026, a Pew poll showed that 60 percent of respondents had an unfavorable view of Israel, marking a sharp increase from 53 percent in 2025 and 42 percent in 2022. Among Democrats, Israel's negative rating is an extraordinarily high 80 percent.⁵ Support for Israel is also declining among the younger generation—including among younger Republicans, 57 percent of whom aged 18 to 49 hold an unfavorable opinion of Israel, up from 50 percent the previous year.

For both parties, Israel has become a divisive issue. A CNN poll conducted in late March 2026 found that 72 percent of Democrats and 47 percent of Republicans called support for Israel an issue that was causing problems in their respective parties.⁶ Because of this major shift in US public opinion, voters increasingly are demanding that elected officials and political candidates denounce Israel's genocide in Gaza, indicating that they would be less likely to support candidates who are endorsed by the pro-Israel lobby (especially the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC) or candidates who refuse to criticize Israel's treatment of Palestinians. It would only be a matter of time before these views were reflected in election outcomes. So, it was in 2024, when Kamala Harris lost her presidential election to Donald Trump, that polls showed that her hesitation to condemn what Israel was doing in Gaza played a role in her defeat. I have had debates with establishment Democrats who refuse to accept this fact. As is often the case, when

a poll does not make the argument a group wants to see, their first inclination is to question the validity of the polls.

Domestic Political Ramifications: The Case of the 2024 Election

The impact of shifts in public opinion toward Palestine and Israel on domestic political debates, especially in the Democratic Party, was most prominently observed during the 2024 presidential election. Polls showed that Democratic candidate Kamala Harris's hesitation to condemn Israel's actions in Gaza played a role in her loss to Donald Trump. An Institute for Middle East Understanding/YouGov poll showed that 29 percent of those who voted for Joe Biden in 2020 and did not vote for Harris in 2024 said that "ending Israel's violence in Gaza" was the top issue affecting their decision—more than the economy (a close second at 24 percent), Medicare and Social Security (12 percent), immigration and border security (11 percent), or healthcare (10 percent).⁷

It was not simply that Vice President Harris did not unequivocally separate herself from President Joe Biden's embrace of Israel's genocidal policies that cost her some support. It was also because the position she did take on this issue did not ring true with voters. Early in the Gaza war, in October 2023, I had a conversation with Harris, in which she expressed to me how upset she was with what Israel was doing to Palestinians—even making the point that, as a woman of color, she understood this issue in a way that others in the Biden administration did not. When I suggested she say that publicly, to offer hope to Palestinians and to criticize Israeli policies toward them, she said that she would consider it. That same evening, Harris was speaking at a Hispanic Heritage Month event, and I suggested that she make a statement there. The next day, her office sent me a recording of her at that event speaking passionately and eloquently about what was happening to Palestinians and expressing her belief that both Israelis and Palestinians deserve the right to self-determination.⁸ In response, officials in the White House reportedly clamped down on her freedom to speak on this issue in the future.⁹

By the time that President Biden had withdrawn from the race in July 2024, Harris, the new Democratic Party candidate, had only 107 days before Election Day in which to cobble together a campaign, from staffing and issue briefs to scheduling and strategy. This meant that she started out far behind. In this tense, highly compressed situation, she had to rely on consultants and staff inherited from the Biden team and on a strategy that was not her own. The tight timeframe may have made it difficult for Harris to assert herself and to be the candidate she might have wanted to be.

That said, it was not only that Kamala Harris did not separate herself forcefully enough from President Biden's policy toward Israel, but when she did speak

about the issue of Gaza, her words rang hollow. It was as if she was considering all of the conflicting advice she was receiving from consultants and the White House and ended up with a muddled message that did not feel authentic. I believe that it was this inauthenticity to which voters reacted. I am not blaming Harris as much as I am blaming the compressed campaign schedule in which she was forced to run and the political environment that shaped that campaign. Having done political campaigns with other presidential candidates, I know how oppressive and demanding it can be.

The US Political Landscape and the Persistence of Establishment Politics

Election season and campaigning in the United States involve a very demanding campaign schedule for candidates. There are thousands of people to meet, reporters throwing questions left and right to catch candidates in a contradiction and then snag a headline, all the while keeping a grueling dawn-to-midnight schedule. There is also the question of the wider political environment in which candidates operate—shaped by consultants, donors, media, and policy elites. Each of these plays a critical role in the US political system.

Campaign consultants, in particular, shape electoral politics far more than many voters realize. Candidates' high-pressure schedules mean that they often must rely on consultants for recommendations on what to say, which issues to elevate, whom to meet, and how this or that action or expression will be received in the media or by opponents. Consultants exert significant influence over campaigns but, when a candidate loses, consultants never seem to be held accountable. Because they are largely driven by the money they can make from political campaigns (mainly through the percentage they take on advertising revenues), I like to say that consultants never lose. They simply bow out and await the next election cycle. As a result, their inclination is to be risk-averse and unimaginative. They stay within the bounds of the supposed conventional wisdom of establishment politics—even when the situation has changed and public opinion has shifted—and continue to do what has been done before, even when it clearly is not working.

Unsurprisingly, the consultants who surrounded Harris recoiled at the proposal to have a Palestinian-American who had lost family members in Gaza speak on the main stage during the August 2024 Democratic National Convention, where Harris was officially nominated.¹⁰ No Palestinian had ever been given such a platform. (For the record, I was the only person of Arab descent ever to speak on Palestinian rights at a party convention—and that was back in 1988). It was those same consultants who thought that it was a good idea to have Harris spend a day with Liz Cheney in Pennsylvania, thinking that it would help them win over moderate suburban

women, although Cheney did not have any pull with moderate Republicans or women voters. Consultants inhabit a world shaped by media and policy elites, who themselves often are out of touch with changing realities in public sentiment. These two groups are often people who have served in previous administrations and thus are themselves both creators and captives of what is considered accepted wisdom. They have inherited it, and they propagate it. When it comes to the Middle East, most of these elites have dismal records of failure, and yet because they have served past administrations, they are still called on to share their “wisdom.”

Finally, there is the role played by campaign funding and the outsized role of lobbyists and special interest groups in US politics. We have considerable evidence of how major donors use their contributions to coax candidates to embrace their preferred positions or to create the fear that money will be spent to harm their campaign if a candidate adopts a different approach. AIPAC, for example, has for decades been the most influential group in lobbying politicians to support Israel. In 2022, AIPAC, along with another pro-Israel group, the Democratic Majority for Israel, poured money into opposition campaigns to help unseat incumbent Democratic lawmakers Andy Levin (D-MI) and Marie Newman (D-IL) because of their criticism of Israel. In the 2024 midterm elections, AIPAC was a huge spender, dropping \$100 million on races in both parties, and helping to defeat incumbent Palestinian rights supporters Rep. Cori Bush (D-MO) and Jamaal Bowman (D-NY) in their primaries.¹¹

In the 2026 congressional primaries, as AIPAC becomes more controversial with Democratic voters, the group and its allies have adopted a new tactic of channeling donations through shell organizations to conceal from voters the source of the money.¹² AIPAC and related groups are spending massively to defeat progressive candidates who are critical of Israel, including in several 2026 Illinois Democratic primaries for House seats to the tune of \$22 million.¹³ Pro-Israel individuals and groups are also major presidential campaign donors in their effort to influence election results and executive branch policies toward Israel. For example, Israeli-American Miriam Adelson, whose main cause is supporting Israel, was the third-largest donor to Trump’s campaign in 2024, giving more than \$100 million.¹⁴ For consultants, ‘money is the mother’s milk of politics.’ Their concern about losing contributors—and their need to spend money to defend candidates against well-funded attacks—make them averse to the perceived risk of breaking with conventional wisdom to advocate for justice and rights for Palestinians.

Is a Policy Shift Imminent?

Even with the obstacles of consultants, media and policy elites, and money, the ground has dramatically shifted for US politicians with regard to Israel and Palestine.

Signs of change are everywhere. In April 2026, 40 of the 47 senators who caucus with Democrats voted for Senator Bernie Sanders's (I-VT) resolution to block a military sale to Israel, the largest number ever to do so.¹⁵ Additionally, the support of pro-Israel groups such as AIPAC has become a political liability for some candidates. Some Democratic voters have started to consider funding from such groups as a litmus test for which candidates to support. In the primaries for the 2026 midterms, numerous Democratic incumbents and challengers for House and Senate seats have made opposing Israeli policies and rejecting support from AIPAC as elements of their campaigns. In spring 2026, progressive Democratic House candidates such as Analilia Mejia in New Jersey and Daniel Biss in Illinois won their primaries despite significant AIPAC spending against them. In both cases, AIPAC's heavy-handed intervention to oppose candidates expressing even mild criticism of Israel appeared to backfire with voters.¹⁶

It is not only Democrats who are changing their attitudes toward Israel. The Arab American Institute's April 2026 poll showed that majorities of Democrats and Independents want the United States to increase pressure on Israel to end the occupation and are more likely to support candidates who call for reducing or ending military aid. It also showed that Republicans under the age of 45 are more closely aligned with Democrats than with older Republicans on many Israel-related issues.¹⁷ We may be on the verge of a breakthrough. In the 2026 midterms and in the 2028 presidential contest, the "P" word will be spoken. And support for Israel, once considered the third rail in American politics, will undergo a transformation, with some candidates hesitant to voice full-throated support for Israeli policies, fearing the voters they might antagonize. Four decades after the 1988 Democratic Convention, "change is a-coming."

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US Support of the Gaza Genocide: The Statutory Framework and Violations of US Laws

Safia K. Southey

Since October 7, 2023, the United States has provided at least \$21.7 billion in military assistance to Israel. The total includes Foreign Military Financing (FMF), missile-defense support, drawdowns and replenishment of US stockpiles, ammunition procurement, and other weapons transfers approved or delivered during the war in Gaza.¹ Israel's air campaign has depended on US-origin aircraft, munitions, spare parts, and maintenance infrastructure. Its combat aircraft inventory includes US-origin F-15, F-16, and F-35 fighter jets and Apache attack helicopters, alongside a continuing pipeline of bombs, guidance kits, missiles, and related services.² These transfers continued despite the ongoing mass death of civilians, obstruction of humanitarian aid, and the International Court of Justice (ICJ)'s determination of the plausible risk of violations of the 1948 Genocide Convention. Laws passed by Congress contain specific statutory conditions regarding when security assistance may be provided and what must happen when those conditions are no longer met.

Section 502B of the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) of 1961, as amended, prohibits US-funded security assistance to governments engaged in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights. Section 620I of the same Act bars assistance to any country whose government "prohibits or otherwise restricts, directly or indirectly, the transport or delivery" of US-taxpayer-funded humanitarian aid. The so-called Leahy Laws, named for legislation introduced by former Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), prohibit assistance to units of foreign security forces that are credibly implicated in gross violations of human rights, absent effective remediation. And the Arms Export Control Act (AECA) limits the purposes for which US-origin defense articles may be used and requires executive branch reporting to Congress when substantial violations may have occurred.³ These legal provisions establish different thresholds for suspending arms, none of

which requires a final genocide judgment, an international criminal conviction, or a completed Israeli domestic investigation.

In assessing US laws and publicly available evidence, this chapter argues that the executive branch under both the Joe Biden and the second Donald Trump presidencies failed to enforce the laws with respect to arming Israel during its war on Gaza.

Unpacking the Statutory Architecture

Rules governing the provision of US-origin weapons and other security-related assistance and articles to Israel (and other countries) are found in a number of laws passed by the US Congress—statutes—which together form the statutory architecture for the transfer of these items to foreign governments.

Section 502B of the FAA states that “no security assistance may be provided to any country the government of which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights,” unless the US president certifies to Congress that “extraordinary circumstances warrant” the provision of such assistance (otherwise known as “waiver authority,” a narrow presidential override requiring formal certification to Congress).⁴ The statute defines gross violations to include torture, cruel or inhuman treatment, prolonged detention without charges, disappearances, and “other flagrant denial[s] of the right to life, liberty, or the security of person.”⁵ This final category is particularly significant in the Gaza context because it is broad enough to include repeated conduct causing large-scale civilian death, particularly where the pattern is documented across incidents, time, weapons systems, and affected civilian groups.

Section 502B is sometimes treated as aspirational foreign policy language, but that reading does not fit the text, in which the operative phrase is “no security assistance may be provided.”⁶ A “consistent pattern” can be established through what this chapter terms “the record,” which comprises two overlapping bodies of information: the publicly available evidence of Israeli conduct, including United Nations (UN) agency reports, nongovernmental investigations, and media documentation; and the executive branch’s own internal findings, assessments, and legal conclusions, which are only partially disclosed to Congress and rarely released to the public.⁷ In practice, however, Section 502B’s force is limited by several features of the statute itself. The law gives the president override power that requires only a written certification to Congress, not congressional approval. The statute imposes no automatic trigger and no independent body to compel a finding, enabling the executive branch to avoid its consequences simply by declining to make the predicate determination. Congress may request a specific country’s human rights report, but that mechanism produces a report rather than a binding legal consequence.

The administration can also invoke Section 614 emergency waiver authority to maintain transfers regardless. Section 614 of the FAA permits the president to override most foreign assistance restrictions, including human rights conditions, by certifying that doing so is important to US national security interests; it requires notification to Congress but not congressional approval.

Section 620I of the FAA applies more directly to Israel's conduct in Gaza because its trigger is narrower and more mechanical than Section 502B's: rather than requiring a determination that a government has engaged in a consistent pattern of human rights violations, it bars assistance whenever it is made known to the president that a recipient government is restricting the transport or delivery of US humanitarian assistance, which is a factual matter the documented record of aid obstruction in Gaza could answer. This section prohibits the provision of assistance under the FAA or the AECA to any country when it is made known to the US president that the government of that country "prohibits or otherwise restricts, directly or indirectly, the transport or delivery of US humanitarian assistance."⁸ Once that is known, assistance is barred unless the president invokes the statutory exception and reports to Congress. Section 620I is a strong basis for prohibiting security assistance to Israel in light of the extensive and contemporaneous record of Israeli restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza.⁹ However, Section 620I does not contain the same reporting requirements as 502B, as it does not explicitly require annual reports to Congress, formal executive branch human rights assessments, or a recurring certification regime, relying instead on the passive formulation that assistance is barred "when it is made known to the president," which is a threshold the executive branch can treat as unsatisfied without making any public legal determination or formal finding. This, along with national security waivers, allows the executive branch to avoid issuing a public legal determination on whether Section 620I had been triggered and hence evade enforcement of the ensuing statutory cutoff of military aid.

The Leahy Laws provide for distinct constraint on assistance at the security or military unit-level (as opposed to the recipient government as a whole). The Department of State Leahy Law language prohibits assistance to any unit of a foreign security force when the Secretary of State has credible information that the unit has committed a gross violation of human rights, unless the foreign government is taking effective steps to bring responsible members to justice.¹⁰ The Department of Defense (DoD) law applies a similar prohibition to DoD-funded training, equipment, and other assistance.¹¹ The relevant threshold is "credible information"; the law requires the executive branch to identify recipient units, to vet them against available information, and to withhold assistance when the standard is met.¹² As such, several pathways exist that can undermine the statutory design of the law and allow the executive branch to evade enforcement: aggregating assistance

through tracking transfers at the country level rather than the unit level, bypassing the statute's unit-specific vetting requirement; deferring to Israeli internal review and accepting the Israeli military's own investigations as satisfying the remediation standard rather than conducting independent US assessment; and refusing to name implicated units and declining to publicly identify which units have been flagged, thus preventing verification that the vetting obligation was met.

In addition, the AECA includes a separate process for monitoring how a recipient country ultimately uses US-supplied weapons, especially in cases when this use diverges from what the United States agreed to at the time of provision. Section 4 limits US-origin defense articles and services to specified purposes, including internal security, legitimate self-defense, and participation in collective arrangements consistent with the UN Charter.¹³ Section 3 requires reporting to Congress when the president receives information that a substantial violation of an agreement governing US-origin defense articles may have occurred.¹⁴ The reporting obligation applies before final legal certainty. Information indicating possible substantial misuse should be enough to trigger executive branch responsibility to report and assess. In a military campaign in which US-origin munitions and weapons systems, including aircraft, are repeatedly linked to mass civilian harm, an AECA inquiry cannot plausibly rely upon formal assurances from a foreign government.

Biden's National Security Memorandum 20

Not part of the statutory architecture per se but a new executive branch policy was the Biden administration's 2024 National Security Memorandum 20 on Safeguards and Accountability With Respect to Transferred Defense Articles and Defense Services (NSM-20). With violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) increasing in Gaza and growing public anger and pressure from congressional Democrats to pause arms transfers, the White House wanted to preempt any new, stricter legislative measures from Congress that could impede its ability to arm Israel. Thus, in February 2024, the Biden team introduced its own policy (rather than law) on weapons transfers, touting NSM-20 as an important new accountability tool that supposedly demonstrated the administration's concern for adhering to international and domestic law regarding US arms transfers.

NSM-20 required recipients of US-origin offensive weapons provided since January 2023, before receiving any more such articles, to provide "credible and reliable written assurances" to the US government that they would use those articles consistently with international humanitarian law and other international laws, and would facilitate US-supported humanitarian assistance.¹⁵ NSM-20 also required the secretaries of state and defense to provide written country reports to Congress confirming such assurances, along with an "assessment of any credible reports or

allegations” that US weapons were being used by recipient governments in human rights abuses or otherwise in violation of US law and policy, with the prospect that if they were, such arms would be withheld.

NSM-20 was procedurally modest and did not amend any underlying statute—meaning that it did not have the force of law—but its issuance treated continued arms transfers as requiring documented justification in addition to the reporting requirements contained in the statutory framework. More consequentially, NSM-20 transformed the compliance question from a matter of general policy discretion into one with a documented paper trail.¹⁶ Once the Department of State solicited written assurances, evaluated them, and reported to Congress, the resulting record became evidence of what the executive branch knew and concluded—at least in part, since NSM-20 required submission to Congress but did not mandate public release, meaning the full record remains only partially visible outside the executive branch. Although NSM-20 established a formal process for evaluating and documenting recipients’ compliance, it relies heavily on executive branch assessments and discretion, and on assurances provided by recipient governments rather than requiring independent US investigations into alleged violations.

The Biden Administration’s Compliance Record

By the time NSM-20 was issued, the factual grounds for statutory action to cut off weapons to Israel were already substantial. An analysis by the watchdog organization Airwars of only the first 25 days of Israeli operations in Gaza documented at least 5,139 civilian deaths and 606 published civilian-harm incidents. In just 26 of those incidents, roughly four percent, did Airwars find public evidence of militant presence (e.g., fighters with Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and others). Within that subset, Airwars documented at least 522 civilians killed alongside a minimum of 32 militants.¹⁷ At least 1,900 children were killed in the first 25 days, nearly seven times the highest previously documented monthly child death toll in the Airwars archive. Sixty-three percent of the civilian-harm incidents documented involved at least one child killed. At least 1,213 women were killed, and 96 percent of those women were killed in incidents where at least one child was also killed. Airwars also documented incidents involving killed health workers, journalists, and entire families in residential buildings.¹⁸ Together, these facts show recurrence, scale, and a documented pattern of harm affecting protected civilian populations, directly relevant to a Section 502B finding that military aid must be suspended.

On January 26, 2024, just weeks before Biden’s NSM-20 was issued, the ICJ found that at least some of the rights claimed by South Africa under the Genocide Convention were plausible and ordered Israel to take all measures within its power to prevent acts within Article II of the Convention, thus compounding the problem

of executive branch awareness.¹⁹ While the order was not a final merits ruling (i.e., not the final binding decision), it became part of the documentary evidentiary basis on which the executive branch was required to assess its statutory obligations. Arms transfers continued with knowledge that the UN's principal judicial body had found a plausible risk of Genocide Convention violations.

Israel's record on humanitarian access implicated a separate statute entirely—Section 620I. In March 2024, the UN's Integrated Food Security Phase Classification warned that famine was imminent in northern Gaza.²⁰ UN agencies and humanitarian organizations had already reported Israeli restrictions on aid entry, inspection delays, denials of access, attacks affecting humanitarian personnel, and impediments to distribution within Gaza.²¹ Those facts implicated Section 620I without any need to resolve the ICJ's final ruling on genocide: the statutory inquiry under Section 620I was simply whether Israel had restricted the transport or delivery of US humanitarian assistance, a question the publicly available evidence, independent of any internal executive findings, gave ample basis to answer.

The Biden administration's May 2024 NSM-20 report exposed the gap between the factual record of information available to the administration and the administration's choice of what information to privilege, shaping its decision to continue providing military assistance to Israel. The report stated that, given Israel's significant reliance on US-origin defense articles, it was "reasonable to assess" that such articles had been used by Israeli security forces in instances inconsistent with international humanitarian law or established best practices for mitigating civilian harm.²² It also noted that Israel had not shared complete information and that US officials lacked full visibility into many incidents. The report nevertheless accepted Israeli assurances as credible and reliable and declined to recommend suspension. Yet the report's reasoning would not withstand legal scrutiny under each applicable statute: the report acknowledged facts supporting a Section 502B inquiry, serious humanitarian-access concerns implicating Section 620I, and information indicating potential substantial misuse of US-origin defense articles under the AECA.²³ In each case, the administration's reliance on Israel's assurances left the statutory determinations unresolved.²⁴

The Biden administration's May 2024 pause on the delivery of certain 2,000-pound and 500-pound bombs to Israel confirmed that the legal issue had become weapon-specific, as officials stated US concerns about Israel's potential use of large munitions in densely populated areas, especially Rafah.²⁵ By conditioning continued delivery on the intended use of specific munitions, the administration acknowledged a direct connection between identified US-origin weapons and foreseeable civilian harm—a connection that triggers AECA end-use obligations and makes Section 502B's "consistent pattern" analysis harder to avoid. The pause was limited in scope as other weapons continued to flow, and the administration relied

on Section 614 emergency authority and other procedural routes to maintain transfers despite mounting statutory risk. The Biden administration used Section 614 on multiple occasions to maintain arms flows despite the restrictions Section 502B would otherwise impose. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) forced floor votes on resolutions disapproving certain arms packages and Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) raised separate statutory objections, but none succeeded.²⁶

Litigation might seem to be a route to compel executive branch compliance, but it had not succeeded either. It did not reach the merits as the courts declined jurisdiction on constitutional and justiciability grounds. For example, in *Defense for Children International-Palestine v. Biden*, federal courts dismissed the complaint under the political question doctrine, which holds that certain decisions, including foreign policy and national security judgments, are constitutionally committed to the political branches and not subject to judicial review.²⁷ The result was that no court ruled on whether the transfers violated the FAA, the Leahy Laws, or the AECA. The statutory questions thus remained unresolved when Donald Trump returned to the White House.

The Trump Administration's Acceleration of Weapons for Israel

The second Trump administration inherited an extensive record of Israeli conduct in Gaza, comprising both the publicly available documentation of civilian harm and the executive branch's own internal findings, including the State Department's NSM-20 assessments and its acknowledgment that US-origin weapons had likely been used inconsistently with international humanitarian law.²⁸ By January 20, 2025, when Donald Trump took office for his second term, the ICJ had already issued provisional measures against Israel. UN agencies had documented famine conditions and humanitarian access restrictions that directly implicated Section 620I, and civilian-harm documentation organizations had identified patterns of mass death across hundreds of incidents and had publicly linked US-origin weapons to Israeli strikes in Gaza.²⁹ Thus, by the time the second Trump administration began, many of the relevant statutory concerns were already documented.

The Trump administration's early decisions moved away from statutory caution. Just weeks into his presidency, Trump rescinded NSM-20, thereby eliminating the reporting framework that required written assurances and disclosure to Congress regarding IHL compliance and humanitarian access.³⁰ The new administration released the hold on the bombs paused by Biden and approved transfer of more than 20,000 rifles that had reportedly been delayed under Biden because of concerns about diversion to Israeli police or settler use in the West Bank.³¹ Within its first months, it notified Congress of new arms sales to Israel totaling at least \$7 to \$8 billion, encompassing thousands of bomb bodies and casings, JDAM guidance

kits for the bomb bodies including BLU-109 and MK-series bombs, fuzes, and Hellfire missiles. It also separately proposed a \$3.8 billion sale of 30 AH-64 Apache helicopters that would nearly double Israel's existing Apache inventory.³²

NSM-20 had created a documentation mechanism requiring written assurances, generating compliance assessments, and producing reports to Congress. Its elimination did not remove the underlying statutory obligations under Section 502B, Section 620I, the Leahy Laws, or the AECA; those obligations are creatures of statute, independent of any executive branch policy and reporting framework.³³ What Trump's withdrawal of Biden's memo removed, however, was the paper trail through which the prior administration's awareness of Israel's potential violations had been recorded.³⁴ The Biden-era NSM-20 process had produced written Israeli assurances, internal Department of State assessments, and a formal report to Congress acknowledging that Israel had likely used US-origin weapons in Gaza inconsistently with international humanitarian law, representing a contemporaneous record of executive branch knowledge available to any future accountability proceeding.³⁵ By eliminating the mechanism that generated this record, the Trump administration ensured that its own continued weapons transfers to Israel would produce no comparable record. The result was continued non-enforcement with less documentation available for public scrutiny and potential accountability efforts.

Compliance with the Leahy Laws also deteriorated as credible allegations of gross violations continued to attach to identifiable Israeli military, police, and security units receiving US assistance. In August 2024, media reporting indicated that the Biden administration had considered sanctions against the Netzah Yehuda battalion in the West Bank before ultimately accepting Israeli remediation claims.³⁶ That episode showed the Leahy Laws' vulnerability: compliance cannot rest on exceptional treatment of one high-profile unit. In this instance, assistance to the Israeli military as a whole continued without providing publicly disclosed findings on individual units, each of which must be vetted under the Leahy Laws. The Trump administration's approach generated no publicly disclosed Leahy vetting findings for any Israeli unit receiving US assistance, a departure even from the Biden administration's minimum of conducting and partially disclosing the Netzah Yehuda review. The statute depends on specific findings, and allowing transfers without them leaves it with little practical effect.

Section 620I remained independently relevant as humanitarian access in Gaza became more contested in 2025, with aid flows repeatedly interrupted, border crossings restricted, and famine warnings recurring.³⁷ Israeli military conduct at or near US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation distribution sites, where civilians were killed while seeking aid, provided additional factual basis for a Section 620I finding.³⁸ The statutory bar under Section 620I applies when restrictions on US humanitarian assistance are known to the president. Rescinding NSM-20

eliminated the reporting mechanism that had made the executive branch's compliance analysis partially visible to Congress and the public, but it did not eliminate the underlying statutory obligation, which exists by force of the FAA, the Leahy Laws, and the AECA regardless of any presidential memorandum.³⁹

Accountability Routes

Executive enforcement of laws restricting security assistance to Israel (and elsewhere) has failed across both administrations, and judicial review has not reached the merits, but Congress can still act.⁴⁰ It could narrow Section 614 emergency authority by barring its use for arms transfers to any government under active Section 502B, Section 620I, Leahy, or AECA review unless Congress affirmatively approves the transfer.⁴¹ It could require public reporting on Leahy vetting of Israeli units, for example, with classified annexes when genuinely necessary.⁴² It could also mandate AECA end-use reporting when credible public evidence links US-origin weapons to mass civilian harm, and condition future FME, including that promised in any new US-Israel memorandum of understanding, on demonstrated statutory compliance.⁴³ The Department of State should release NSM-20 assessments, internal Section 620I analyses, and AECA end-use reviews that remain outside public view.⁴⁴

Accountability now depends on the documentary record of what the executive branch knew, concluded, and chose not to act on. The key questions are what the executive knew, what evidence it took into consideration, when it knew it, which Israeli units were reviewed, which weapons were linked to which incidents, and what legal conclusions were reached inside the government.⁴⁵ Diplomatic cables, end-use monitoring files, Leahy vetting memoranda, and interagency legal reviews are likely to matter more than public statements. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) litigation and congressional oversight requests remain the most realistic paths to publicize that record.⁴⁶

International legal developments have made it increasingly difficult for either administration to claim it lacked sufficient information to trigger its statutory obligations. The ICJ proceedings, the International Criminal Court's arrest warrants for Israeli officials, Amnesty International's genocide report, Human Rights Watch's findings on deprivation of water, and the UN Commission of Inquiry's findings on genocide should all bear on what US officials knew when assistance decisions were made.⁴⁷ The UN General Assembly has also called on states to halt arms transfers where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that they may be used in the occupied Palestinian territory.⁴⁸ None of these materials directly enforces US statutes, but each makes claims of insufficient notice harder to sustain. The Biden administration's NSM-20 report explicitly noted that US officials "lacked full visibility

into many incidents,” which is the closest either administration came to an insufficient-notice claim. The significance of the international legal record is that it forecloses that defense prospectively, both in any future litigation and in any congressional or international accountability proceeding.

The record across the current and immediate previous US administrations shows sustained non-enforcement of laws that should lead to weapons cut-offs. The Biden administration created a compliance paper trail, acknowledged serious concerns, accepted Israeli assurances, and continued assistance. The Trump administration rescinded the policy that had produced the reporting architecture and accelerated transfers. Across that period, the documented facts were sufficient under Section 620I and the AECA to require the executive branch to conduct formal legal reviews and report its conclusions to Congress—obligations it did not publicly discharge. The record also triggered serious Section 502B and Leahy Law concerns that could not be resolved through generalized assurances, the use of aggregate country-level assistance figures rather than tracking transfers at the unit level, or deference to Israel’s claims it would conduct its own internal review. The laws that existed were sufficient to prohibit the transfers or require a formal legal response to them. The executive branch declined to apply those laws with the force that Congress intended when the laws were written.

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V

The International Dimensions of the Gaza War: The Crisis of International Law and Global Governance

Chapter 17

The Global Movement Against Genocide: The Role of Civil Society Amid the Breakdown of the International Order

Phyllis Bennis

Chapter 18

The European Union and the Genocide in Gaza: Enablers, Balancers, and Dissenters

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Chapter 20

The Responsibility to Protect Civilians and Israel's Genocide in Gaza: What International Order?

Susan M. Akram and John B. Quigley

The Global Movement Against Genocide: The Role of Civil Society Amid the Breakdown of the International Order

Phyllis Bennis

Just one week after Israel launched its assault on Gaza following the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led attack on southern Israel, nearly 900 scholars of international law and genocide studies issued their first warning that the threat of genocide loomed.¹ “We are compelled to sound the alarm about the possibility of the crime of genocide being perpetrated by Israeli forces against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip,” they said. It was early; their language was appropriately cautious about the “possibility” that lay ahead. But within weeks, activist movements and legal scholars began to normalize the language of genocide to describe Israeli actions in Gaza.² In the absence of international legal measures to prevent or halt the genocide and without any meaningful official action to protect Palestinians, the task of fighting the genocide and enforcing international law, including bringing some modicum of accountability for Israeli crimes and their US enablers, would fall to civil society and social movements around the world.

This chapter argues that national and global grassroots movements as well as governments in the Global South worked to challenge US hegemony over the international order. In the context of weak, often failed global governance, and the lack of political will to enforce legal frameworks to prevent the genocide in Gaza, civil society actors worked with key governments to place necessary and creative forms of pressure on individual states and some global institutions, and are managing to move the needle, albeit slightly, toward justice.

Grassroots Movements Take the Lead

The widespread adoption of the term “genocide” to describe Israel’s war on Gaza came shockingly fast compared to the more than two-decade-long process of

normalizing the word “apartheid” to describe Israeli occupation and its policies of systematic segregation, oppression, and domination over Palestinians. While South Africans and Palestinians had long recognized the appropriateness of the apartheid term, Palestinian rights activists in the United States in the early 2000s had felt it was too provocative—that too much time would be spent arguing over semantics, rather than focusing on the horrors of Israeli actions.³ It was not until 2021, when major international, US, and Israeli human rights organizations began issuing carefully documented reports proving that Israeli actions violated the United Nation’s (UN) 1973 Convention against Apartheid, that the word began to be normalized in public discourse.⁴ The normalization of the term “apartheid” had taken 20 years; “genocide” took fewer than 20 days.

Protests erupted at the same time as the genocide warnings began. The first came within hours of the Israeli attacks on Gaza, including large demonstrations in London and New York, followed within days by marches and rallies in Bangladesh, Germany, India, Indonesia, Mauritania, South Africa, and beyond.⁵ In the United States, within weeks, massive protests filled the streets of Washington, DC, with hundreds of thousands of demonstrators mobilized not only by the horror of the genocide but also by the growing recognition of the critical role of the US government, US weapons, and US funding in enabling Israeli actions.⁶ By early November 2023, protests had spread to major cities and small towns across the country.

The Rise of the Global South

As the genocide unfolded during the Biden and Trump administrations, US representatives to the UN vetoed resolution after resolution in the Security Council that called for a pause, humanitarian access, or a ceasefire in order to stop the carnage in Gaza.⁷ The United States cast its first such veto on October 18, 2023, less than two weeks after Israel launched its assault.⁸ On October 27, 2023, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution A/RES/ES-10/21, requiring a wide range of actions from a cessation of hostilities to humanitarian aid access. It was essentially a menu of everything that a Security Council resolution *should* have contained.⁹ The problem, of course, was that the General Assembly represents the most democratic component of the UN, but its resolutions—unlike those of the Security Council—are not officially binding in international law. They can be, and are, ignored with impunity.

But this time, something changed. South Africa decided to hold Israel accountable for its actions. On December 29, 2023, Pretoria filed a lawsuit against Israel in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for violating the International Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.¹⁰ The move included engagement with South African, Palestinian, and global social movements, and

brought the ICJ into an unspoken but widely appreciated alliance with civil society. Such an alliance had not been seen since 2002-2003, when for eight months the resistance of the member states of the Security Council prevented US and British war planners from securing UN Security Council authorization for their coming war against Iraq.¹¹

South Africa's initiative also broke taboos that had historically protected Israel from facing the consequences of its actions and prevented countries of the Global South from accessing the most powerful institutions of the UN. For decades, with few exceptions, US vetoes in the Security Council, along with Washington's use of bribes and threats to pressure members of the General Assembly, ensured that the Israeli government and its political and military leaders were never held accountable for their continued oppression of Palestinians.¹² South Africa's ICJ lawsuit, coupled with the November 2024 decision of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to issue arrest warrants for the Israeli prime minister and minister of defense for war crimes and crimes against humanity, began to change this situation.¹³

In bringing the lawsuit, South Africa was claiming an equality of access that had long been denied in key multilateral institutions. The ICJ had always been assumed to belong primarily to the powerful countries of the Global North. Smaller, less powerful countries might use the court to resolve border disputes or other conflicts, but initiatives by governments of the Global South, especially African nations, to sue the most powerful countries or their key allies have been rare. The vision of the Rainbow Nation that had fought for decades to overcome apartheid, holding to account the perpetrator of a genocide that was itself rooted in Israel's apartheid, played a major role in demonstrating solidarity and in escalating the mobilization of social movements and civil society across Africa and the world. When the opening arguments of the ICJ hearing began in The Hague on January 11, 2024, hundreds of Dutch and international activists wearing keffiyehs and waving Palestinian flags crowded the streets in front of the iconic Peace Palace where the ICJ is housed.¹⁴ Thousands across the world watched the livestream from The Hague.

The ICJ issued its preliminary ruling just two weeks later on January 26, 2024, which stated that it was "plausible" Israel's actions constituted genocide, and issued six provisional orders to protect Palestinians.¹⁵ The ruling did not explicitly call for a ceasefire, but ordered Israel and its military to stop killing, injuring, or creating unlivable conditions for the Palestinians of Gaza—all actions prohibited by the Genocide Convention. Activists' mobilization played an important role in prompting more countries to announce their intention to join South Africa as parties to the ICJ case, with the number reaching 14 by the end of 2024.¹⁶ The Gaza Tribunal was also created, bringing together global teams of scholars, lawyers, and activists in a set of human rights-based hearings aimed at encouraging greater civil society engagement with the ICJ case and other efforts toward accountability.¹⁷

A Growing Global Movement Despite Crackdowns

As the genocide continued, Israel and the United States grew only more isolated. The call for a permanent ceasefire from almost the moment that the Israeli assault on Gaza began became the watchword of a rapidly expanding global movement. In many countries, citizens demanded that their governments support UN Security Council or General Assembly resolutions and stand up to US pressure. In the United States, as well as in some European countries, ceasefire calls were coupled with a demand to end the arms transfers to Israel that enabled the genocide. From 2020 to 2024, the United States provided about 66 percent of major arms supplied to Israel, while Germany provided about 33 percent.¹⁸

In the face of increasingly powerful social movements, Israel's defenders in the Global North seemed to give up trying to win over public opinion by persuasion, instead doubling down on the repression of genocide opponents. Throughout 2024, the world watched as protest encampments sprang up on hundreds of college campuses. Protesters in the United States, as well as in Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere, were met with escalating violent attacks by law enforcement who college administrators called to their campuses. Students faced harsh sanctions including denial of graduation and retraction of employment offers.¹⁹ In the United States, international students who participated in anti-genocide protests—or who simply wrote op-eds for student newspapers—also risked arrest by masked immigration agents, months of detention in immigration jails, and threats of deportation regardless of their legal status.²⁰

European governments' responses to the mass protests in their countries expressed variants of sympathy (often for “both sides”), concern (about Israel going “too far” or, following the US lead, killing “too many” Palestinians), or unease (about potential region-wide escalation of the conflict). For most, it was empty rhetoric without action. Any proposed solution to end the violence was usually limited to rhetorical support for the two-state solution or offers to recognize Palestine as a state, neither of which changed anything on the ground. For European governments, fear of losing support from their increasingly pro-Palestinian populations if they refused to take on Israel vied with fear of challenging their close ally in Washington.²¹

In the Global South, responses were quite different. Support for Palestinian rights was far stronger and more widespread among the population, and began far earlier, than in Europe or North America. About one year into the genocide, nine countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, led by Colombia and South Africa, launched the Hague Group with the purpose of explicitly supporting the ICJ challenge against Israeli genocide and holding Israel accountable.²² This group played a significant role in strengthening political will to move from statements of solidarity

to real action. For example, Colombia stopped exporting coal to Israel, and dock-worker strikes in Italy prevented shipments of weapons to Israel from sailing.²³

Pathways to Justice and Accountability

Protest campaigns continued to call on governments to take greater action at the UN. But the options were limited and remain so. According to the UN Charter, threats to international peace and security belong first to the Security Council, where a US veto could be counted on to protect Israel. From 1970 until today, about half of all US vetoes were cast to prevent sanctions against Israel.²⁴ But pressure and demands for the UN to do more continued to rise. At the UN headquarters in New York, the newly organized movement Rabbis for Ceasefire occupied the Security Council chambers in January 2024 and later met with the UN secretary general to call on the UN to challenge US support for Israel and to urge greater action to end the assault underway in Gaza.²⁵

In July 2024, in response to a 2022 request from the General Assembly, the ICJ issued an advisory opinion on the legality of Israel's decades-long occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.²⁶ Previously, specific Israeli actions such as collective punishment, settlement-building, and house demolitions had been found illegal, judged within the framework of a legal, temporary, military occupation. But there had never been a challenge to the prolonged occupation itself. The court's finding exceeded expectations. Issuing its ruling nine months into the Gaza genocide, the ICJ determined that the entire occupation was illegal and that the settlements should be dismantled and the settlers evacuated immediately. It found that Israel had denied Palestinians their right to self-determination, and that the 1990s Oslo "peace process," which required the occupied population to negotiate with its occupiers over whether and when and how much of the occupation would end, simply did not take precedence over international law.

The ICJ acknowledged that it had no power to implement or enforce its ruling and therefore turned to the UN General Assembly to carry it out. In response, in September 2024 the General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/ES-10/24, operating under the "Uniting for Peace" precedent. This mechanism can be invoked when the Security Council is paralyzed by a veto to enable the Assembly to act on issues of peace and security that would ordinarily belong only to the Security Council.²⁷ The resolution combined the ICJ's findings in both the preliminary genocide rulings and the advisory opinion on the illegality of the occupation, calling on individual governments to implement a long menu of sanctions to pressure Israel to end its violations.²⁸ While General Assembly resolutions are not officially binding, they do identify what is needed for governments to accomplish goals that may be impossible to reach in the veto-challenged Security Council, such as trade and

banking sanctions, diplomatic pressures, and, most important, an arms embargo. Additionally, they provide irrefutable evidence of where most nations stand on critical issues, especially regarding stopping Israel's genocide and realizing Palestinian rights, showing that Israel and the United States stand virtually alone outside the global consensus.

Again, recognizing that the biggest weakness in systems of international law and justice is the lack of institutional enforcement capacity, the General Assembly resolution, rooted in ICJ decisions, meant that individual governments, and ultimately people—protesters, civil society mobilizers, and national and global movements—could serve as enforcers of international law.

A model already existed for that enforcement role. Throughout the 1980s, at the height of the global movement against South African apartheid, such a process was underway. Various governments attempted to pass binding resolutions in the Security Council to impose sanctions on Pretoria, but the United States repeatedly vetoed such resolutions. Ironically, considering the role that South Africa was later to play in challenging Israeli apartheid and genocide, about one-third of all US vetoes in the 1970s were used to prevent UN sanctions against apartheid in South Africa, Namibia (then called Southwest Africa), and Zimbabwe (then called Rhodesia).²⁹ The resolutions, rooted in the Convention against Apartheid, were then taken to the General Assembly, where they passed with large margins, but the United States would repeat its mantra that Assembly resolutions are not binding and would ignore them with impunity.

It turned out, however, that anti-apartheid activists around the world were not prepared to give up. They took the lists of proposed sanctions outlined in the General Assembly resolutions and pressured their own governments, one after another, to impose those sanctions unilaterally. One after another, governments did just that. Eventually, when those governments began to include all of Washington's closest allies, the United States itself caved in to the pressure. The organizers of the US anti-apartheid movement therefore realized their ambition to achieve US government sanctions against apartheid. That set the stage for the ultimate victory that South Africans won for themselves in ending decades of apartheid.

The Convention against Genocide, like the 1973 Convention against Apartheid, imposes obligations on all signatory parties, not only on the perpetrators. These obligations include doing everything possible to prevent a genocide, doing everything possible to stop it if it happens, and specifically rejecting complicity in the genocide itself. But the United States has refused to abide by the Genocide Convention's requirements, and thus remains complicit through its provision of arms, money, and protection enabling the Israeli genocide.

The responsibility now for global civil society and activists in every country is to push their own governments to abide by the terms of the Convention against Genocide and their obligations to the ICC and ICJ. That means trade sanctions, educational and banking sanctions, and—especially for the United States—an arms embargo. That is what enforcement by civil society would look like, and that is how civil society can stop the genocide.

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The European Union and the Genocide in Gaza: Enablers, Balancers, and Dissenters

Isabel Ruck

On December 14, 2023, Josep Borrell, at the time the high representative of the European Union (EU) for foreign affairs and security policy, offered a candid admission that sharply captured the predicament of the EU regarding its policy toward Israel: “I should represent a common position, but there isn’t one. There are different approaches,” he said.¹ Borrell’s statement indicates that the EU’s predicament is not merely an internal disagreement—it is a structural inability to act coherently in the face of mass violence. Over the past two years, European policies toward Israel’s genocidal war on Gaza have shifted from strategic ambiguity to different forms of involvement that amount to complicity. References to international humanitarian law, civilian protection, and a two-state solution have served as discursive shields to insulate Europe from accountability. Meanwhile, material, diplomatic, and legal practices of EU collusion with Israel continue largely uninterrupted.

This chapter argues that through both its transnational institutions and its individual member states, the EU has enabled and prolonged genocidal violence against Palestinians in Gaza. Europe’s role has taken multiple, reinforcing forms: shielding Israel diplomatically in multilateral forums, continuing military cooperation and arms transfers, selectively interpreting international law, obstructing accountability mechanisms, and in some countries, repressing domestic dissent. The cumulative effect of such policies that sustain mass violence may amount to complicity.

At the same time, the EU has not been a unified actor. Since October 2023, deep divisions shaped by historical responsibility, colonial legacies, political economy, alliance politics, and differing domestic trajectories have produced increasingly fragmented and often incoherent responses. By tracing the dynamics of those member states that enacted limited yet meaningful policy shifts between 2023 and

2025, this chapter assesses policymaking during the Gaza war, situates contemporary developments within Europe's longer involvement in Palestine, and interrogates the gap between Europe's self-representation as a norm-setting power and its actual practices in times of extreme violence. The chapter moves beyond characterizing Europe as merely ineffective, showing instead how it has wielded its power selectively and defensively—with lethal consequences.

Historical and Structural Foundations of European Policy toward Israel and Palestine

European engagement in Palestine long predates the Gaza war. It is rooted in the legacies of colonial rule, mandate governance, and diplomatic frameworks shaped by Holocaust politics and Cold War alignments.² From its inception after World War II, the European Community cultivated an image of itself as a civilian or “normative” power committed to international law and multilateralism. This self-representation, which has not gone uncriticized, enabled Europe to displace political responsibility onto international institutions or the United States, in the process obscuring the lines among colonial governance, counterinsurgency practices, and contemporary peacebuilding frameworks.³

By the 1970s and 1980s, European discourse began to recognize Palestinians as a people with legitimate rights, yet stopped short of endorsing their unconditional right to statehood.⁴ The 1980 Venice Declaration marked a real shift by asserting Europe's “special role” in the peace process, but embedded Palestinian rights within a negotiation framework that in effect granted Israel veto power over political outcomes.⁵ Although later it exerted influence on the 1993 Oslo framework, during the 1970s and 1980s Europe largely subordinated its Palestine policy to the US-led peace process, limiting its role to declaratory diplomacy and economic engagement.⁶

The 1993 Oslo Accords ushered in a decisive transformation in European involvement. Financial and technical assistance from the EU expanded sharply while its political pressure on Israel receded. Under US leadership, the EU became the primary funder of the Palestinian Authority under conditions of continued occupation, thereby subsidizing a governance structure that allowed Israel to externalize the costs of control.⁷ This arrangement entrenched and also depoliticized EU involvement by reframing political conflict as a technocratic project of “state-building under occupation.”⁸

After Oslo, the EU institutionalized its role through formalized relations with both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. These relations included the 1995 EU-Israel Association Agreement, expanded aid conditionality and security sector reform in the Palestinian territories, and the appointment of an EU special

representative for the Middle East peace process in 1996.⁹ Subsequent declarations, notably those in Berlin in 1999 and Seville in 2002, clarified European positions on final status issues without departing from the EU's negotiation-centered paradigm.¹⁰ During the 2000s, the EU expanded its presence through the Quartet, civilian missions for border management and police and justice reform, and various regional initiatives.¹¹ Following Hamas's electoral victory in 2006, the EU's policy of non-engagement reinforced Palestinian political fragmentation and constrained representation.¹²

Since then, the EU's relations with Israel and the Palestinian Authority have been governed by a succession of action plans and strategic frameworks extending to 2025. The EU developed a coherent declaratory position on a negotiated settlement—reaffirmed in multiple Council Conclusions, particularly in 2014—but this coherence weakened after 2016 due to internal divisions and deteriorating EU-Israel relations.¹³ Although temporary consensus emerged following Hamas's October 2023 attack, repeated failures to adopt subsequent conclusions highlighted the persistence of these fractures and the limits of Europe's claimed normative cohesion.

European Policies after October 2023

Longstanding EU divisions over the Middle East “peace process” became starkly apparent after October 2023. The EU response appeared weak and fragmented. While High Representative Borrell and European Council President Charles Michel stressed conditional support for Israel, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Parliament President Roberta Metsola expressed largely unconditional solidarity. But von der Leyen's unscheduled Israel visit right after October 7, during which she failed to publicly refer to Israel's obligations under international law, sparked dissent inside the EU.¹⁴ Tensions intensified when EU Health Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi unilaterally suspended Palestinian funding, provoking internal contestation.¹⁵ Bureaucratic rivalries and personal antagonisms further undermined the EU's response.

These reactions revealed the incoherence across institutions and policy domains. Despite abundant statements urging Israeli restraint, humanitarian access, and legal compliance, the EU refrained from deploying instruments that might influence Israel's actions. Three structural factors explain this paralysis. First, the EU's requirement for unanimity in decision-making enables small member states to block action. Second, the EU's self-image as a regulatory, rather than a coercive, power limits its use of sanctions. Third, the EU's prioritization of transatlantic alignment constrains its autonomy.¹⁶ The EU-Israel Association Agreement, with its human rights conditions for Israel, illustrates such structural shortcomings.

Despite evidence of Israeli atrocities, the EU delayed or neutralized proposals to suspend or review the agreement, which had the effect of reducing legal obligations to symbolic gestures. Similarly, EU commitments under the 1948 Genocide Convention and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) were not translated into policy.¹⁷

The EU role in Gaza thus goes beyond simple inaction—it amounts to a strategy of active non-intervention. Arms transfers and military cooperation continued, with Germany exporting €485 million (\$565 million) in military equipment to Israel from October 2023 to May 2025, and France providing bombs, grenades, and missiles.¹⁸ EU diplomats presented Israeli actions as self-defense while labeling Palestinian resistance as terrorism, moves that shaped media coverage, legal interpretations, and United Nations (UN) votes.¹⁹ Legal obstruction further weakened accountability. For example, EU states refused to execute International Criminal Court arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and diluted support for ICJ-based UN resolutions.²⁰ Domestic repression of pro-Palestine protests and speech insulated these policies from democratic challenges. Europe's conduct vis-à-vis Gaza reflects a deliberate choice to preserve alliances, legal ambiguity, and domestic stability at the expense of Palestinian lives.

Gaza War Shuffles Dissent among European Member States

The events of October 7, 2023, exposed Europe's weaknesses and crystallized the divisions between three categories of EU member states: enablers, balancers, and dissenters. Though fluid, these categories capture dominant national orientations.

Enablers: Shielding Israel from Constraint

Following the Hamas attack, a core group of EU states including Austria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia backed Israel's war effort through diplomatic, legal, and material support.²¹ They uniformly framed Israel's actions as self-defense, rejected human rights conditionality in EU-Israel cooperation, and blocked sanctions, arms embargoes, and suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, albeit for different ideological reasons.²²

Germany's post-October 7 alignment with Israel is rooted in its post-Holocaust *Staatsräson* ("reason of state"), which elevates Israel's security to a core pillar of Germany's own national identity and foreign policy.²³ This principle has led to unconditional political backing, arms exports, and repression of pro-Palestinian expression, with limited humanitarian gestures failing to alter Germany's stance.²⁴ Chancellor Friedrich Merz's opposition to revisiting the Association Agreement

reflects both his sense of Germany's historical responsibility toward Jews and its refusal to confront the colonial and legal dimensions of unconditional support.²⁵ Hungary and Austria, in contrast, have anchored their support in far-right ideology, civilizational and security discourse, strategic bilateralism, and hostility to international human rights norms.²⁶ Collectively, enablers have acted as force multipliers of Israeli power and have rendered the EU's coercive instruments politically unusable.

Balancers: Critique without Rupture

A second group, including Denmark, France, Italy, and (until mid-2025) the Netherlands, has combined growing rhetorical concern over Israel's civilian harm and other violations of international law with the preservation of strategic, economic, and security ties to Israel.²⁷ France oscillated between legalistic rhetoric and security alignment, ultimately recognizing a Palestinian state in September 2025 while continuing intelligence cooperation with Israel and refusing to support arms embargoes. Italy followed a similar balancing strategy, shaped by divergences among public opinion, the stance of the Holy See, and the approach of Giorgia Meloni's right-wing government.²⁸ Denmark avoided using the term genocide and defended Israel's right to self-defense, although domestic pressure forced it to carry out limited divestment and humanitarian signaling.²⁹ The Netherlands maintained a middle course, and until mid-2025 balanced its pro-Israeli orientation with Palestinian aid, reflecting its transatlantic ties, Holocaust memory, and criticism of settlement expansion.³⁰ These "balancer" states have endorsed humanitarian pauses in Gaza and symbolic accountability measures for Israel while avoiding any effort that would disrupt the status quo.

Dissenters: Legalism and Symbolic Disruption

Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, and Spain have openly challenged EU orthodoxy by condemning Israel's war in Gaza, the occupation, and settlement expansion, foregrounding international law and Palestinian self-determination.³¹ Ireland has been particularly active. It has framed the conflict in terms of international humanitarian and criminal law and has advocated for accountability and review of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

The recognition of Palestine by Ireland, Norway, and Spain on May 28, 2024, marked the first major symbolic rupture among EU members. It was followed by recognition by Slovenia and then by Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Malta, and Portugal in September 2025. While arguably performative, these acts nevertheless reject the EU's longstanding deferral of Palestinian statehood.³² Despite the

dissenting states' numerical minority and limited leverage within the EU, not to mention the political backlash they may face, these governments have politicized Europe's internal divisions and raised the reputational costs of continued European inaction.

Conclusion

The war on Gaza has revealed a crisis of European political will and coherence. Far from passive, the EU has functioned as an enabler. Its decisions, individual and collective, have shaped the conditions under which genocidal violence has occurred in Gaza. Europe's involvement has been deliberate, produced through action, omission, and obstruction, leaving it vulnerable to legal claims of complicity.

EU involvement has operated across multiple axes. Diplomatic protection has insulated Israel from multilateral pressure. Military cooperation has sustained Israel's operational capacity for war. Legal ambiguity has weakened accountability efforts, and repression of domestic dissent has eroded democratic freedoms. This response has rendered Europe's commitment to international law mostly performative.

The Gaza conflict has also exposed the internal structure of European foreign policy: a tripartite division of enablers, balancers, and dissenters, and institutions in which action is guided not by shared norms but by the lowest common denominator tolerable to those defending the status quo. Dissenting voices may politicize fractures and raise reputational costs, but power asymmetries make it likely that symbolic gestures prevail over substantive change.

Europe's claim to normative authority has been hollowed out. The EU's privileging of alliances over legal obligation has rendered its legal frameworks subordinate to geopolitical convenience. The consequences extend beyond Gaza: they undermine the credibility of international law, signal permissiveness toward future violations, and reinforce global perceptions of western double standards. Reclaiming any meaningful role as a legal and moral actor will require the EU to confront its responsibility. It will need to break with a policy of active non-intervention, to re-politicize legal obligations, and to accept the costs of genuinely holding Israel accountable. Ultimately, history will judge the EU not by the sophistication of its statements, but by whether it mobilized its power to prevent mass violence.

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CHAPTER 19

The Machinery of Violence: Arms Transfers and Israel's War on Gaza

Waleed Hazbun

The smooth, expedited transfer of munitions, weapons, and fuel by the United States to Israel following the Hamas-led attacks on October 7, 2023, was critical to enabling and prolonging Israel's brutal war on Gaza. As military analyst William Hartung concludes, "Without U.S. money, weapons and political support, the Israeli military could not have committed such rapid, widespread destruction of human lives and infrastructure in Gaza."¹ These wartime flows are only one circuit within a larger self-perpetuating machinery of violence that US policymakers, taxpayers, and corporations have spent decades building and show little interest in dismantling even in the face of widescale evidence that Israeli actions constitute war crimes and genocide. While US-based actors have been responsible for the bulk of the arms, technology, and funding, numerous governments and private firms across Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere have also directly and indirectly contributed to what United Nations Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese has called "a collective crime."² Meanwhile, a growing number of former policymakers, scholars, and activists as well as private citizens in the United States and across the world have declared an urgent need to challenge the sprawling infrastructure that sustains Israel's capacity for unrestrained war-making and are calling for diplomacy to address the security challenges facing the region.

Background: Building Israel's Military Capacity

The development of Israel's military capacity has been a longstanding cornerstone of US foreign policy. Designated as a major non-NATO ally, Israel has been the largest cumulative recipient of US foreign assistance since 1945. This support has "helped transform the Israel Defense Forces into one of the world's most capable,

effective militaries.”³ Israel has an active military of 169,500 troops, with almost another half a million in the reserves. In addition to its undeclared nuclear weapons, Israel maintains more than a dozen squadrons of US-supplied advanced fighter jets, a robust air defense system, and a ground force equipped with Israeli-made armored fighting vehicles. Its forces have traditionally been “organised for territorial defense, short-term interventions in neighboring states and limited regional power projection.”⁴ More recently, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has focused on the development of military technology and intelligence in order “to ensure swifter and more decisive operations against future threats” while building missile defense capabilities.⁵ Even as Israel made use of its advanced military technology and artificial intelligence systems, the unusually extended duration of Israel’s 2023 war in Gaza and its simultaneous conflicts with Lebanon and Iran intensified its reliance on continual, real-time support from the United States.

Israel’s current military capability has been built and modernized through a series of massive financial commitments made by the United States to Israel since the early 1970s. Israel is the leading recipient of US security assistance under the Foreign Military Financing program, which funds both US-brokered transfers of arms and direct Israeli purchases from US firms. Israel also draws on a US weapons stockpile in Israel and has special permission to use US financing to purchase Israeli-made weapons. Since the end of the Cold War in 1991, the United States has offered Israel consistent, large-scale military funding and access to its most advanced weapons systems. The latest 10-year agreement was signed under President Barack Obama in 2016 and offers Israel \$3.8 billion a year to purchase US-origin armaments and missile defense through 2028. Negotiations for other agreements are already underway.

With US support, Israel’s relative defense expenditure is one of the highest in the world, reaching 8.8 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2024.⁶ Its industrial base, however, lacks “the capacity to build many of the platforms, weapons, and munitions it needs,” and thus Israel relies heavily on US manufacturers such as Boeing, General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin, and Raytheon (renamed RTX in 2023).⁷ Over 75 percent of US military aid to Israel is spent on US-manufactured weapons, which allows American defense contractors to maintain steady production, helps boost the US economy, and provides high-wage employment—all of which creates a domestic logic for perpetuating US military aid to Israel.

US military support for Israel is unique not only in its large scale, but also in its quality. The concurrent US commitment to maintaining Israel’s “qualitative military edge” ensures Israeli access to the most advanced US military technology and supports the domestic development of Israeli military technology.⁸ This US support has “turned the Israeli military industry and technology sector into one of the largest exporters of military capabilities worldwide.”⁹ The ability of Israeli firms

to market their products abroad as battle-tested in Gaza only adds to the self-perpetuating machinery of violence.¹⁰

Advocates of US arms transfers to other states often justify such sales by claiming that they increase US leverage over the actions of its security partners. But as former Department of State expert in military affairs Josh Paul notes, the US commitment to Israel's qualitative military edge instead has "the potential to sustain destabilizing military action by Israel," allowing Israel to "feel able to rely on [its military] superiority rather than engaging in diplomacy."¹¹ This concern, however, has yet to redirect US policy. The United States and Israel continue to engage in robust defense cooperation with joint military exercises, research, and weapons development, collaboration that often leads US military planners to adopt a regional strategic outlook defined by Israeli security interests and threat perception.

Giving Israel "Everything It Needs"

This history of US commitment to Israel's military capacity and the tight US-Israeli strategic alignment enabled a resolute US response to Israel's requests in the wake of the October 7 attacks. Not only were Israeli leaders caught off guard by the Hamas-led attacks, but Israel also lacked sufficient weapons and munitions to sustain the military campaigns that it launched in response.¹² During the first week of Israel's campaign in Gaza, its air force was already "employing (almost) all its available aircraft day and night" to drop hundreds of tons of ordnance on Gaza.¹³ Immediately following the October 7 attacks, working closely with Israeli commanders, the US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin pledged, "We will ensure that Israel has everything it needs."¹⁴ President Joe Biden quickly surged military supplies to Israel, resulting in hundreds of aircraft deliveries and sea shipments. These deliveries amounted to "tens of thousands of tons of munitions and weapons systems," including helicopters, interceptors to replenish the Iron Dome missile defense system, artillery shells, and over 41 million kilograms of jet fuel.¹⁵ At the same time, the US War Reserves Stock in Israel served "as an emergency arsenal for rapid mobilization."¹⁶ Before the end of October, Biden had made an emergency supplemental budget request to Congress that included \$14.3 billion in Israel-related funding.¹⁷ In April 2024, Congress approved \$26.4 billion in spending to support Israel. The massive size of these outlays, which commit the United States to arms deliveries for years into the future, displayed the robust functioning of the transnational military-industrial complex as well as the importance of Israeli military capability to US regional strategy.

Tracking the actual spending on and the delivery of weapons is tricky due to the nature of the transfers, as well as the Biden administration's lack of transparency (in contrast to its approach to aid to Ukraine). Hartung calculates that the United

States committed \$17.9 billion to Israel within the first year of the war and another \$3.8 billion in the second year.¹⁸ By March 2024, the United States had approved and delivered more than 100 separate foreign military sales to Israel. These shipments supplied a large quantity and variety of weapons and munitions, including missiles, artillery shells, tank rounds, small arms, and equipment including night vision devices. A senior Pentagon official observed that the quantity of weapons sent was so significant that the Department of Defense sometimes “struggled to find sufficient cargo aircraft to deliver the systems.”¹⁹ In its effort to catalogue the actual transfers based on available trade data, the Center for International Policy reports that the US government transferred almost \$4.2 billion of military goods to Israel between October 2023 and May 2025. This number includes \$2.3 billion worth of bombs, mines, and ammunition used in Israel’s ongoing military operations.²⁰ By the end of May 2025, the United States had dispatched 800 transport planes and 140 ships to deliver more than 90,000 tons of armaments and military equipment to Israel.²¹

The rapid expansion of US military support for Israel during the Gaza war will likely help sustain the US-Israel military-industrial complex in the long term. As of April 2025, the United States had 751 active Foreign Military Sales cases to Israel valued at \$39.2 billion, with US officials noting that priority initiatives included additional F-35 Joint Strike Fighter aircraft, heavy lift helicopters, aerial refueling tankers, and precision-guided munitions.²² As the *Wall Street Journal* reported, “The conflict built an unprecedented arms pipeline from the U.S. to Israel that continues to flow, generating substantial business for big U.S. companies—including Boeing, Northrop Grumman and Caterpillar.”²³

While the US government and US firms have offered the bulk of military sales to Israel, Germany has been the second largest supplier of arms, providing 33 percent of arms bought by Israel between 2020 and 2024, with many supplies going to the Israeli navy.²⁴ Since November 2023, Germany has expedited arms exports to Israel, including military vehicles as well as ammunition for guns and tanks.²⁵ Italy has been the third largest supplier to Israel, accounting for almost 5 percent of purchases between 2013 and 2023 but only 1 percent of Israeli imports between 2020 and 2024.²⁶ Firms in Italy also participate with contractors in about 18 other countries to supply parts and components to the United States’ F-35 program.²⁷ The United Kingdom’s BAE Systems is a major participant, producing 13 to 15 percent of each F-35 fighter plane across its global operations.²⁸ The United Kingdom has also supported Israel’s war through its base in Cyprus and with surveillance missions.²⁹

The Question of Accountability: The Beginnings of a Counter Movement?

Scholars and military analysts concerned about restraining deadly conflict in the Middle East have long pointed to the massive arms sales to Israel, Egypt, and the Arab Gulf states as a destabilizing factor. Meanwhile, human rights groups have repeatedly noted that Section 502B of the US Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 prohibits US security assistance to any government that “engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights,” suggesting that widespread reports of Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights should be grounds to halt US security assistance to Israel.³⁰ The duration and brutality of Israel's war on Gaza, with its reported Palestinian casualties of over 70,000 (and likely much higher) and evidence of the destruction of the means of life, have mobilized even more opposition to the continuing US support of the Israeli machinery of violence.

In December 2023, Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) introduced the first of many resolutions calling for a report by the Department of State on Israel's human rights practices, pursuant to Section 502B of the Foreign Assistance Act.³¹ This and all subsequent similar bills were voted down. Meanwhile, around the same time, Biden invoked emergency authority to bypass the normal congressional review process for larger arms sales to Israel. As Palestinian casualties mounted and accusations of Israeli violations of human rights and even war crimes increased, Biden faced further questions about US military support to Israel. In February 2024, Biden issued National Security Memorandum 20 (NSM-20) that required written assurances from recipients of defense articles that they would be used in accordance with international humanitarian law (IHL). This effort, however, would come to be understood as mostly performative. In May 2024, even after acknowledging evidence that Israel had used defense articles inconsistently with IHL, Secretary of State Antony Blinken nevertheless assessed that Israel had given credible assurances about its lawful use of US weapons.³² That same month, as Israel launched major ground operations into Rafah in southern Gaza, against the stated wishes of the United States, and as evidence of Israeli obstruction of Palestinian access to humanitarian aid became clear, the Biden administration began a review of its planned delivery of additional 500-pound and 2,000-pound bombs. The hold on the 500-pound bombs was soon lifted. Several other governments also announced that they were suspending or reducing arms exports to Israel. In October 2024, French President Emmanuel Macron would go a step further when he called on the international community to halt the delivery to Israel of weapons used in Gaza and Lebanon.³³

Several members of the US Congress called the Biden administration's delay of the additional delivery of larger bombs an “arms embargo” and passed a

resolution opposing the delay. Upon returning to office in January 2025, President Donald Trump quickly released the hold on the delivery of 1,800 MK84 2,000-pound bombs while exempting Israel from its universal freeze on foreign aid. Within a month, the Trump administration notified Congress of additional arms sales to Israel totaling \$8.4 billion (including the largest sale of munitions to Israel in a decade), rescinded NSM-20 about safeguards and accountability in weapons sales, and declared an “emergency” to bypass congressional approval for another \$4 billion of bombs and bulldozers for Israel.³⁴

While the Trump administration accelerated and expanded US military aid to Israel (along with additional arms sales to Arab Gulf states), concerns grew across the global community over Israel’s unrestrained use of force in Gaza and Lebanon, continuing after ceasefires were declared, as well as over its targeting of Hamas negotiators in Doha, Qatar, and striking military assets across Syria. Meanwhile, mobilization by activists and labor unions targeted the logistical infrastructure of Israel-bound military supplies and components.³⁵ Even across the United States, polling shows that a plurality of all adults (33 percent) say that the United States is providing “too much military aid to Israel,” while only 23 percent report that it is “about the right amount,” and a mere 8 percent suggest that it is “not enough.”³⁶ Of adults age 18 to 29, 42 percent say that the United States sends too much aid to Israel, while a full 49 percent of Democrats feel the same way. In a different poll, 60 percent of voters opposed sending Israel more assistance for Gaza operations.³⁷ This growing sentiment, found on the US left and increasingly on the right, may be no match to the transnational networks of interests and flows of capital and weapons that sustain Israel’s machinery of violence. It nevertheless suggests the importance of challenging the continuing militarization of US policy toward the Middle East and the reckless backing of Israel’s unrestrained military dominance in the region.

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The Responsibility to Protect Civilians and Israel's Genocide in Gaza: What International Order?

Susan M. Akram and John B. Quigley

Amid widespread expert and public opinion that Israel has committed genocide against the Palestinian people, the perpetrators remain unpunished and a nominal ceasefire provides cover for the genocide to continue. Israel's genocide illustrates the failure at every level of the entire global system intended to protect civilians. Civil society around the world has protested, marched, and joined flotillas in support of breaking the siege on Gaza and has sought by all available means to hold the perpetrators accountable. But the global political and privileged class has circled the wagons to protect their profitable ties to Israel's machinery of genocide. Powerful institutions—from universities to the law to medicine, even women's rights and children's welfare associations—have responded to the genocide with silence or, worse, by suppressing the facts and attacking those who bring the truth to light.

This chapter analyzes distinctive features of Israel's acts in Gaza that have contributed to the characterization of genocide. It explains the obligations of the United Nations (UN), and how relevant UN bodies have been derelict in fulfilling their core mission. It suggests steps that UN institutions should take, even at this late date, to protect the population of Gaza.

Unique Features of Israel's Genocide: Fact and Law

In October 2023, Israel began its military advance into Gaza in response to Hamas's attack on southern Israel. Its subsequent actions in Gaza have been widely condemned as genocide. The UN Commission of Inquiry on Occupied Palestine reached this conclusion after a rigorous investigation, as did the International Association of Genocide Scholars, prominent human rights groups including Amnesty International and Israel's B'Tselem, and other US and international

human rights clinics and centers.¹

In December 2023, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) was asked to issue provisional measures in a case brought by South Africa against Israel for alleged violations of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.² The ICJ issues such measures, known as injunctive orders, only if the claimed rights are deemed plausible. In a January 2024 ruling, the Court said that at least some of the acts alleged by South Africa could fall under the provisions of the Genocide Convention.³ The Court ordered Israel to take all measures within its power to prevent the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. In the face of subsequent non-compliance, the Court issued two further provisional orders in March 2024 and in May 2024 to stop Israel's genocidal acts, to end Israeli-imposed siege and famine, and to cease its onslaught on Gaza.⁴ Israel failed to implement any of these orders.

In a series of sessions from October 2024 to October 2025, the Gaza Tribunal, an international civil society initiative, brought together eyewitnesses and experts to create an archive of historical facts on the genocide. Evidence presented at the Tribunal highlighted the distinctive features of Israel's actions vis-à-vis other recent crimes of genocide—features that should have triggered massive protection responses from the UN and other leading international institutions.⁵

One of the unique features of Israel's genocide is the imposition of measures intended to prevent Palestinian births, where reproduction, reproductive systems, mothers, and children have been deliberate targets. In March 2025, the UN Commission of Inquiry documented the systematic reproductive violence inflicted by Israel on Gaza's population—namely, the rise in maternal, neonatal, and intra-partum fetal deaths, miscarriages, premature births, and imposed starvation that killed infants and children.⁶ Save the Children concluded that by September 2025, more than 20,000 Gazan children had been killed—approximately 2 percent of Gaza's child population, or one child every hour—and more than 39,000 injured.⁷ In just the first three weeks of the war, the number of children killed in Gaza surpassed the number of children killed each year in all the world's conflicts since 2019.⁸ Doctors and health care professionals provided evidence, too, of Israel's intentional targeting of children. A December 2024 UN report concluded that Israel was waging a “war on children,” echoing the testimonies a few months earlier of 44 Gaza doctors who said they had received dozens of children aged under 13 with single bullet wounds to their head or chest.⁹ Indeed, women and children have been disproportionately killed in the Strip compared to other modern conflicts, as noted by UN and humanitarian organizations. By May 2024, Israel reportedly had killed an average of 21.3 women a day in Gaza, including 7,920 mothers. The shocking rate at which women were killed reveals a systemic pattern of targeting women in order to destroy an entire demographic.¹⁰ Israel also has attacked reproductive healthcare facilities, including maternity wards and an in vitro fertilization

(IVF) center.¹¹ Professor Heidi Matthews's expert testimony to the Gaza Tribunal, in reviewing this evidence, described Israel's annihilation of the possibility of future generations of Palestinians as tantamount to "biological genocide."¹²

Israeli soldiers have subjected both male and female Palestinians to systematic sexual and gender-based violence. Women have been threatened, forced to unveil or undress, and abused.¹³ Palestinian men have been targeted in their genitals, causing permanent injuries that prevent them from fathering children.¹⁴ Israel's Sde Teiman prison has been the site of reports of multiple rapes, including gang rapes, of Palestinians held without charge, assaults that result in lifelong injuries, as Lisa Hajjar and Sahar Francis testified in the Gaza Tribunal.¹⁵ Instead of being held accountable, the perpetrators have been protected from prosecution and even celebrated in Israel.¹⁶

Israel's genocide is also apparent in its systematic destruction of Gaza's educational sector. Targeting elite institutions as a means of destroying a population is also covered by the language of the Genocide Convention. Legal scholar John Reynolds refers to this phenomenon as *scholasticide*, defined as "the systemic obliteration of education through the arrest, detention or killing of teachers, students and staff, and the destruction of educational infrastructure."¹⁷ From 2008 to 2014, Israel's attacks on Gaza caused enormous destruction to educational institutions.¹⁸ After each round of destruction, Gazans rebuilt their schools and universities. But in October 2023, Israel began obliterating the education system in the Strip. Every university in Gaza was targeted for destruction, causing 90,000 university students to cease their formal higher education.¹⁹ Reynolds tracked the destruction of schools, colleges, and universities, as well as the students, teachers, and academics who were killed by Israel.²⁰ By December 2024, 494 schools and universities had been partially or completely destroyed, more than 18,863 school students and 792 educational staff killed, and more than 27,000 students and 3,200 teachers injured. More than 600,000 students at all levels could not attend school or college for two consecutive years.²¹

By September 2024, an estimated 85 percent of school buildings in Gaza had been hit or damaged during the war, including nearly 70 percent of UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools.²² A July 2025 report found that 432 of Gaza's 564 schools had been hit directly.²³ In August 2025, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 91.8 percent of all schools required complete or major reconstruction to be usable.²⁴ Quite aside from Israel's intentional targeting of buildings dedicated to education, an act that is in itself a war crime, Reynolds argues that *scholasticide* is covered by Article II(c) of the Genocide Convention, as it deliberately inflicts on Gazans conditions of life that are calculated to bring about their destruction. These acts are, in Reynolds' words, "destroying the very fabric and basis of Palestinian life in Gaza."²⁵

The UN Failure to Stop Genocide

The UN was designed to reflect the world order imposed by the victors of World War II, and it has largely worked as designed. Five major states—China, France, the United Kingdom, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (now Russia), and the United States—were given the power to block action from the UN Security Council (UNSC). This veto power has made it difficult for the UNSC to achieve the human rights goals identified in the UN Charter. The Charter makes clear that the main purpose of the UN is “to achieve international co-operation in...promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms.”²⁶ But the UN has failed to stem Israel’s assault, even though international experts have identified its actions in Gaza as genocide, as has the UN’s own legal body, the ICJ, albeit provisionally. Even if they fell short of the legal definition of genocide, the depredations inflicted by Israel on the population of Gaza are war crimes and crimes against humanity, which are two charges made against Israel’s prime minister by the International Criminal Court.²⁷

The UN General Assembly (UNGA), which is collectively tasked with defending international norms, has not checked Israel as it has laid waste to Gaza. A key reason for its inaction is the role accorded to the five veto-bearing states on the UNSC, which has the primary responsibility for stopping breaches of the peace.²⁸ This veto power in effect prevents the Security Council from discussing action that any of the veto-holding permanent members is likely to oppose. UNSC members typically must fashion resolutions that placate the United States, which since the UN’s founding has used its veto to support Israel more than 50 times and has blocked any intervention to end the genocide.²⁹

Early in the UN’s history, member states realized that five permanent UNSC members’ veto power could prevent the organization from fulfilling its purposes. The UN Charter assigned responsibility for maintaining peace and security to the Security Council, but in 1950, the UNGA, which represents all member states, provided a solution to the impasse created by the veto. The UNGA adopted a resolution titled *Uniting for Peace* (UfP), which gave the body the authority to recommend action to member states in situations of a “lack of unanimity of the permanent members”—that is, when the Security Council failed to respond to breaches of the peace.³⁰ This resolution was the mechanism by which the UNGA authorized the UN Emergency Force (UNEF) during the 1956 Suez crisis, for example. UNEF then remained in Gaza for 10 years as a peacekeeping force and supervised the withdrawal from Egypt of foreign troops, including those of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).³¹ Given the serious deadlock at the UNSC with respect to the ongoing genocide in Gaza, by now the UfP should have been triggered and action taken by the UNGA. Although the UNGA has used UfP to debate the genocide in Gaza,

it has fallen short of taking any meaningful action to stop it.

Even after failing to take measures to stop the genocide, in November 2025 the UNSC passed Resolution 2803, which approved President Donald Trump's 20-point "peace" plan for Gaza.³² The Resolution authorized an "International Stabilization Force" as a temporary security force for Gaza, operating under a "Board of Peace." In January 2026, President Trump promulgated a charter for the board and proclaimed himself its head.³³ This charter made no mention of Gaza and instead envisaged a new international organization with undefined powers to resolve international conflicts. The charter identifies Donald Trump as having final say over decisions of the board, with the power to name a successor. UNSC Resolution 2803 authorized the Board to operate only through 2027, but the charter contains no end date. In contrast to the UN, which has 193 member states, Trump's board so far has only 26 country members, all of which have acquiesced to the US president's agenda. Notably, Bulgaria and Hungary are the only European countries that have joined.³⁴ The Board of Peace seems aimed at directly undermining the UN, but with so few member states it can hardly pretend to represent the global community—a point that the major European powers and other states have publicly raised. While the United States has withdrawn from, defunded, and delegitimized numerous UN bodies, President Trump has pledged \$10 billion to fund his Board of Peace.³⁵ The UNGA, which represents the majority of people in the world, is undermined by the Board of Peace, which is apparently seeking to turn Gaza into a construction site for luxury buildings to benefit President Trump and his associates at the expense of Palestinians.

The Board of Peace charter has been widely condemned as a violation of Resolution 2803. At the February 2026 Munich Security Conference, the European Union foreign affairs chief noted the different ways in which the Board had assumed more authority than what was accorded by Resolution 2803.³⁶ To date, however, no effort has been mounted for reconsidering Resolution 2803 at the Security Council. With the US veto power, the UNSC is in any case unlikely to revoke the Resolution. Yet given the clear expansion of power assumed by President Trump, the UNGA can and should use the UfP resolution to refute the legality of President Trump's board as a violation of the UN Charter itself. Despite the weaknesses of the UN and its failure to prevent or halt the genocide in Gaza, the solution lies in the UN itself, not outside of it. Reforming the imbalance of power between the UNSC and the UNGA is urgently needed. But in the meantime, the UNGA should seize the authority it possesses under UfP to deny the Board of Peace a mandate in Gaza (or elsewhere) and to authorize a UN peacekeeping force in the Strip.

When the October 9, 2025, ceasefire was announced, the IDF withdrew to the eastern half of the Gaza Strip. But the IDF subsequently encroached on the western half of Gaza and, purportedly responding to Hamas forays, conducted air

strikes killing hundreds of Gazans. Israel now occupies more than half of Gaza. It has continued to impede the delivery of humanitarian aid and has completely forbidden UNRWA from operating in territory claimed by Israel. UNRWA is the only agency mandated by the international community to provide humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees, and it is the only agency with substantial aid distribution capability in Gaza.³⁷

Conclusion

The UN's failure to take meaningful action to protect Palestinians in Gaza reflects a breakdown in the international order. The UN and prominent international institutions have stood by while Israel, firmly backed by the United States, has devastated the population of Gaza, with ramifications that may last for generations. In July 2024, the ICJ ruled that Israel's very presence in Gaza and in the entire Occupied Palestinian Territory was unlawful.³⁸ Endorsing the ICJ ruling, the UNGA demanded that Israel withdraw.³⁹ If it chose to act, the UNGA could pass diplomatic, economic, or even military measures to force Israel out of Gaza. Redress will come only when UN member states reassert their collective commitment to the values that underpin the entire organization, and when they revoke the authority given by the Security Council to President Trump and his Board of Peace.

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VI

Pathways Forward: Rehabilitation, Accountability, and Self-Determination in Palestine

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CHAPTER 21

The Long Road to Recovery: Saving Palestinians in Gaza Remains Key

Mohammed Samhour

Shortly after Israel began its retaliatory war on Gaza on October 7, 2023, plans for the “day after” started to emerge. Most of these plans were based on two assumptions: that Hamas would be quickly defeated as a military force, and that the war would be short. Given these assumptions, the “day after” plans, primarily motivated by an Israeli agenda and written by US-based pro-Israel groups, focused on one major question: Who will govern post-Hamas Gaza? Recovery and reconstruction were of secondary importance.

These assumptions turned out to be wrong. The war dragged on for nearly three years and Hamas, although militarily weakened, remained in control.¹ In the meantime, Gaza turned into a ruined landscape, with its remaining two million people struggling to survive what a growing number of scholars and international organizations defined as a genocide.² Plans for reconstructing the embattled Palestinian enclave were beginning to attract attention.

Whether Gaza can ever fully recover is an open question. This chapter argues that despite the massive destruction the war wrought on the Strip, it is highly doubtful that Israel—with its total control over Gaza under any future scenario—would facilitate the rebuilding of a land it had deliberately destroyed. The highly unstable political and security environment and the many challenges of implementing plans for reconstruction all add to the difficulty of rebuilding postwar Gaza. In these uncertain conditions, the priority should be to provide Gaza’s exhausted population with the basic means to cope and survive, using whatever financial resources and diplomatic pressure the international community can muster to achieve that goal.

US-Sponsored Indefinite Occupation

Nearly three years of Israel's devastating war laid much of Gaza to waste, killing and injuring over 10 percent of the total population, forcibly displacing 90 percent of its inhabitants, and creating a humanitarian crisis and human suffering on an unprecedented scale.³ The ceasefire agreement that came into effect on October 10, 2025, brought much-needed respite from Israel's relentless bombardment.⁴ Yet, despite the ceasefire, the slaughter of Gaza civilians, the restrictions on the entry of humanitarian aid, and the destruction of what remained of Gaza's public and private properties all continued, albeit at a lower intensity.

More troubling for the future of Gaza is the US-sponsored 20-point plan. Although it brought relative calm to Gaza after the implementation of its first phase, the plan proposed transnational foreign control over the shattered enclave and partitioned the tiny territory along the so-called "Yellow Line." Israel was left in control of over 58 percent of the land, and over two million Gazans were crammed into less than 42 percent of the destroyed terrain.⁵

On November 17, 2025, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2803 endorsed the US plan and granted its so-called Board of Peace (BOP) a sweeping two-year mandate over governance, security, and reconstruction in Gaza.⁶ According to the plan, the international US-led BOP will supervise governance by a temporary committee of Palestinian technocrats. Security will be delegated to an International Stabilization Force authorized to disarm Palestinian militant groups and oversee the training of a new Palestinian police force, although no countries had committed to participating in this force, at the time of writing. The UNSC resolution also called for the establishment of a World Bank-backed multinational trust fund for recovery and reconstruction. However, there is no clarity yet on funding sources for this multibillion-dollar task. The US-drafted resolution is ambiguous and short on the details of implementation. More importantly, it hardly provides an auspicious basis for recovery and reconstruction.

Destroying Conditions of Life in Gaza

The nearly three-year war has left its devastating mark on all aspects of life in Gaza. More than 70,000 Palestinian civilians have been reported killed, although the death toll is likely to be much higher.⁷ Over 171,000 people have been injured, with a quarter of all injuries potentially life-changing.⁸ According to human rights organizations, Gaza is now home to the largest group of child amputees in modern history.⁹

In addition to human lives, Israel's genocidal assault deliberately targeted everything that sustained life in the coastal enclave. It explicitly intended to

render the territory uninhabitable and drive out its population of over two million Palestinians.¹⁰ In consequence, Gaza's physical infrastructure has been devastated. According to UN satellite imagery on October 11, 2025, close to 81 percent of all structures in the Gaza Strip had been damaged, including 320,622 housing units.¹¹ Ninety-four percent of the water and sanitation infrastructure, 84 percent of the power infrastructure, 78 percent of the road network, and 71 percent of primary healthcare services have all been destroyed.¹² Over 97.5 percent of schools have also been destroyed or partially damaged.¹³ An earlier, mid-2024 preliminary assessment by the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) reported that the massive physical destruction had already caused unprecedented and possibly irreversible damage to Gaza's ecosystem.¹⁴

Satellite images collected in July 2025 documented that the physical destruction of Gaza had produced 61 million tons of debris.¹⁵ About 15 percent of that rubble is contaminated with asbestos, hazardous materials, human remains, and unexploded ordnance. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), clearing the rubble could take seven years under the right conditions—conditions that are unlikely given the political context and Israeli government policy.¹⁶

The war has wiped out Gaza's economic base. Over 84 percent of private businesses have been destroyed and 86 percent of cropland in Gaza has been damaged, leaving only 1.5 percent of cropland both accessible and undamaged.¹⁷ Additionally, 89 percent of Gaza's water resources have been destroyed, and the fishing industry has been all but eliminated.¹⁸ The macroeconomic picture is equally dire. In 2024, Gaza's Gross Domestic Product contracted by 83 percent; in the first half of 2025, it contracted by a further 12 percent.¹⁹ In April 2025, unemployment surged to 80 percent.²⁰ Almost the entire population has been pushed into poverty.²¹

The colossal destruction, widespread poverty, mass unemployment, and economic collapse require emergency intervention on two fronts. The first is the urgent need to rehabilitate the most critical infrastructure to provide Gaza's population with a minimum level of basic public services to enable them to survive. Second, an Emergency Basic Income program should be established to provide Palestinians in Gaza with a financial safety net to allow them to live with dignity.²²

Dismantling Human Capital

In addition to the massive physical destruction, the war on Gaza has had a catastrophic impact on the enclave's human development, with the near-total collapse of healthcare, mental health, and education. In October 2024, the UNDP and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) projected that the Gaza war would set back human development in the Strip by 69 years (to

1955 levels).²³ This assessment was only for the first year of the war.

The healthcare system in Gaza has been systematically dismantled. Hospitals, clinics, and primary healthcare centers have all been destroyed or rendered partially operational. The destruction of water and sanitation infrastructure led to a surge in communicable diseases in overcrowded makeshift shelters of displaced families. A July 2025 report by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel concluded that Israel had not only deprived Palestinians in Gaza of the most basic forms of medical care but had also “deliberately inflict[ed] conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction.”²⁴ Restrictions on aid entry and the destruction of domestic food production led to high rates of food insecurity, malnutrition, hunger, and famine.²⁵ The World Health Organization (WHO) warned that without sufficient “nutritious food, clean water, and access to health care, an entire generation will be permanently affected.”²⁶

Furthermore, the psychological impact of the genocidal war has created a sense of insecurity and trauma among the entire Gaza population and worsened the already fragile mental health conditions that existed before the war.²⁷ Reports indicate extremely high rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that were significantly higher than in other conflict zones. One 2025 study reported that 54 percent of Gaza’s population displays symptoms of depression and 65 percent display symptoms of anxiety.²⁸ Children, in particular, exhibit signs of severe distress, including nightmares, fear, and in some cases self-harm or suicidal thoughts. The trauma is expected to have long-term effects that could last for generations.²⁹

Gaza’s education system has been almost entirely obliterated, with a devastating impact on the future of an entire generation. As already indicated, 97.5 percent of school buildings have been damaged or destroyed, including all the universities in the Gaza Strip.³⁰ About 625,000 school-age children and 88,000 higher education students have lost access to formal learning.³¹ The widespread destruction of education infrastructure and the complete halt of formal learning for hundreds of thousands of children has been described by some UN experts and academics as “scholasticide.”³²

The deliberate destruction of Gaza’s healthcare, mental health, and education systems has profound long-term implications. If left unaddressed, this systemic obliteration of human capital will put current and future generations of Palestinians at severe risk of lower cognitive capabilities and diminished productivity. As such, saving Gaza’s war-torn population from falling further into destitution and despair should be a priority. Such an emphasis becomes even more crucial at a time when the prospects for recovery and reconstruction are highly uncertain.

Recovery Remains Uncertain

With the deliberate destruction of Gaza's physical, social, and economic infrastructure and the catastrophic humanitarian conditions in which over two million displaced Palestinians are languishing, the need to plan early recovery and reconstruction is paramount.

In February 2025, the World Bank Group, United Nations, and European Union—in coordination with the Palestinian Authority (PA)—conducted an Interim Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (IRDNA) for the Gaza Strip.³³ The IRDNA was updated by the PA in September 2025, publishing an addendum that showed a higher figure of Gaza's total physical and economic losses, estimated at \$49 billion.³⁴ In November 2025, the PA published its Gaza Recovery and Reconstruction Implementation Program.³⁵ This report built on the Arab League's Early Recovery, Reconstruction, and Development of Gaza plan that was approved at its March 2025 summit in Cairo.³⁶ The PA plans for recovery and reconstruction carried a price tag of \$67 billion and are intended to serve as the operational arm of the Arab League initiative.

Unlike many postwar settings, where early recovery and reconstruction activities begin after adversaries sign peace treaties, reconstruction plans for Gaza have been proposed for implementation while the conflict is still ongoing. Twice before, the international community held conferences on postwar reconstruction in Gaza—March 2009 in Sharm el-Sheikh and October 2014 in Cairo—and they both failed for the same reason: reconstruction activities were conducted under continued conflict conditions, with Israel remaining in total control of the entire rebuilding process.³⁷

These various reconstruction plans are futile given current political conditions and Israel's ongoing occupation. The past failures of rebuilding Gaza provide us with one major lesson: for recovery and reconstruction to have any chance of success, the various constraints imposed on Gaza must first be addressed. At present, none of the conditions necessary for recovery and reconstruction exist in Gaza. For example, the ambiguity of governance and security arrangements and Israel's continued restrictions on movement and access for people and goods all constitute formidable obstacles. Under these conditions, it is highly unlikely that the international community would be willing to provide the enormous financial resources needed for implementing any reconstruction plan.

Saving Gaza

With reconstruction a remote possibility, over two million Palestinians—half of them homeless—have been forced into a narrow, cramped, and largely uninhabitable

enclave of coastal land representing less than half of the Gaza Strip—thus doubling the already high population density. Given the vagueness of the two remaining phases of the 20-point plan, Gaza could remain partitioned for the foreseeable future, if not indefinitely. International efforts must therefore squarely focus on enabling a more effective, efficient, and sustained response to Gaza's severe humanitarian crisis.³⁸ The main goal should be to prevent Gaza from becoming trapped in a state of humanitarian purgatory, with endless human suffering, deprivation, and despair.³⁹

The fragile October 10, 2025, ceasefire gave humanitarian agencies a window to scale up their coordinated efforts, even slightly, to provide the people in Gaza with emergency relief services. These efforts cover a wide range of critical needs in a variety of sectors, including education, health, food security, shelter, child protection, water, sanitation and hygiene, and mental health and psychosocial support.

But these crucial international efforts are facing two major hurdles. First, humanitarian agencies in Gaza are now facing chronic financial shortages, which hinder them from meeting Gaza's most urgent needs. The 2025 UN Flash Appeal for Palestine, for example, had requested \$4 billion (88 percent for Gaza) that year, but by December 18, 2025, had received only \$1.6 billion (40 percent).⁴⁰ Securing much-needed funds is clearly not easy given competing humanitarian demands from elsewhere in the region (e.g., Sudan, Syria, and Yemen). The second problem is access. Despite the ceasefire agreement calling for a surge in humanitarian aid, Israel continues to substantially restrict aid entry and reject requests from international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to bring relief materials into the Gaza Strip.⁴¹

The aftermath of October 7, 2023, has resulted in significant and drastic changes to the geography and demography of the Gaza Strip due to the widespread destruction, mass forced displacement, and a staggering loss of life. Given the scale of the damage to physical, social, economic, and human capital in Gaza, Israel's deliberate policy of erasure and colonialism, and the enormous political, logistical, and financial obstacles to any recovery and reconstruction efforts, it is unlikely that "day after" reconstruction and governance proposals will produce any positive outcomes in the near future.

After two years of genocidal war, the political future of the war-shattered Palestinian coastal enclave may be unclear. But helping Gaza's two million people survive their Israeli-engineered ordeal is a litmus test not just for the world's commitment to international humanitarian law, but for its commitment to humanity.

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Gaza Reconstruction Plans: The Dangers of Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Disaster Capitalism

Nur Arafah

Almost one year after the ceasefire brokered by the Trump administration in October 2025, Gaza remains a site of despair and uncertainty. More than 80 percent of the buildings in the Strip have been destroyed in nearly three years of war, leaving behind more than 60 million tons of debris.¹ The ceasefire agreement marked Gaza with a yellow line that divides the territory between an area in the west controlled by Hamas (42 percent of the Strip) and an area in the east occupied by the Israeli military (58 percent).² Most of the population is living west of the yellow line amid the debris of their homes destroyed in the war, while most of Gaza's farmland lies out of reach, east of the yellow line and therefore under Israel's control.

To rebuild Gaza, an estimated \$70 billion is needed.³ While the past two years witnessed the development of numerous postwar plans for Gaza, most of these plans sideline Palestinians either as experts or as agents in the reconstruction process. One of the latest plans proposed by the United States surfaced in mid-November 2025 and proposed bifurcating Gaza into a "green zone" and a "red zone."⁴ Under this plan, reconstruction would proceed only in the green zone, which would comprise the portion of Gaza under Israeli and international military control on the east side of the yellow line. The red zone, on the west side of the yellow line, where most Gazans live, would be left as rubble.

This plan followed an earlier initiative discussed by the United States and Israel to create fenced-in housing sites called "Alternate Safe Communities" on the eastern side of the yellow line, where small groups of Palestinians from Gaza vetted by Israel could live, while the parts of Gaza controlled by Hamas would remain in ruins.⁵

Another plan, leaked in January 2026 and reportedly presented at the US military-led Civil-Military Coordination Center (CMCC) in Kiryat Gat, Israel,

proposed the establishment of a “Gaza First Planned Community” in Rafah as a pilot project.⁶ The proposal, which draws on the “gated communities” developed by the United States in Iraq following the 2003 war, envisions housing approximately 25,000 Palestinians in a residential zone under full Israeli control. Residents would be governed through biometric identification systems, tightly controlled entry and exit checkpoints, monitoring of commercial transactions, and new educational programs aimed at promoting normalization with Israel.

The language of these reconstruction plans differed, but their logic is the same: to create two Gazas—one rebuilt, one abandoned. That logic surfaced publicly in October 2025, when President Donald Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner suggested that reconstruction should be limited to areas “secured” by Israel, offering Palestinians “a place to go, a place to get jobs, a place to live,” while reconstruction funds from any area governed by Hamas would be withheld.⁷

Kushner was explicit about the principle underlying these proposals: the reconstruction of Gaza would be conditional, geographically selective, and used as a tool to reshape Palestinian incentives. Indeed, these proposals reveal a new model of reconstruction, one still in the making, that is grounded in the intertwined logic of counterinsurgency doctrine and disaster capitalism. Responding to humanitarian need is repurposed as an instrument of control, and the destruction of Gaza is treated as an opportunity for fundamental political and economic restructuring.

Reconstruction as Counterinsurgency

The emerging vision of two Gazas follows modern counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine. Rooted in Cold War-era military strategy, COIN seeks to win the “hearts and minds” of a population by providing security and basic services, thereby discouraging support for insurgents.⁸ In practice, it often involves carving out zones of relative stability and prosperity to entice civilians away from territory controlled by insurgent groups.

This logic is evident in the proposed green zone in Gaza. The idea is to engineer a stark material contrast: the green zone, where housing, schools, electricity, and employment are available, set against the red zone, left under Hamas’s control in a condition of ongoing devastation and misery. The assumption is that Palestinians in the rebuilt area will see what they stand to gain by acquiescing to Israeli security control, while Palestinian despair in the unreconstructed area will erode support for Hamas.

In this framework, reconstruction is not a right but a reward for compliance and is weaponized as a mechanism of control. US officials have been unusually explicit about this strategy of population management. “As things progress and you create conditions for significant progress on reconstruction,” one US official told

The Guardian newspaper, “you [will] have Gazan civilians moving [to the green zone] beginning to thrive. People will say, ‘Hey, we want that.’”⁹

Therefore, reconstruction is designed not simply to rebuild but to reshape movement, allegiance, and governance. At its core, this is an effort to separate civilians from Hamas, both physically and politically. The model mirrors earlier COIN experiments, including the US “strategic hamlet” program in Vietnam, which itself was inspired by Mao Zedong’s idea of insurgents as “fish swimming in a sea of people.”¹⁰ Drain the water—by relocating or constraining civilians—and the fish cannot survive. Just as the strategic hamlet approach forcibly moved rural populations in Vietnam into controlled zones, the proposed Gaza plans (whether to push Gazans to a green zone or to the so-called planned communities) aim to concentrate civilians in areas where Israel’s authority is unchallenged.

A key challenge facing reconstruction in Gaza is that such plans are being turned into instruments of spatial engineering. The benefits of reconstruction will extend only to Palestinians who live within Israel’s security perimeter. Gaza is not restored and rebuilt as a unified territory. Instead, it is subdivided into zones of inclusion and exclusion. The yellow line might thus become more than a border: it could function as a political sorting mechanism, dividing Palestinians into compliant depoliticized subjects, who will receive housing, and those marked as suspect populations, who will live in the ruins.

From Counterinsurgency to Disaster Capitalism

The logic of counterinsurgency does not fully capture the economic and political ambitions now taking shape. A more sweeping ambition seems to be emerging—one that treats Gaza’s destruction as an opportunity for profound political and economic restructuring and hegemony. Indeed, several postwar plans for Gaza increasingly reflect the logic and structural features associated with disaster capitalism.

The concept of disaster capitalism was coined by Naomi Klein in her book, *The Shock Doctrine*.¹¹ The notion of disaster capitalism refers to how governments and corporations exploit crises—wars, natural disasters, and economic collapses—to impose political and economic changes that would be unacceptable in normal times. Destruction creates a vacuum of governance and public oversight, enabling elites to redesign economies, privatize state assets, and reconfigure institutions in ways that enrich foreign corporations and political allies at the expense of local populations.

Although it is premature to classify Gaza as a textbook case of disaster capitalism—those patterns become fully visible only once plans are implemented—the postwar plans for Gaza being circulated right now clearly contain its genetic

material. As Mandy Turner and I emphasized in a recent essay, three particularly troubling mechanisms being proposed for Gaza risk opening the door to disaster capitalism: governance structures, economic arrangements, and security frameworks that echo the enabling conditions seen in earlier cases.¹²

The first mechanism of disaster capitalism embedded in several postwar schemes for Gaza is the creation of governance structures imposed from the outside and devoid of Palestinian political agency. Trump's 20-point plan envisions "a new international transitional body" or "Board of Peace," chaired by President Trump himself and involving other heads of state, overseeing a "technocratic, apolitical Palestinian committee."¹³

While the committee's mandate is left vague, the plan is explicit on a key point: the Board of Peace, now mandated by the United Nations (UN) through Security Council Resolution 2803, will "set the framework and handle the funding for the redevelopment of Gaza."¹⁴ In essence, crucial decisions about reconstruction would be made by an external board, which raises critical questions about the political agency and sovereignty that the Palestinian committee would have—especially as there is no meaningful role provided to Palestinian institutions that are accountable to the people of Gaza.

As historical precedents in Iraq and Afghanistan reveal, when external powers wield administrative authority rather than institutions accountable to the population, reconstruction funds are often misappropriated and misused, and new political and economic orders are imposed without the consent of indigenous communities.¹⁵

The second mechanism in the plans to rebuild Gaza concerns war profiteering. Reconstruction at this scale represents billions of dollars in contracts. There are mounting concerns that foreign firms will be the primary beneficiaries. An early indication appeared in 2024, when Joseph Pelzman, an American university professor, submitted a Build-Operate-Transfer reconstruction plan for Gaza to Trump's team and inspired the president's earlier vision of turning Gaza into the "Riviera of the Middle East."¹⁶

Pelzman's plan envisioned Gaza as an investment zone where foreign companies could acquire "equity shares" in land and infrastructure through 50-year leases. It characterized Gaza as lacking meaningful property rights and therefore effectively available for purchase, management, and resale by outside players. The fate of this plan is unclear, but it exposed the underlying logic: reconstruction reimagined as a profit-generating vehicle for external investors. It is this same logic that led the United Kingdom government in October 2025 to invite British investors to coordinate efforts for Gaza's reconstruction.¹⁷ This rationale is also behind "Project Sunrise," which was drafted by Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff and surfaced publicly in December 2025.¹⁸ As presented by Kushner at the World Economic Forum

in Davos in January 2026, the project plans to turn Gaza into a lustrous metropolis featuring beachfront luxury hotels, advanced transportation infrastructure, and artificial intelligence (AI)-powered electrical grids. Again, the Palestinian territory is seen as an investment commodity, where public assets would become a source of private wealth for foreign capital.

A third mechanism that could enable disaster capitalism is the prominence of a security-first framework in postwar planning.¹⁹ Across multiple proposals, reconstruction has been made contingent on Israel's retaining broad security authority, creating a tightly controlled environment in which political dissent can be suppressed. Such arrangements are hardly unique to Gaza. In other post-conflict settings, security-heavy governance has frequently served to stabilize conditions for external actors to advance their own political or economic agendas. The emphasis on security would serve a dual purpose: addressing immediate threats while establishing the controlled conditions necessary for external economic and political projects to proceed unimpeded.

The Danger of a Forever War

If the emerging postwar vision for Gaza were to be implemented, the territory would be left in a state of engineered precarity, with reconstruction conditional on compliance. Gaza would remain locked in a forever war, sustained by crisis management rather than resolution.²⁰ Whether or not every element of this vision ultimately materializes is immaterial. What is already clear is that Israel, with US support, is working to advance a new model of postwar reconstruction, one in which the rebuilding is neither driven by the people of Gaza nor accountable to them. Governance is externally imposed, local participation and political agency are decorative, and economic opportunity is channeled toward foreign contractors and investors rather than the people whose homes lie in ruins.

Gaza risks becoming a testing ground for this approach.²¹ If the approach is normalized in Gaza, it could set a template for post-conflict reconstruction elsewhere, reshaping how the international community responds to devastation in future wars. That is why getting Gaza's reconstruction right matters beyond Palestine.

A rights-based, sustainable reconstruction effort must address the root causes of destruction, respect Palestinians' right to self-determination, and place real ownership and agency in Palestinian hands. It should also reform international aid structures to avoid donor competition. Only reconstruction grounded in justice and political accountability can lay the foundation for a durable recovery.

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CHAPTER 23

Pursuing Accountability for the Gaza Genocide and the Future of the Law-Based Global Order

Sarah Leah Whitson

The global struggle to hold Israel accountable for war crimes in Gaza represents one of the most significant stress tests that the international legal system has faced in decades. Holding those responsible for the Gaza genocide to account is a critical step in the international legal process, ensuring justice for victims and consequences for the perpetrators. At stake is not only the enforcement of laws prohibiting genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, but also the credibility of a legal order that has long claimed to constrain state violence through courts, treaties, and international institutions. Yet the Gaza war has also exposed the profound fragility and selectivity of that system. Despite an expanding web of proceedings before international courts, universal jurisdiction complaints, sanctions campaigns, arms embargoes, and diplomatic initiatives, the mechanisms of accountability remain deeply dependent on political will and on the willingness of states to impose actual costs on violators. The result is a stark paradox: as accountability efforts around Palestine have proliferated across international and national legal forums, the gap between the articulation of legal norms and their enforcement has become increasingly difficult to ignore. This chapter outlines the various avenues of accountability, the forceful pushback by Israel and its allies, and the political challenges to pursuing justice.

The International Criminal Court

The International Criminal Court's (ICC) involvement in Palestine stretches back more than a decade, but took a decisive turn in 2024, just over a year into Israel's genocidal war in Gaza. On November 21, 2024, the court issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Minister of Defense Yoav

Gallant, charging them with starvation, deliberate attacks on civilians, murder, and persecution in Gaza, as well as now-deceased Hamas official Mohamed Deif for attacks on civilians.¹

These warrants stemmed from a formal investigation into violations of the Rome Statute, the treaty establishing the ICC, that then-Chief Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda opened in 2021, following an examination initiated in 2015, with jurisdiction for crimes committed in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) since June 13, 2014.² Civil society groups had advocated for years to urge the Palestinian Authority (PA) to accede to the Rome Statute, which the State of Palestine finally did on January 2, 2015, and then to refer the situation in Palestine to the ICC, which it did on May 22, 2018. In response, Israel and the United States punished the PA and its officials with political and economic reprisals.³ When Karim Khan replaced Bensouda as the court's top prosecutor in 2021, many expected that he would avoid pursuing the investigation in Palestine, but the genocide in Gaza apparently compelled him to take action.

In one of its first decisions, the court's Pre-Trial Chamber ruled that it does have jurisdiction over the territory of the State of Palestine in light of its membership in the court, as well as jurisdiction over nationals of the State of Palestine.⁴ The court also confirmed its jurisdiction over crimes committed *in* the OPT, which means that it has jurisdiction over anyone committing crimes there even if they are citizens of states that are not members of the court, as provided in Article 12 of the Rome Statute. Accordingly, although Israel and the United States are not members of the court, their nationals are subject to the court's jurisdiction for crimes that they commit in Palestine.

Israel and the United States have retaliated against the court with attacks, sanctions, and pressure campaigns aimed at delegitimizing the court and at punishing countries, organizations, and individuals who support its work. Multiple investigative reports documented a campaign since 2015 by Israel to undermine the investigation by surveilling, hacking, smearing, and threatening ICC staff.⁵ During his first term, President Donald Trump sanctioned former Prosecutor Bensouda, her staff, and their families, and in 2025 after returning to office has sanctioned Prosecutor Khan, two other prosecutors, and eight judges, explicitly citing the court's investigation of Israeli officials as the reason.⁶ The Trump administration sanctioned two of the judges on the same day that the court ruled against an Israeli procedural challenge to the proceedings. Khan took leave from the court in May 2025 amid sexual abuse allegations; the ongoing investigations by member states continue to cast uncertainty over the court's future leadership.⁷ Meanwhile, in July 2025, Israel issued a ban against five civil society organizations—DAWN, Al-Haq Europe, Law for Palestine, the Hind Rajab Foundation, and Lawyers for Palestinian Rights—and 50 of their staff members for supporting the court's prosecution of

Israelis; the Trump administration followed suit in September 2025, sanctioning three Palestinian organizations—Al-Haq, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, and Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights—for their ICC work.⁸

Following the opening of the investigation by Bensouda, organizations began submitting evidence to the ICC on Israeli violations, but rarely, if ever, identified perpetrators. This dynamic shifted in December 2023 with DAWN's first submission to the court, naming 40 Israeli commanders who had a role in blocking aid and in starving and attacking civilians.⁹ In October 2024, the Hind Rajab Foundation, a new organization seeking accountability against Israeli perpetrators, filed a historic submission accusing 1,000 Israeli soldiers of crimes in Gaza, often relying on the soldiers' own social media posts documenting their crimes.¹⁰

DAWN has also targeted US officials for aiding and abetting Israel's atrocities. In January 2025, DAWN submitted a 172-page communication to the ICC urging it to indict former President Joe Biden, former Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and former Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin for aiding and abetting Israeli crimes by providing essential military, political, and public support to Israel. DAWN reported that "this support included at least \$17.9 billion in weapons transfers, intelligence sharing, targeting assistance, diplomatic protection, and official endorsement of Israeli crimes, despite knowledge of how such support had and would substantially enable grave abuses."¹¹

The court has issued no new warrants or charges against Israeli officials since its 2024 warrants, stymied at least in part by the investigation against the chief prosecutor. Hungary, a party to the ICC, defied the arrest warrant against Netanyahu when he traveled there in 2025, but Netanyahu has not set foot in any other member state.¹² The Court has since announced that it will no longer make warrants public, but no leaks have emerged suggesting that any new ones have been issued.¹³ Following a successful 2025 Israeli appeal of the Pre-Trial Chamber's opinion finding the court's jurisdiction lawful, the matter remains under the court's review, but the court refused to rescind the arrest warrants or suspend its investigation pending the appeal.¹⁴

The International Court of Justice

In parallel, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has had two cases against Israel for genocide and illegal occupation, as well as a case against Germany for aiding and abetting Israel's genocide in Gaza. A 2023 case initiated by South Africa accuses Israel of violating the Genocide Convention in Gaza. At least 18 other countries have supported the case with Article 63 submissions (including, most recently in late 2025 and 2026, Namibia, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Iceland).¹⁵ In January 2024, the ICJ issued provisional measures ordering Israel to prevent genocidal acts

and to ensure humanitarian aid to Gaza. In March and May 2024, it issued additional measures, all of which Israel ignored. After securing over a year of delays to present its rebuttal, Israel replied on March 12, 2026; it remains under the court's review.¹⁶ To the great frustration of many who hoped that South Africa and the court would act aggressively to seek and to issue, respectively, new orders against Israel pending a final opinion, there have been no new orders for two years.

In a separate related case in 2024, Nicaragua filed charges against Germany at the ICJ for aiding and abetting Israel's genocide in Gaza by providing Israel with military, financial, and political support.¹⁷ However, the court declined to issue any of the requested provisional measures (namely the suspension of German arms transfers to Israel). Germany rejected the claims, and the Court set oral hearings for September 2026. Germany cited this case as a reason for its decision not to submit an intervention on behalf of Israel in the ICJ genocide case, saying that it would compromise its own defense.¹⁸

The Court's more immediately impactful case against Israel came after the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) requested an opinion on the legality of Israel's occupation and evidence that it was committing apartheid. In its July 19, 2024, opinion, the ICJ determined that Israel's occupation of Palestine is illegal; that its policies separating Israeli settlers and Palestinians constitute racial segregation under Article 3 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which obligates governments to eradicate racial segregation and apartheid; and that it must cease its settlement activities, withdraw its settlers, and provide full reparations to Palestinians.¹⁹ It also reaffirmed the Palestinian right to self-determination, noting that member states are legally bound to recognize Israel's presence in the OPT as unlawful, to not aid Israel in maintaining it, and to cooperate to end it.

In response, on September 18, 2024, the UNGA issued a significant and groundbreaking resolution affirming the opinion, giving Israel a one-year deadline to comply, and ordering it to comply with the ICJ's orders. More important, it called on states to refrain from actions that sustain the unlawful situation, including "to prevent trade or investment relations that assist in the maintenance of the illegal situation," and "to take steps towards ceasing...the provision or transfer of arms, munitions and related equipment to Israel, the occupying Power, in all cases where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that they may be used in the Occupied Palestinian Territory."²⁰ The UNGA resolution also made clear that these obligations extend to subnational public authorities and state-controlled entities, including pension systems, treasuries, and other custodians of public funds, directing states to take steps to ensure that "their nationals, and companies and entities under their jurisdiction, as well as their authorities, do not act in any way that would entail recognition or provide aid or assistance in maintaining the situation." This

marked the first time that the UNGA obliged states to prevent trade and investment with Israel, including arms transfers, and explicitly cited public financial and sub-national actors, opening the door for advocacy rooted in customary international law and explicitly binding actions.

Litigation in National Courts

There has also been a surge in efforts to pursue justice through universal jurisdiction laws in national legal systems. Although complaints have been filed in some 10 countries, to date none have resulted in interrogations, charges, or prosecutions, but several remain outstanding and have resulted in summonses. Such litigation remains a particular challenge to dual nationals serving in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), including 4,000 French-Israeli dual nationals and 12,000 American-Israelis.²¹

Very few cases have proceeded beyond the filing of complaints by human rights organizations. In 2025, following complaints filed by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Al-Haq, and Al Mezan, a French judge issued summons against two Israeli-French dual national IDF soldiers, Nili Kupfer-Naouri and Rachel Touitou, for complicity in genocide, but the women remain in Israel and have ignored the summons.²² Another French judge summoned two French-Israeli members of an Israeli “Ghost” sniper unit charged with summary executions in Gaza; the matter also remains outstanding.²³

In October 2024, Belgian prosecutors announced a probe into a Belgian-Israeli citizen in the IDF’s “Refaim” sniper unit for crimes in Gaza. The entire 21-person unit—including three Americans, two French, a German, an Italian, and a Belgian national—is reportedly under investigation.²⁴ (In July 2025, Belgian authorities briefly detained and interrogated two visiting Israeli soldiers for their role in war crimes, but subsequently referred them to the ICC.)²⁵ In 2024, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, working within the country’s Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Program, launched a “structural” investigation into Canadian citizens who served in the IDF to gather evidence about their possible involvement in Gaza crimes; it is reportedly still in the evidence-gathering phase.²⁶

Although no indictments have yet been issued, the proceedings are having an effect by restricting the travel of Israeli soldiers and by signaling intolerance for their impunity. The IDF advised a group of soldiers who served in Gaza against traveling abroad due to fears of legal action against them.²⁷ In at least eight cases, Israeli authorities ordered soldiers who had traveled to countries such as Brazil, Cyprus, the Netherlands, and Slovenia to leave after legal filings were initiated against them.²⁸ In 2026, state members of the Hague Group, formed in 2024 to support international legal actions for Palestine, announced that they would require travelers to their countries to disclose service in the IDF and would subject Israelis

to secondary screening to ensure compliance with domestic war-crimes inadmissibility rules.²⁹

Legal Challenges to Arms Transfers

Civil society organizations have sued in national courts around the world to enforce domestic and international laws prohibiting weapons transfers to abusive states or where the weapons may be used unlawfully. While almost all of these cases have failed, primarily on procedural or jurisdictional grounds, they have had a significant effect in forcing governments to restrict arms exports to Israel in whole or in part.

In the United States, courts have typically barred challenges to arms transfers under the “political question” doctrine, in which courts defer to the executive branch for matters related to foreign policy.³⁰ This doctrine was the basis for a California court’s rejection of a 2023 case alleging that the US government breached the Genocide Convention by providing weapons to Israel.³¹

However, a 2024 US lawsuit organized by DAWN on behalf of Palestinian and Palestinian-American plaintiffs adopts a novel approach, challenging the Department of State’s refusal to enforce the Leahy Law, a provision of the Foreign Assistance Act that prohibits security assistance to abusive foreign units.³² To avoid the political question doctrine, the case narrowly targets the failure to enforce the Leahy Law as an arbitrary and capricious violation under the Administrative Procedure Act. The case is ongoing.

Legal challenges to arms transfers have also emerged in Europe, primarily focused on the export of F-35 fighter jet components to Israel assembled by a consortium of states. In December 2023, Global Legal Action Network and Al-Haq sued the UK government for these exports. The United Kingdom had exempted the parts from its broader suspension of arms to Israel, claiming that it would disrupt the international supply chain and harm national interests. In 2025, the British court ruled against the plaintiffs, agreeing with the government’s defense and stating that it was not up to the judiciary to assess arms export policies. This case followed a more successful effort in the Netherlands, where in 2024 the Hague Court of Appeal ordered the Dutch government to halt F-35 parts exports to Israel over concerns they could be used in violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). In 2025, the Dutch Supreme Court found the Appellate Court’s ruling extrajudicial but ordered the government to reevaluate the risks of Israel exports; the government has maintained its ban.³³ Challenges to German and Danish arms exports have failed as well, with courts finding procedural and technical grounds to reject the claims.

Arms Embargoes, Trade Sanctions, and Diplomatic Suspensions

An unprecedented number of governments have successfully imposed partial or total arms embargoes on Israel, typically citing domestic laws prohibiting weapons transfers to human rights violators, as well as trade and diplomatic embargoes, generally tied to the 2024 UNGA resolution mandating measures to end Israel's illegal occupation.

The most significant arms embargoes include Germany's decision in August 2025 to sharply restrict weapons exports to Israel in the wake of Netanyahu's declared plan to invade and reoccupy all of Gaza; Germany had been a major arms supplier to the country, accounting for 30 percent of Israel's weapons imports between 2019 and 2023.³⁴ In 2024, Germany had already suspended new licenses for "war weapons," while continuing transfers of military equipment. Other countries with significant arms exports to Israel, including Belgium, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain, also embargoed, suspended, or restricted their arms exports starting in 2024.

In 2025, 13 Hague Group states—Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Indonesia, Iraq, Libya, Malaysia, Namibia, Nicaragua, Oman, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, and subsequently Turkey—announced a comprehensive embargo on weapons to Israel and a ban on the transit of weapons and dual-use goods to Israel from their ports, specifically citing the 2024 UNGA resolution mandating a halt to weapons transfers assisting the occupation.³⁵ Follow-up Hague Group meetings in 2026, which included the participation of 27 other states, mandated enforcement of these commitments, including coordination on arms-transfer restrictions, port and flag-state controls, public procurement reviews, and support for universal-jurisdiction investigations related to crimes committed in Palestine.³⁶

Countries with partial export suspensions have focused on "offensive" weapons, citing the risk of their use to harm civilians, but permitting "defensive" weapons exports. The United Kingdom partially suspended 30 of 350 arms export licenses to Israel in 2024, finding a "clear risk" that the items could be used to violate IHL in Gaza but exempting the F-35 jet components. France suspended offensive weapons in 2024, but justified continued sales of defensive weaponry, such as parts for the Iron Dome.³⁷ (However, a 2025 report documented continued French offensive arms exports to Israel despite the pledge to ban such weapons.)³⁸ France also banned Israeli defense firms, including Elbit, Rafael, and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), from advertising their weapons at the June 2024 Eurosatory Exhibition and the 2025 Paris Air Show.

Even the United States, which supplied 69 percent of Israel's arms imports between 2019 and 2023 and provided more than \$20 billion in weapons to Israel's war effort in Gaza, imposed limited restrictions during the Biden administration,

blocking the transfer of 500-pound bombs and MK-84 2,000-pound bombs.³⁹ (Biden reportedly had resumed the transfer of the 500-pound bombs by June 2024.) The second Trump administration reversed restrictions on the 2,000-pound bombs and armed bulldozers in 2025, bypassed congressional review for several major weapons transfers, and has approved staggering sums of support reaching nearly \$20 billion in additional formally notified weapons transfers. In February 2025, the Trump administration officially notified Congress of military sales to Israel totaling \$8.4 billion (officially pre-cleared during the Biden administration), and in March, Secretary of State Marco Rubio signed a declaration using emergency authorities to expedite an additional \$4 billion in weapons aid, bringing the total amount of military assistance to Israel to nearly \$12 billion in arms transfers in the first six weeks of the second Trump administration.⁴⁰ In September 2025, the Trump administration informed Congress of its plan to offer Israel another \$6 billion in weapons, in addition to the \$5.2 billion allocation to enhance its air defense systems authorized in 2024 that Israel continues to draw down on.⁴¹ Most significantly, Congress's 2026 National Defense Authorization Act required the administration to assess and help address capability gaps in Israel's defense needs due to arms restrictions imposed by other countries.⁴²

Trade and investment suspensions have also increased since the Gaza war and the 2024 UNGA resolution, but most have been tied specifically to Israel's West Bank settlements. In 2025, Hague Group states agreed to prevent trade, investment, shipping, and other forms of economic or logistical support that could sustain Israel's occupation or military operations in Palestine; in 2026, they expanded these commitments by proposing restrictions on trade with settlements, including on public spending tied to settlements and on sovereign wealth funds and public pension investments in Israel. Outside the Hague Group, states including Belgium, Malaysia, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom have also limited free trade negotiations or limited trade and investment with Israel, especially in relation to goods from settlements. Nevertheless, in 2025 and 2026, the European Union (EU) failed to suspend its trade association agreement with Israel, despite extensive efforts to secure such a suspension.

Since the start of the 2023 Gaza war, several states also have downgraded, suspended, or severed diplomatic relations with Israel. Bolivia and Belize formally severed diplomatic ties, while countries including Bahrain, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Jordan, South Africa, and Turkey recalled ambassadors, suspended diplomatic engagement, or otherwise downgraded relations with Israel. Many cited Israel's repeated violations of IHL and attacks on civilians in Gaza as the basis for these measures.⁴³

Sanctions Against Individuals for West Bank Violence

Sanctions against individual Israeli perpetrators in the West Bank have recently emerged as a new vehicle for accountability. In 2024, the Biden administration became the first to sanction Israeli settlers and settlement entities, but President Trump canceled the sanctions program in one of his first moves upon returning to office. DAWN submitted sanctions nominations against five of the sanctioned settlers, one of whom took legal action against the organization, though the court dismissed the case.⁴⁴

Several other countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, the UK, and several EU states, have now imposed sanctions on Israeli settlers, settler organizations, and Israeli officials, including Ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, expanding their focus from individual perpetrators of violence to settlement financing and organizational networks.⁴⁵ In May 2026, France and Poland also sanctioned Ben-Gvir following outrage over his abuse of French and Polish citizens detained by Israeli forces for their participation in an aid flotilla headed to Gaza.⁴⁶ The designations of Israeli ministers are a significant political signal, marking an overdue recognition that settler violence is systemic and backed by the Israeli government.

Conclusion: The Tools of Accountability

Taken collectively, these actions have thus far failed to halt Israel's destruction of Gaza or its accelerating annexation of the West Bank, which the Israeli Knesset voted to support on July 23, 2025.⁴⁷ The central obstacle remains the unwillingness of powerful states—above all the United States—to impose meaningful political, military, or economic consequences on Israel for its actions.

Nevertheless, the momentum is clear. The breadth of these accountability initiatives, led by Palestinians and supported by global civil society groups, has started to crack Israel's global shield of impunity, and Israel finds itself increasingly isolated. Whether these efforts ultimately produce meaningful accountability remains uncertain. But the struggle over Palestine has already become a defining test of whether international law functions as a genuine constraint on state violence or primarily as a language of principle detached from power.

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The Impact of the Gaza War on the Future of Palestine and Israel: Post-War Challenges

Khalil E. Jahshan

Soon after the attack of October 7, 2023, academic and political observers realized that the military confrontation between Israel and Palestinian militant groups in the Gaza Strip, primarily led by the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), was not following the pattern observed in their previous clashes. Earlier military conflicts with Israel after Hamas took control of the Strip from the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah) in 2006–2007, including Operations Cast Lead in 2008, Pillar of Defense in 2012, Protective Edge in 2014, and Guardian of the Walls in 2021, caused significant bloodshed, civilian casualties, severe humanitarian crises, and widespread physical destruction in Gaza. But these conflicts were relatively limited in duration, intensity, and geopolitical impact—especially compared to the existential all-out war over the future of the Gaza Strip and historic Palestine more generally after October 7.

The scale of the war that began in October 2023 has no doubt exceeded the expectations of the planners of the Hamas attack on Israeli targets. Their primary aims were to exploit internal Israeli turmoil to break the Israeli siege on Gaza, to defend al-Aqsa Mosque against Israeli encroachment, to stop the creeping wave of Arab normalization with Israel, and to end the increasing Palestinian isolation and marginalization across the region by inflicting the greatest possible damage on Israel “to evoke fear” and a feeling of instability across Israeli society.¹

Nevertheless, the context of the October 7 attacks cannot be ignored. For decades—particularly following the collapse of the Oslo Peace Process and amid continued Israeli violations—Palestinians have been subjected to multiple forms of oppression and systematic denial of their basic rights. This has included a devastating siege of the Gaza Strip—in place since 2007—alongside escalating violence, settlement expansion, and de facto annexation of the West Bank. At the same time,

Palestinians have effectively been blocked from pursuing meaningful, peaceful, legal, or diplomatic avenues to defend themselves against mounting Israeli aggression. Israel has faced little meaningful accountability at the international level and has continued to receive extensive economic, military, political, and diplomatic support from the United States and other countries, enabling its ongoing occupation, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

Israel's brutal, disproportionate, and reckless military response, culminating in its hell-bent pursuit of a genocidal war of revenge against the people of Gaza, helped turn what could have been a relatively limited confrontation with Hamas and its local allies into an existential crisis with serious historical consequences for the region. Israel, undoubtedly, was awaiting an opportunity to advance its "Greater Israel" project, to eliminate the Palestinian presence, and to dismantle any remaining prospects for a Palestinian state. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not hide Israel's grandiose intentions, declaring on October 9, 2023, that "Israel's response to the unprecedented multi-pronged attack by Palestinian gunmen from the Gaza Strip 'will change the Middle East.'"² In fact, the Gaza war (2023-present) has exacerbated tensions throughout the region, spreading to fronts including Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and Yemen, and subsequently contributing to the devastating war on Iran launched by Israel and the United States on February 28, 2026. The economic and political implications of the Gaza conflict for a changing Middle East and a weakened world order will continue to unfold for years to come.

The Impact of the Gaza War on Israel

The October 7 surprise attack by Palestinian fighters, targeting more than 30 Israeli civilian and military locations in the "Gaza envelope" (the populated areas in southern Israel located within 4.5 miles of Gaza) and the immediate border vicinity, caught the Israeli military and political establishments off guard, prompting swift retaliation, including a declaration of war and a full invasion of the Gaza Strip 20 days later.³ The subsequent war, regardless of its original objectives—which remain mostly ambiguous and controversial—has fundamentally reshaped the Arab- and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Whether intended by its planners or not, the strategic fallout of the October 7 attack and the subsequent fighting lies in its deep, long-term challenge to the region's economic, legal, political, and social order, particularly by undermining long-held perceptions of the intractability of the conflict, including the primacy of Israeli military power in the region.

Hamas's attack is widely regarded in Israel and across the Jewish diaspora as the deadliest assault on Jews since the Nazi Holocaust. Although it did not occur in a vacuum, coming 75 years after the Nakba and 59 years since the 1967 occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, it deeply shocked Israeli society and exposed the

false sense of security that most Israelis had been conditioned to feel since 1973. Very few of Israel's 10 million citizens, regardless of ethnicity or political leanings, expected such a security nightmare. On that fateful day, Israelis felt that their sense of military superiority and national safety had been shattered.⁴ The political fallout from that historic attack continues to appear nearly three years later, significantly affecting the country's national security, military strategy, social polarization, and public opinion.

The Israel that the world knew on October 6, 2023, no longer exists. The current state of Israel's government and public is more extremist, more paranoid, and significantly more racist than what had existed from 1948 to 2023. Racism, discrimination, and ethnic superiority in Israel were not born in 2023, but the shock of losing approximately 1,195 people, including 796 civilians and 379 military personnel, and the abduction of 251 hostages from Israel into the Gaza Strip, unleashed deeply buried Israeli outrage, fears, and insecurities.⁵ What these attacks also exposed is that the permanent, decades-long occupation and oppression of Palestinians was no longer inconsequential or tucked away behind walls and checkpoints, easy for Israelis to ignore. Consequently, 2023's Operation Swords of Iron—and its reincarnation in 2025 as Operation War of Revival—were intended to avenge the October 7 attacks and to restore Israel's shaken self-confidence at any cost.⁶

The vengeful reaction was immediately evident in shifts in Israeli public opinion. According to a Gallup Poll conducted in the early phase of the war, 65 percent of Israelis swiftly reasserted their opposition to an independent Palestinian state as part of the two-state solution.⁷ This change was a reversal of attitudes a decade earlier. The proportion of Israelis supporting a Palestinian state fell from 61 percent in 2012 to a meager 25 percent in 2023. After October 7, 2023, a record-high 74 percent no longer expected a permanent peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Israeli society appeared to have abandoned any remaining interest in achieving peace with the Palestinians based on the two-state solution advocated since the Oslo Process was officially launched in 1993. These sentiments followed decades of dehumanization of Palestinians in Israeli public and political discourse and behavior. A June 2025 Hebrew University survey showed that 64 percent of Israelis believed that “there are no innocents” in Gaza, while a March 2025 Pennsylvania State University poll showed that 47 percent of Israelis supported killing all Palestinians in the Strip.⁸ These findings have offered the most extreme currents in Israeli politics an opportune moment to assert themselves by declaring the final demise of the two-state solution, whose viability has been questioned by a growing number of Israelis since its inception.

Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich, long a champion of unchecked Jewish settlements on Palestinian lands, has felt empowered to declare the “erasing” of Palestinian statehood.⁹ He even bragged that “the Palestinian state is being erased

from the table, not with slogans but with actions. Every settlement, every neighborhood, every housing unit is another nail in the coffin of this dangerous idea.” The erasure process is currently being pursued legislatively within the Knesset, where Deputy Speaker Limor Har-Melech of the Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power) party is seeking to permanently overturn the Oslo Accords.¹⁰

Prime Minister Netanyahu, for whom the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant on November 21, 2024, attempted throughout the Gaza war to deflect attention from his own role and legal responsibility by blaming the Israeli military and extremist elements within his own ruling coalition, like Smotrich and Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir, for the excessively brutal nature of the war. But Netanyahu has not necessarily been an innocent or passive bystander when it comes to extreme rhetoric in justifying the ethnic cleansing of the Gaza Strip. Indeed, he personally promoted the same genocidal and vengeful instructions mentioned in the biblical book of I Samuel 15, which called for killing Amalekite men, women, infants, and livestock, by applying these passages to current Israeli political objectives and practices in Gaza. In his declaration of war speech on October 28, 2023, Netanyahu, who is generally viewed as thoroughly secular, quoted Deuteronomy 25:17, telling the Israeli public, “You must remember what Amalek has done to you, says our Holy Bible. And we do remember.”¹¹

Whether Netanyahu remains in power or is replaced as prime minister in the 2026 parliamentary elections, Israel will continue to face an extensive list of unresolved challenges stemming from an ill-conceived, extremely costly, and endless war that shook the socio-political and economic foundations of Israeli society. These challenges are exacerbated by an unstable and insecure geopolitical situation, a fragile ceasefire agreement, and the current government’s failure to achieve key declared objectives, namely, the total dismantling of Hamas’s military and governance capabilities and preventing a repeat of the October 7 attack.

First, Israel is facing a formidable challenge in regaining its national security balance after failing to achieve all of its declared objectives in Gaza and restoring the country’s domestic socio-political cohesion and national self-confidence. Considering the deep polarization of Israeli society at this critical juncture in its history, returning a sense of normalcy to daily life in a country without the prevailing perpetual state of war with its neighbors will not be easy for any post-war government.

Second, given the Gaza war’s significant contribution to Israel’s deeply divisive politics, the country is expected to face additional challenges in forming a new, functional coalition government, capable and empowered by a stable majority of Israelis to govern effectively after 17 years of significant long-term political damage caused by “Netanyahu-ism,” which put Israel on a path of instability and precariousness. Whether Likud-led or otherwise, a new coalition is anticipated to face

unsurmountable challenges in pursuing a solution to Israel's historic problems with the Palestinians without unsustainable political domination and a permanent state of war. The record of likely replacements for Netanyahu, including Naftali Bennett, Yair Lapid, or Gadi Eisenkot, is not conducive to optimism in this respect.

Third, the post-war government in Israel is expected to encounter serious difficulties in its attempts to restore traditional alliances and international relationships with an alienated world community, including the Jewish diaspora and historically friendly Western nations, such as the United States, whose public is, to a significant extent, outraged and disillusioned by Israel's persistent disregard for and violations of international law, including the genocide committed against the captive Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip.¹²

Fourth, although Bank of Israel officials continue to adhere to their optimistic post-war economic forecast for the country, including low inflation and unemployment, the war's prohibitive cost and long-term implications for the economy likely will limit the scope of the anticipated economic rebound in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth forecast for 2026-2027.¹³ Given the massive overall cost of the war, which the Bank of Israel estimated in March 2026 at \$112 billion, it will take post-war Israel years to replace this propped-up "zombie economy," as economist Shir Hever calls it.¹⁴

The Impact of the Gaza War on Palestine

The tragic influence of the Gaza war on Israel was not confined to the territories that it controls within the so-called Green Line but quickly extended far beyond to affect the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Palestinian diaspora. Just as Israel and world Jewry were stunned by the conduct of the war, so were the estimated 15.5 million Palestinians worldwide, including the 7.4 million living in historic Palestine and the 8.1 million scattered throughout the Palestinian diaspora.¹⁵ Naturally, the Palestinian civilian inhabitants of the Gaza Strip felt the brunt of the fighting and paid a devastating price, subjected to what was widely recognized as genocide, domicide, ethnic cleansing, deliberate starvation, internal displacement, and a total economic collapse. From a Palestinian perspective, this genocidal war was nothing short of a modern-day Nakba, potentially exceeding the 1948 catastrophe in its physical and psychological pain.

The catastrophic human toll has been the most traumatic outcome of this war for Gaza's population, estimated at 2.3 million on the eve of the fighting. According to the British Red Cross, more than 69,000 people were killed and at least 170,000 were injured in the Gaza Strip since October 2023, and 90 percent of the population has been displaced from their homes, leaving 1.5 million in urgent need of emergency shelter.¹⁶ These numbers are tragic as they are, but they take on a more

dramatic dimension when compared to the Strip's overall population. Analysts rarely mention that the death toll in Gaza exceeded 3.28 percent of the population, while 8 percent were injured. The Israeli equivalent of Gazan casualties would be roughly 336,000 dead, 819,520 wounded, and 9.22 million displaced and in need of emergency shelter.¹⁷ One cannot imagine the global outcry if these levels of casualties were sustained by Israeli civilians rather than by Palestinians in Gaza.

Furthermore, although the threat of wholesale displacement and ethnic cleansing, raised by Israel and US leaders, including President Donald Trump in his "Riviera of the Middle East" plan, has fortunately been avoided so far due to international protest, the potential for a mass expulsion has not disappeared and continues to present a real danger.¹⁸ Indeed, calls for the forcible evacuation of the Gaza Strip and the transformation of the enclave into a Jewish community are gradually shifting from a fringe position to a mainstream political demand in Israel. Daniella Weiss, leader of the extremist Jewish pro-settlement group Nachala, told NBC News in April 2026 that "we are here on the way to new Jewish communities in Gaza...what we did in Judea and Samaria, we are going to do the same thing here...the two million or whatever number of Arabs, Gazans, who live here will not live here."¹⁹ These sentiments are not confined to right-wing Nachala sympathizers. Indeed, a poll conducted by the Smith Institute in August 2025 "showed that 49 percent of Israeli Jews supported the occupation of Gaza and the displacement of Palestinians."²⁰ Other polls show as many as 82 percent of Jewish Israelis supporting the forcible expulsion of Palestinians.²¹

Another worrisome result of the war has been the massive destruction of civilian infrastructure throughout the Gaza Strip, rendering rubble removal, reconstruction, and rehabilitation virtually impossible because of the devastation's magnitude and its prohibitive cost, which exceed local and regional capacities. With more than 90 percent of residential buildings, schools, hospitals, and commercial facilities damaged or destroyed, clearing an estimated 61 million tons of rubble is expected to take at least seven years.²² This is in addition to the severe physical and psychological trauma and the fact that human development in the Gaza Strip has been set back by 69 years.²³ Furthermore, the United Nations and the World Bank have estimated that rebuilding Gaza will cost over \$71 billion.²⁴ Thus far, only \$17 billion has been pledged to the Board of Peace created by President Trump in September 2025 to oversee the post-war phase in the devastated territory.²⁵ On May 13, 2026, Director General of the Board of Peace, Nickolay Mladenov, warned that the humanitarian and security situation in Gaza was deteriorating because of continued Israeli strikes and Hamas's refusal to proceed with disarmament.²⁶ Diplomats familiar with the mediation process said that even if Hamas were to agree to begin disarming, Israel "is unlikely to be willing to take the steps necessary to advance the deal."²⁷ The National Committee for the Administration of

Gaza, a technocratic body of Palestinians appointed by the Board to manage day-to-day affairs in the Strip, remains largely inoperative, due to Israeli rejection and lack of serious American attention, and awaiting reluctant Egyptian instructions. Meanwhile, Israel continues to move the “Yellow Line” demarcating the territory in Gaza under its military control, further expanding its control over the Strip.

The highly touted promised reconstruction process is even more difficult to implement because of the collapse of the local economy. Unemployment in the Gaza Strip stands at 80 percent, while GDP per capita has fallen to \$161 per year—i.e., less than 50 cents per day, among the lowest in the world.²⁸ Raja al-Khalidi and Qais Iwdat have observed that the Gaza war has decimated an already “ravaged economy,” rendering widespread talk of recovery to the pre-2023 situation largely unreasonable.²⁹ They conclude that the full impact of a devastating war launched by a regional economic and military power implies that the prospect of Gaza’s restoration and economic recovery is “largely meaningless.”

The catastrophic humanitarian crisis, the massive destruction of civilian infrastructure, and the ravaged local economy brought about by the Gaza war have left the Palestinian leadership with a long list of near-insurmountable challenges to address, should the ceasefire with Israel survive and the world community refocus its attention on the future of Palestine. The first of these challenges is a leadership and governance crisis.³⁰ Considering Hamas’s agreement to relinquish its rule, admittedly under duress, to a Palestinian government of technocrats, who will administer the decimated territory in the post-war phase remains unclear.³¹ The government of technocrats proposed by the Trump plan for Gaza does not enjoy the grassroots support needed to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability, and has not even been allowed to start working. The Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority (PA), nominated in Egypt’s reconstruction plan to govern Gaza, will face serious challenges considering its limited popularity in the Strip, particularly after its undignified departure from Gaza in 2007.³² Furthermore, both Fatah and the PA are guaranteed to face local opposition in light of their checkered record in governing the West Bank over the past three decades.

The second challenge is the fragmentation of Palestinian politics and the inability of Fatah and Hamas to overcome their ideological and political differences, which diminishes public support for either party to take charge of governing the Gaza Strip. Technically, national reconciliation is not a requirement to govern the West Bank or the Gaza Strip, but successful governance of either territory requires a long-term functional understanding and a form of political *modus vivendi* between the two camps to learn how to govern and to operate as a loyal opposition to manage future Palestinian statehood. Both Fatah and Hamas must put to rest this formidable challenge presented by their historic animosities and competition if they want to move forward toward eventual political self-determination.³³

The third and most difficult challenge for the Palestinian national movement at this critical juncture is how to cope with an Israeli foe and an international political system that has changed radically over the past 30 years, particularly over the past decade with Benjamin Netanyahu in control of Israeli politics and Donald Trump undermining longstanding tenets of US foreign policy, especially in the Middle East.³⁴ From a Palestinian perspective, the personal beliefs, statements, and policies attributed to Netanyahu are not the problem. The challenge lies in dealing with a radicalized Israel as a country, a political system, a polity, and a foundational ideology of Palestinian subordination. Unfortunately, Palestinian political and strategic adjustment has lagged behind the pace and direction of change on the part of Israel and its supporters, particularly in the United States. For example, the two-state solution framework for the conflict with Israel remains at the center of current Palestinian (PA and Palestine Liberation Organization, or PLO) strategy, yet it has been long relinquished by Israel and the United States. A dialogue of the deaf is the last type of diplomatic process needed to bridge the massive and growing political gap separating Israelis and Palestinians in the aftermath of the Gaza war.

Conclusion

It is not certain whether the Palestinian national movement, as constituted and represented by the PA and the remnants of the PLO, still possesses the capacity and the will to tackle the obstacles highlighted throughout this book by leading a dispersed constituency, half of whom reside under a brutal Israeli occupation that is aggressively waging an intensive genocidal campaign to choke their political aspirations, once and for all. As is evident throughout this volume, the challenges are formidable, abundant, and quite difficult to overcome. They include:

1. A weakened international system that proved, since the beginning of the Gaza war, its incompetence to prevent genocide in Palestine and forbid states like Israel from making a mockery of international laws and norms in the 21st century.
2. The growing tendency throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds to turn inward by disengaging from the Arab-Israeli conflict, by pursuing normalization arrangements with Israel, and by reducing their political and economic support for the Palestinian cause.
3. A dominant, radical shift in US policies in the Middle East, rendering Washington a direct enabler and partner to extreme Israeli policies and practices throughout the region, coupled with growing passivity on the part of European allies who seem increasingly hesitant to challenge or to moderate one-sided US support for Israel.

4. A gradual decline in official support for the centrality of the Palestine issue around the world, especially in the Global North, despite the massive growth in global public support for Palestinian rights.

Consequently, only time will tell if the Palestine national struggle will regain its political balance and refocus its pursuit of liberation and self-determination in an effective, realistic, and timely manner to soften and potentially reverse these trends. But it is evident that disregard for international law erodes the rules-based global. No sustainable future can be achieved without upholding international law and human rights principles and ensuring the rights and protections of the Palestinian people.

Endnotes

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Biographies of Contributors

Susan M. Akram

Susan M. Akram is a Clinical Professor of Law at Boston University (BU), the Director of BU Law's International Human Rights Clinic, and a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at Arab Center Washington DC. Akram's scholarship focuses on immigration, asylum, and refugees, with a particular interest in the Middle East and the Arab and Muslim world. She is also a recipient of the Fulbright Senior Scholar Teaching and Research Award and has served as a Lecturer to the United Nations (including the High Commission for Refugees and the Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees), the European Union, and various government ministries in Europe and Canada. She has written extensively on Palestinian refugee rights and has challenged prevailing interpretations of the USA Patriot Act and women's asylum claims from the Arab/Muslim world post-9/11. Her legal work includes resettlement and refugee claims of Guantanamo detainees and co-counseling several high-profile cases, including the 20+-year litigation of a case of first impression on the interpretation of one of the exclusion bars to asylum, *In re AH*. She taught at the American University in Cairo, Birzeit University, Al-Quds University, and regularly teaches at Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre. Akram holds a JD from Georgetown University, an MSt with Distinction from the University of Oxford, a Diplôme in International Human Rights from the Institut International des Droits de l'Homme, and a BA with honors in Political Science from the University of Michigan.

Hanna Alshaikh

Hanna Alshaikh is the Palestine Project Coordinator and Fellow at Arab Center Washington DC and a PhD candidate in History and Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University. Previously, Alshaikh was an Adjunct Professor of Religious

Studies at DePaul University, teaching an introductory course on Islam and one on religion and politics in the Middle East. Her research examines the role of the Palestinian diaspora in Arab world political discourse, with a special focus on Palestinians in the United States. The project maps their transnational participation in shaping the Palestinian national movement and their engagement with US politics. Her work sits at the intersection of Arab and Palestinian intellectual history, activist history, diaspora studies, Arab American studies, and the history of US social movements. Her writings have appeared in outlets including *The Hill*, *Vox*, *Mondoweiss*, *The Nation*, and *Middle East Eye*. She holds a master's degree from the University of Chicago's Center for Middle Eastern Studies.

Nur Arafteh

Nur Arafteh is the Head of the Political Economy Program and Senior Fellow at Arab Center Washington DC. Previously, Arafteh was a Fellow of the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, where she was also a Co-Lead on the political economy of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) program. Her research interests include reconstruction and private sector development, business-state relations, food insecurity, and peacebuilding strategies. Previously, she was an Associate Researcher at the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS), where she conducted research on topics related to private sector development, economic governance, and food security. In addition, she has consulted for international organizations, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), producing reports on the Sustainable Development Goals in Palestine, as well as economic resilience and development strategy in Jerusalem. She also taught economics at Al-Quds Bard College, served as a Teaching Assistant in Econometrics at Columbia University, and tutored political economy at Stanford University. Arafteh holds a PhD in Development and International Economics from the University of Oxford, as well as an MPhil in the same field from the University of Cambridge, and a dual BA in Political Science and Economics from Sciences Po Paris and Columbia University.

Yara M. Asi

Yara M. Asi is an Assistant Professor in the School of Global Health Management and Informatics at the University of Central Florida, a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at Arab Center Washington DC, a Senior Fellow in the Raphaël Lemkin Genocide Prevention Program at George Mason University, and a Visiting Scholar at the FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University where she serves as the Co-Director of the Palestine Program for Health and Human Rights. Previously, she was the Co-Chair of the Palestine Health Justice Working Group in

the American Public Health Association, and worked with Amnesty International USA, the Palestinian American Research Center, and Al Shabaka Palestinian Policy Network. Her research agenda focuses on health, human rights, and development in conflict-affected and fragile settings. Her work has been published in peer-reviewed journals including *The Lancet*, *Conflict and Health*, and *BMJ Global Health*, along with media outlets like *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Nation*. Her first book, *How War Kills: The Overlooked Threats to Our Health* (2024), was published by Johns Hopkins University Press. She holds a PhD in Public Affairs, Health Services Management and Research Track from the University of Central Florida and was a Fulbright Scholar in the West Bank.

Phyllis Bennis

Phyllis Bennis is a Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) in Washington, DC, where she directs the New Internationalism Project, and an Associate Fellow at the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam. Her work is primarily focused on US foreign policy, the Middle East, UN affairs, and Israel-Palestine, with particular attention to US militarism and global dominance. Bennis spent a decade working as a journalist at the United Nations, where she also served as an informal Middle East adviser to several senior UN officials. She was a founding member of the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights and served on the national board of Jewish Voice for Peace and on the board of the Afro-Middle East Center in Johannesburg. She is a frequent commentator in the media, appearing on Al-Jazeera, BBC, Democracy Now, NPR, and other international outlets, and her writing has been published in *The Nation*, *The Guardian*, *In These Times*, *Common Dreams*, and other major US newspapers. Bennis is the author and editor of twelve books, including *Understanding Palestine and Israel* (2025), *Understanding the US-Iran Crisis* (2008), and *Challenging Empire: People, Governments and the UN Defy U.S. Power* (2005).

Sonia Boulos

Sonia Boulos is an Associate Professor in International Human Rights Law at Nebrija University (Madrid), and a member of the SEGERICO Research Group on Security, Risk Management and Conflict, as well as the CINSEDAT Research Center on Security, Rule of Law and High Technologies. Her research is dedicated to the protection of human rights at the international level, including human rights of Palestinians in Israel, gender equality, use of force in international law, and the governance of present-day security threats. Previously, she served as a Staff Attorney at the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, held teaching positions at IE University and the University of Haifa, and worked with several civil society organizations addressing legal and gender-based discrimination. Boulos has authored or co-authored numerous academic publications, including articles in

leading journals such as the *International Journal of Human Rights*, *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, *Politics and Governance*, *Profesional de la Información*, and is the co-editor of the *Palestine/Israel Review*. She has participated in multiple international research projects, including EU-funded initiatives under the Horizon 2020 program. Boulos holds a JSD and an LLM in International Human Rights Law from the University of Notre Dame, where she was a Fulbright Scholar, and an LLB from the University of Haifa.

Heba Gowayed

Heba Gowayed is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Hunter College and the Graduate Center at City University of New York, as well as a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the Arab Center Washington DC. A global and comparative sociologist, her work covers migration, borders, and how institutions shape people's lives. She wrote *Refuge* (2022), an award-winning book published by Princeton University Press, where she follows displaced Syrians as they try to make a home in the US, Canada, and Germany. She is currently writing her second book, *The Cost of Borders*, which theorizes borders as costly and frequently deadly transactions that structure mobility and inequality worldwide. Her academic work has appeared in leading journals including *Gender & Society*, *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, and *Sociological Forum*. She also writes for media outlets such as *The Guardian*, *Slate*, *Al Jazeera*, *The New Humanitarian*, and *Teen Vogue*, and her research has been featured across major media and podcast platforms. Previously, Gowayed was an Assistant Professor at Boston University and a Postdoctoral Fellow at Columbia University. She is the recipient of the Sandi Cooper Award for Outstanding Research for Associate Professors (2026-2027). She holds a PhD in Sociology from Princeton University, an MA in Sociology from Columbia University, and a BA in Political Science from the American University in Cairo.

Imad K. Harb

Imad K. Harb is a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at Arab Center Washington DC. He is the Founder and Director of Quest for Middle East Analysis, a research and consulting firm. Previously, he served as Director of Research at Arab Center Washington DC. He also worked as Adjunct Professor of Middle East Studies at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University, served as a Senior Analyst at the Abu Dhabi-based Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, and taught political science and international relations at the University of Utah and San Francisco State University. In addition, he worked as Senior Program Officer at the United States Institute of Peace. Harb writes and publishes on several topics including civil-military relations, regional politics, and US policy

in the Middle East and North Africa and the Arabian Gulf, and is co-author, with John Bruni, of *Domestic and Regional Challenges to US-Iran Relations* (Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2015). Harb earned a PhD in political science from the University of Utah.

Nader Hashemi

Nader Hashemi is the Director of the Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding and an Associate Professor of Middle East and Islamic Politics at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. Before coming to Georgetown, Hashemi served as the founding Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver's Josef Korbel School of International Studies, where he also co-directed the Religion and International Affairs program. Over the years, Hashemi has held academic positions at Northwestern, UCLA, and the University of Toronto, and was a Visiting Scholar at Cambridge University. Hashemi is the author of *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy* (2009) and Co-Editor of several volumes, including *The People Reloaded* (2011), *The Syria Dilemma* (2013), *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East* (2017), and the four-volume *Islam and Human Rights* (2022). His forthcoming works include the *Oxford Handbook on Islam and Secularism* and a book examining global political divides over Israel/Palestine. He is a media commentator and appears regularly on PBS, NPR, CNN, CBC, Al Jazeera, and the BBC, and his writing has been published in *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *The Nation*, and other outlets. Hashemi holds a PhD from the University of Toronto, an MA from Carleton University, and a BA from the University of Western Ontario.

Waleed Hazbun

Waleed Hazbun is the Richard L. Chambers Professor of Middle Eastern Studies in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alabama and a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at Arab Center Washington DC. His research focuses on the international relations of the Middle East, with a focus on US foreign policy, security studies, and international tourism. Previously, Hazbun taught international relations at Johns Hopkins University and the American University of Beirut, where he served as Director of the Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies (CAMES). He also held visiting research positions at the University of California, Berkeley, and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Hazbun is the author of *Beaches, Ruins, Resorts: The Politics of Tourism in the Arab World* (2008) and *Between Tragedy and Chaos: US Policy in a Turbulent Middle East under Obama and Trump in The Struggle to Reshape the Middle East in the 21st Century* (2023). His research has appeared in journals including *Third World Quarterly*, *Critical Studies in Security*,

and *Current History*. He is a Senior Researcher with the Security in Context network and has served on editorial and advisory boards for the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), the *Journal of Tourism History*, the Southeast Regional Middle East and Islamic Studies Society (SERMEISS), and the Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS). Hazbun holds a PhD in Political Science from MIT and a BA in Politics and Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University.

Shir Hever

Shir Hever is an independent economic researcher and the Managing Director of the Alliance for Justice between Israelis and Palestinians, where he leads work on political economy, human rights, and accountability in the context of Israel/Palestine. His research examines the economic structures of the Israeli occupation, including the privatization of security, the global and Israeli arms trade, international aid flows, and the political economy of apartheid and military control. Hever previously served as the coordinator of the military embargo campaign for the Boycott National Committee (BNC) and has been active in several civil society organizations, including the Alternative Information Center and Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East, where he is a board member. Hever is the author of *The Privatization of Israeli Security* (2017), based on his doctoral research, and has published widely on the economic dimensions of occupation, security, and militarism. He has reported on Israel/Palestine for more than a decade, including as a correspondent for the Real News Network, and frequently gives talks and interviews on issues related to his research. Hever holds a PhD from the Free University of Berlin.

Khalil E. Jahshan

Khalil E. Jahshan is a Palestinian American political analyst and media commentator. He currently serves as the Chairman of the Board of Directors and Founding Consultant of Arab Center Washington DC, after having served as its Executive Director from 2014 to 2026. Between 2004 and 2013, he was a Lecturer in International Studies and Languages at Pepperdine University and Executive Director of Pepperdine's Seaver College Washington DC Internship Program. Previously, Jahshan served as Executive Vice President of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) and Director of its government affairs affiliate, National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA)-ADC. Throughout his career, he held numerous leadership positions in Arab American organizations, including Vice President of the American Committee on Jerusalem, President of the National Association of Arab Americans, National Director of the Association of Arab-American University Graduates, Assistant Director of the Palestine Research and

Educational Center, and Lecturer in Arabic at the University of Chicago Extension and at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. Jahshan also served on boards of directors and advisory boards of several Middle East-oriented organizations including ANERA, MIFTAH, and Search for Common Ground. He appears regularly as a political commentator on Arab and American media outlets.

Mehran Kamrava

Mehran Kamrava is a Professor of Government at Georgetown University in Qatar, where his research focuses on the modern political history and contemporary politics of the Middle East. He also directs the Iranian Studies Unit at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, overseeing research on political institutions, state formation, and ideological change in Iran and the broader region. A prolific scholar, Kamrava is the author of numerous books, including *How Islam Rules in Iran: Theology and Theocracy in the Islamic Republic* (2024), *Righteous Politics: Power and Resilience in Iran* (2023), *A Dynastic History of Iran* (2022), *A Concise History of Revolution* (2020), *Troubled Waters: Insecurity in the Persian Gulf* (2018), *Inside the Arab State* (2018), *The Impossibility of Palestine* (2016), and *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics* (2015). His edited volumes include *Iran's Look East Policy* (2025), *The Sacred Republic* (2023), *The Routledge Handbook of Persian Gulf Politics* (2020), *Fragile Politics* (2016), and *Beyond the Arab Spring* (2014). Kamrava also serves as Series Editor for *Contemporary Issues in the Middle East* and *Iran from the Pahlavis to the Present*. He earned his PhD from Cambridge and his BA from California State University, Northridge.

Tamara Kharroub

Tamara Kharroub is the Executive Director and Senior Fellow at Arab Center Washington DC. Her research work focuses on human rights, media, and democracy in the Middle East and North Africa and on US policy toward Palestine/Israel. She publishes research and policy analysis papers exploring the role of media and communication technology in the political process including issues of digital authoritarianism, disinformation, cyber power, and AI-assisted warfare. She also works on research focusing on Palestine/Israel, human rights, identity politics, women's rights, and US foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa. Kharroub has published chapters in several books and academic journals, contributed analyses to various media outlets, and spoken at international conferences including at the UN on issues related to Palestine, media, and human rights. Kharroub holds a PhD from Indiana University Bloomington and an MA from the University of Westminster, and is the recipient of several awards and fellowships including Fulbright.

Rami G. Khouri

Rami G. Khouri is a Distinguished Public Policy Fellow at the American University of Beirut (AUB), where he serves as a Director of Global Engagement and an Adjunct Professor of Journalism. He is also a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School and a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at Arab Center Washington DC. A veteran journalist, editor, and analyst, Khouri's work examines Middle East politics, public policy, conflict, and media, with a focus on Arab societies and global engagement with the region. Khouri previously served as the founding Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB, and held senior editorial roles, including Executive Editor of the Beirut-based *Daily Star* and Editor-in-Chief of the *Jordan Times*. His political columns and commentary have appeared in major outlets across the Middle East and globally. He was a Nieman Journalism Fellow at Harvard University and held visiting fellowship positions at Princeton, Stanford, Mount Holyoke, Villanova, Syracuse, and other institutions. A frequent lecturer and media commentator, Khouri appears regularly on international news platforms and serves on advisory boards, including at the Northwestern University Journalism School in Qatar. He earned his BA and MSc from Syracuse University. In 2006, he was awarded the Pax Christi International Peace Prize for his work supporting peace and reconciliation in the Middle East.

Yousef Munayyer

Yousef Munayyer is the Head of the Palestine/Israel Program and Senior Fellow at Arab Center Washington DC. He also serves as a member of the editorial committee of the *Journal of Palestine Studies* and Co-director of the Transnational Repression Project, a research initiative on transnational repression housed at the University of Michigan's Center for Political Studies. Previously, he was Executive Director of the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights and Director of The Jerusalem Fund and its Palestine Center. He taught on Palestine as well as repression and dissent in the Middle East at Georgetown University and George Mason University. Some of his published articles can be found in *The New York Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The Washington Post*, *The Nation*, *Boston Globe*, *Foreign Policy*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *Middle East Policy*, and others. Munayyer holds a PhD in International Relations and Comparative Politics from the University of Maryland.

Tahani Mustafa

Tahani Mustafa is a Lecturer in International Relations in the Department of War Studies at King's College London and a Visiting Fellow in the Middle East and North Africa Program at The European Council on Foreign Relations. Her research focuses on security governance, development, and socio-political and legal structures in Palestine, with broader expertise in peace and conflict, political violence,

and state-society relations across the Middle East. Previously, Mustafa served as the Senior Palestine Analyst at the International Crisis Group, where she led field-based analysis in the West Bank. She has also worked extensively in policy analysis and advocacy, engaging with UN special envoys, Western governments, humanitarian organizations, and international NGOs, and has participated in both Track I and Track II diplomacy. Her commentary and analysis have appeared across major international media outlets, including CNN, BBC, and Al Jazeera. Mustafa held academic positions at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) University of London, the University of Exeter, and Mutah University, and was an Economic and Social Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow at the London School of Economics. She holds a PhD in Politics and International Studies, an MSc in Middle East Politics, and a BA in Politics, all from SOAS University of London.

John B. Quigley

John B. Quigley is Professor of Law Emeritus at the Moritz College of Law at The Ohio State University, where he previously held the title of President's Club Professor of Law and received the university's Distinguished Scholar Award. Before joining Ohio State, Quigley served as a research scholar at Moscow State University and a research associate in comparative law at Harvard Law School. He held visiting positions at the University of Dar es Salaam and contributed extensively to international legal proceedings, including as counsel or consultant before the International Court of Justice, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the International Criminal Court. Quigley is the author of numerous books, including *The Case for Palestine: An International Law Perspective* (2005), *The Statehood of Palestine* (2010), *The Six-Day War and Israeli Self-Defense* (2012), *The Legality of a Jewish State* (2021), and *Britain and Its Mandate over Palestine* (2022). His broader scholarship spans human rights, genocide, consular law, and socialist legal systems. Fluent in Russian and French, with proficiency in Spanish and Swahili, Quigley holds an AB, MA, and LLB from Harvard University.

Isabel Ruck

Isabel Ruck is the Head of Research and Scientific Coordination at CAREP Paris, where she oversees research development, scientific programming, and the center's Ecology and Politics research axis. A political scientist specializing in the Middle East, she has conducted extensive field-based research and published widely, including editing a double issue of *Maghreb-Machrek* (2018) devoted to minority rights in the region. Ruck has over a decade of teaching experience working as an Adjunct Professor at Sciences Po Paris, where she teaches courses on world politics, religion, and politics of the MENA region. She also teaches in the Global BBA program at ESSEC Business School and has held academic appointments at

UPEC, ESPOL, NEOMA, and Saint Joseph University in Beirut. In addition to her academic work, Ruck has extensive experience in project management and policy consulting, including working with the Pharos Observatory and Brussels-based companies supporting European Commission initiatives. She is an associate member of ESSEC's Institute for Research and Teaching on Negotiation and a member of the Cercle des Chercheurs sur le Moyen-Orient. Ruck holds an MA in International Conflict Analysis from the University of Kent and completed seven years of doctoral research in International Relations at Sciences Po Paris.

Mohammed Samhouri

Mohammed Samhouri is a Palestinian economist with over three decades of experience in policy-oriented research, economic advisory work, and international development. He served as a senior consultant to major international organizations, including the World Bank, UNDP, and ESCWA, and was a board member for the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction. Samhouri previously served as a Senior Economic Advisor to the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, where he was central to national development strategies and coordinating donor engagement. In 2005, he worked with the Palestinian ministerial committee to prepare Gaza for Israeli disengagement. He later held academic appointments as a Senior Fellow and Lecturer at Brandeis University's Crown Center for Middle East Studies. He is the author of the UNDP-commissioned report *Beyond Survival: Challenges to Economic Recovery and Long-Term Development in the Gaza Strip* (2017) and has written widely on Palestinian economic policy. Samhouri has a PhD in Economics from Kansas State University, an MA from the University of Saskatchewan, and a BSc in Economics from Cairo University, with post-doctoral executive training at Harvard University and the IMF Institute.

Martin Shaw

Martin Shaw is a Research Professor at the Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals and Emeritus Professor of International Relations and Politics at the University of Sussex. A leading sociologist of war and genocide, Shaw previously served as a Professor of Political and International Sociology at the University of Hull and taught at Durham University. His scholarship has shaped the field of genocide studies, with major works including *War and Genocide* (2003), *Genocide and International Relations: Changing Patterns in the Transitions of the Late Modern World* (2013), *What is Genocide?* (2015), and *The New Age of Genocide: Intellectual and Political Challenges After Gaza* (2025). His broader research spans global politics, militarism, civil society, and the modern state, as reflected in works such as *Dialectics of War* (1988), *Post-Military Society* (1991), and *Theory of the*

Global State (2000). Shaw received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Network of Genocide Scholars in 2021. He holds a BA in Sociology from the London School of Economics and a PhD from Hull University.

Safia K. Southey

Safia K. Southey is a JD/LLM Candidate at Columbia Law School and the University of Amsterdam, where she specializes in international criminal law, transitional justice, and accountability in the Middle East. She currently works as a Researcher for the UN Special Rapporteur on Transitional Justice and the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. Her scholarship has appeared in *Opinio Juris*, *Lawfare*, *Verfassungsblog*, *ASIL Insights*, *Responsible Statecraft*, and *International Journal of Transitional Justice*. Southey's professional experience includes organizations such as UNRWA, UNHCR, Amnesty International, the International Center for Transitional Justice, the Center for Justice and Accountability, and PILPG. She conducted research and consultancies in more than 100 countries, with early fieldwork in Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan. She holds a Dual BA from Sciences Po and Columbia University, where she graduated with the highest honors. She also has an MSc in Conflict Studies from the London School of Economics.

Sarah Leah Whitson

Sarah Leah Whitson is an international human rights lawyer and the former Executive Director of Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), where she served from 2020 to 2026. Prior to that, she spent nearly sixteen years as Executive Director of the Middle East and North Africa Division at Human Rights Watch, where she oversaw research and advocacy across the region and led dozens of missions in conflict zones and humanitarian crises. Whitson's career includes senior roles in advocacy, litigation, and corporate law, including positions at Goldman Sachs and Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton as well as service as general counsel to the Center for Economic and Social Rights. She has testified before US congressional bodies, briefed international institutions, and published widely in outlets such as *Foreign Policy*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The New York Times*, and *Just Security*. She is the co-author of *From Apartheid to Democracy: A Blueprint for Peace in Israel-Palestine* (2025) and continues to write and consult on human rights and US policy in the region. Whitson has a JD from Harvard Law School and a BA with highest honors from the University of California, Berkeley, and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

James J. Zogby

James J. Zogby is the Founder and President of the Arab American Institute, a leading national organization for political empowerment and policy research

on Arab American communities. He is also the Managing Director of Zogby Research Services, which conducts public opinion polling across the Middle East and Turkey. A lecturer and scholar of Middle East affairs and US-Arab relations, Zogby worked as a Visiting Professor of Social Research and Public Policy at New York University Abu Dhabi and is a frequent commentator in international media. Zogby has advised US presidential campaigns for more than three decades. He served as Deputy Campaign Manager and Senior Advisor to Jesse Jackson's presidential bids, and later advised Gore's, Obama's, and Sanders's campaigns. He has held senior leadership roles within the Democratic National Committee, including service on the Executive Committee (2001-2017) and as long-time Co-Chair of the Resolutions Committee. In 2013, President Barack Obama appointed him to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, where he served two terms and was elected Vice Chair twice. He is the author of several books, including *Arab Voices* (2010) and *The Tumultuous Decade* (2019), and has written a weekly syndicated column since 1992. Zogby holds a PhD in Islamic Studies from Temple University and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Raef Zreik

Raef Zreik is a jurist and scholar of political philosophy and the philosophy of law, whose work looks at questions of citizenship, identity, Zionism, and the Palestinian condition. He is a Senior Lecturer in Jurisprudence at Ono Academic College, a Senior Lecturer in Political Philosophy at the Academic College of Tel Aviv-Yaffo, and a Senior Research Fellow at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. From 2010 to 2022, he worked as the Academic Co-Director of the Minerva Humanities Center at Tel Aviv University. Zreik's recent works include *The Ethics of the Intellectual* (in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 2020), *Zionism and Political Theology* (in *Political Theology*, 2023), *War and Self-Defense* (in *Analysis & Kritik*, 2024), and the monograph *Kant's Struggle for Autonomy: On the Structure of Practical Reason* (2023). He held visiting positions at Georgetown Law, Brown University's Cogut Institute for the Humanities, the Human Rights Center at Yale Law School, and Harvard Divinity School. Zreik holds LLB and LLM degrees from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, an LLM from Columbia Law School, and an SJD from Harvard Law School.



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Editors

Khalil E. Jahshan and Tamara Kharroub

Contributors

Susan M. Akram

Hanna Alshaikh

Nur Arafah

Yara M. Asi

Phyllis Bennis

Sonia Boulos

Heba Gawayed

Imad K. Harb

Nader Hashemi

Waleed Hazbun

Shir Hever

Khalil E. Jahshan

Mehran Kamrava

Tamara Kharroub

Rami G. Khouri

Yousef Munayyer

Tahani Mustafa

John B. Quigley

Isabel Ruck

Mohammed Samhour

Martin Shaw

Safia K. Southey

Sarah Leah Whitson

James J. Zogby

Raef Zreik

Arab Center Washington DC

1400 K Street NW, Suite 700

Washington, DC 20005

+1 202-750-4000

ArabCenterDC.org

@ArabCenterDC

