



GAZA'S DAY AFTER: IT IS NOT THE PLAN THAT IS MISSING BUT THE WILL TO IMPLEMENT IT

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A strip of the Mediterranean coastline, forty-one kilometres wide with a depth of six to twelve kilometres inland, has been obliterated. Since Hamas's vicious attack against Israel on 7 October 2023, the deadliest since the establishment of the country, [Israel has conducted one of the most intense bombing campaigns](#) in history. [Invoking Amalek](#), the scriptural enemy of the Jewish people, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has directed a campaign of destruction of biblical proportions against the Gaza Strip. It is considered [the most complete destruction](#) of almost any urban area since the dawn of modern warfare, comparing unfavourably even to the [nuclear devastation of Hiroshima](#).

The brutality of the onslaught has been such that in November last year the International Criminal Court (ICC) [issued an arrest warrant for Netanyahu and his then Defence Minister Yuval Gallant](#). In the meantime, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has been investigating whether Israel is guilty of genocide. Leading international human rights organisations are not so circumspect, and

have already asserted that [Israel's actions amount to the crime of crimes](#). The Israeli government began [planning to use Hamas's attack on 7 October 2023 to ethnically cleanse the Gaza Strip](#) within days, and [senior officials continue to call openly to do so](#) to this day.

Biden Stalls

The failure to end the Gaza war falls primarily on the Biden Administration, which dealt with the 7 October attack by Hamas and the Israel onslaught on Gaza until the entry of Donald Trump into the White House on 20 January. From the start of the war [President Biden refused to call for an end to Israel's genocidal campaign](#) – which it supported fully with weapons as well as diplomatically – choosing to [focus instead on “the day after”](#).

Within days of the war, President [Biden laid out a plan for post-war Gaza](#) that called for the elimination of Hamas; withdrawal of Israel; the takeover by a Palestinian Authority (PA); and a path towards a Palestinian state. Before the end of October, Secretary of State Antony Blinken began to refer to a “revitalised” Palestinian Authority (PA) governing Gaza, and, from that point on and for the rest of the Biden Administration, [the focus turned to Palestinian Authority \(PA\) reform, becoming a precondition for its return to Gaza](#). Putting the onus on the Palestinian Authority (PA) to transform itself instead of pressure on Israel to allow the Palestinian Authority's return to Gaza was a stalling manoeuvre, and effectively sabotaged the prospects of solution to the war.

From the beginning of the war, [Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia refused to discuss “day after” plans](#) because it would be interpreted as a green light for the continuation of Israel's unbridled offensive. With a ceasefire in place on 19 January, the Arab states leading efforts to resolve the crisis were finally in a position to discuss plans regarding mid- and long-term solutions to conflict between Israel and Gaza.

Trump's Takeover

But then US President Donald Trump stunned the world in early February, when days after his second inauguration [he revealed a plan for the removal of the population of the Gaza Strip and its subsequent takeover by his country](#), endorsing Israel's ethnic cleansing schemes and evoking the height of 19th-century US imperialism. He has repeated this idea justifying it on the grounds that the Gaza Strip has been made uninhabitable, and has gone as far as to say that [“a civilisation has been wiped out in Gaza”](#) by Israel. Further, he explained that Egypt and Jordan could accommodate the expelled inhabitants of Gaza, sending shockwaves through the corridors of power of these two very fragile regimes.

At times Trump's aides have justified the plan to ethnically cleanse 2.3 million Palestinians from Gaza and turn it into a plum real estate development project by claiming that no one has volunteered an alternative solution to [the problem of Gaza](#). Deeply concerned over the possible repercussions to regional stability, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia convened an emergency

session of the Arab League within a month of Trump's shocking proposal in order to present and agree on a [joint plan for the reconstruction of Gaza](#) that would not require the expulsion of the Palestinian population.

Pharaonic Plans

More than anything else, the Egyptian plan, entitled "Early Recovery, Reconstruction and Development of Gaza", represents an effort to show there is a concrete and viable plan to reconstruct Gaza, and it devotes the vast majority of its ninety-one pages to that end, providing a serious and useful roadmap. The report is a detailed needs assessment for the reconstruction based on an analysis of the damages to the Strip. For the early recovery, for example, it proposes temporary housing, dividing the Gaza Strip into five segments (pp. 81-2). In one section, it compares strategies of postbellum urban reconstructions from Hiroshima and Berlin after WWII and Beirut after the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). It prioritises the various stages of reconstruction (p. 41); sets out a strategy to deal with the debris (p. 44); and offers a template for land distribution, whether residential, governmental, commercial, agricultural, infrastructures or public facilities (p. 55) illustrated with plans (p. 59). At one point it discusses ways to preserve Palestinian identity architecturally (p. 71). The justification of the reconstruction cost, \$53 billion, is articulated extensively – in recent years Egyptian construction companies have been busy building a [New Administrative Capital](#), and developed extensive expertise in pharaonic real estate projects.

The physical reconstruction of Gaza will be a massive endeavour, but it will not move a grain of sand unless a political and security framework is established. In that area the plan presented in the document is the consecration of ideas that have been debated and continue to be discussed among the main Arab stakeholders since the start of the war. These are presented in the first five pages, in a section simply entitled "General Context", which reaffirms the Palestinian "right to self-determination." As a corollary, it calls on efforts to "reach a just settlement that protects the Palestinian people's legitimate right to an independent state alongside and in peace with Israel" while condemning "efforts to entrench geographic and political division between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in order to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state."

Israel's – and now quite clearly also the US's – rejection of Palestinian self-determination in Gaza and the West Bank – or even any form of Palestinian governance in Gaza – is the fundamental obstacle to a solution to post-war Gaza. Even if Israel were to accept it there are two additional challenges: Hamas's fate and Israeli security guarantees. These are addressed summarily in the subsection on the "Administration of the Gaza Strip during Reconstruction", which calls for "the establishment of a Gaza Administration Committee, currently in progress, in order to manage the next stage, under Palestinian rule, for the administration of the Gaza Strip's issues in the transitional phase for a period of six months." It will be "an independent committee formed by technocrats and non-partisan figures under the umbrella of the Palestinian government, in order to strengthen the PA and prepare its complete return to the Gaza Strip."

On the very sensitive security dimension, first, “Egypt and Jordan are training Palestinian police officers in preparation for the deployment in order to strengthen the Palestinian Authority (PA) to return to the Gaza Strip.” Second, it calls on “the Security Council to study the idea of international presence in the Palestinian territories (the West Bank and Gaza), including the deployment of an international protection/peace keeping force with a clear mandate, and reinforced by a schedule for the establishment of a Palestinian state.” Third, “the challenge of the multiple Palestinian armed parties is one that can be dealt with forever, only if the reasons for it were eradicated through a clear horizon and a credible political process that returns the rights to its owners.” The plan also proposes “work on a mid-term ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA), for a limited time, in all the Palestinian territories to determine confidence building measures.”

These appear as somewhat cursory remarks, particularly in comparison to the detail and methodology of the rest of the document. But the agreement in the Cairo Summit over these terms is important, given some differences among Palestinians and Arab stakeholders until now over these questions. For example, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was said to take a stronger line, pushing for reference to an international “force” rather than just a “presence”, while also seeking a fundamental overhaul of Palestinian Authority (PA) leadership. The Egyptian plan does make an oblique reference to Palestinian Authority (PA) reform but does not make it a condition for post-war Gaza governance. Palestinian factions – [other than Fatah and Hamas who were invited to Cairo in early December to discuss Palestinian Authority \(PA\) control of post-war Gaza](#) – feel that Egypt is dictating the terms, but they are also aware that they are sorely lacking a strong leadership and not in a position to raise too many objections.

These are questions that have been debated for two decades as part of the intra-Palestinian reconciliation dialogue, and while there might be disagreement here and there over terminology or methodology, there is a fundamental agreement on the basic principles, which represent a sufficient basis for action. Hamas has been looking for a way out of Gaza's governance for years and the 7 October attack itself was the result of the failure of those efforts to work out an arrangement by which it could give up control without being perceived as completely surrendering. Hamas demands some sort of [token presence in the governance of Gaza](#), even if it is just, in its most limited expression, the right to veto a technocrat or two in the Gaza Administration Committee. In this regard, many Palestinians see the sort of flexibility that Europe and the United States are demonstrating towards the [new Syrian authorities, an offshoot of al-Qaida](#), and they are wondering why there is no such pragmatism, not even close, when it comes to Hamas.

Similarly, the disarmament of Palestinian factions cannot be an unconditional and immediate demilitarisation of Gaza. Given Israel's refusal to contemplate any form of Palestinian self-determination (if any doubt lingered, the Israeli parliament voted overwhelmingly on 18 July 2024 to ban the establishment of a Palestinian state), on the contrary, its ceaseless efforts to ethnically cleanse Palestinian territory as a preamble to its annexation makes it hard for Palestinian militants to imagine that by giving up their weapons they will be doing anything other

than surrendering as a coda for the end of Palestinian nationalism. Any Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) plan needs to be a gradual undertaking tied to a political process, culminating in Palestinian statehood.

Solution-ism?

That any solution to the conflict between Israel and Gaza needs to include these three conditions is known to all parties that have taken any interest in this matter: a) a path towards establishing a Palestinian state; b) the return of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to Gaza (or any form of united Palestinian leadership); and c) Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. The first is of course the most important as without it, the Palestinian Authority (PA) or any sort of international peacekeeping presence would be perceived as an occupying power.

The very idea that there is no plan for the day after Gaza is simply an effort to distract attention from the real work that needs to be done to pressure Israel to agree to these conditions. This is not dissimilar to the problem with efforts in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a whole, which is that interested parties have sufficed with what is known as “solutionism”, expressing support for a two-state solution, and encouraging the parties to enter negotiations, without taking any decisive steps towards it. The fact is that there is an overwhelming consensus on the majority of issues at stake, but also an absence of pressure on Israel to end its occupation — declared illegal by the ICJ on 19 July — and recognise Palestinian right to self-determination. The rest are details.