

# Palestinian Elections and a Sovereign State Are the Answer to Middle East Stability

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To restore peace and stability in the Middle East and to create a political path for a settlement between Israel and Palestine based on the two-state formula, regional and international players must act according to the principles of the Middle East Peace Process initiated in the early 1990s. The two-state solution is clearly outlined in UN Resolutions 181, 242, 338, 194, and 2334. This solution, proposed by the international community and accepted by the Palestinian Liberation Organization, remains the most viable path to lasting peace and stability for all. Netanyahu and his right-wing government instead adopt annexation and settlement as policy, thus hindering any prospects for peace. Hence, this essay will argue that an imposed reality of the two-state solution by the international community can definitely bring about a political settlement.

The international community needs to be reminded that negotiations are just one tool for conflict resolution; international law and arbitration are other peaceful, yet often overlooked, mechanisms that can pave the way for peace, justice, and stability. Adhering to international law provides a straightforward path toward these goals.

## Local and National Elections in Palestine

For peace to be sustainable, the process must be inclusive and representative, involving youth and women not only at the negotiating table but also in senior decision-making positions. A democratic transition of power, achieved through elections at both local and national levels, is essential to ensure genuine representation and public participation; however, given the current suffering, conducting elections may seem

impossible. Therefore, a unity consensus government could be an effective strategy toward democratic reform. This approach would allow all parties to participate in selecting representatives based on merit, reflecting the diversity of the Palestinian population in terms of politics, age, and gender.

Recent polls in Palestine show dissatisfaction with the existing leadership. The current technocrat government, despite the capabilities of its members, lacks public support because it was formed unilaterally by President Abbas, the head of the Fateh movement, without consulting other political factions. This unilateral decision-making has led to public dismay and undermined the democratic process.

Public opinion polls indicate that neither Hamas nor the current Palestinian leadership enjoys the public's trust. Inspired by the South African model of struggle against apartheid, Marwan Barghouti is seen as a leader who could unite the Palestinian people. A Palestinian Mandela would easily be able to sell a peace deal to the public. According to surveys, Barghouti is the only leader who is well placed to gain the confidence of the Palestinian people from all factions in Gaza and in the West Bank because of his broad-based Fateh affiliation and his legacy of struggle that no one contests. With the social fabric between Gaza and the West Bank totally shattered, the release of Barghouti is guaranteed to restore the harmony of the Palestinian social fabric.

His release would bring back hope and trust in the international community as he is the one and only Palestinian leader capable of concluding a peaceful political settlement that the public would buy into. The international community should pressure the Israeli Government to release

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Barghouti to demonstrate a genuine commitment to the two-state solution and lasting peace for the two peoples. Barghouti's release should be envisioned as a transitional phase paving the way to carrying out elections and ensuring a democratic process.

## Holding Israel Accountable

The international community has failed to effectively address war crimes in Gaza. As long as Israel enjoys impunity, there is little incentive for it to pursue peace. Israel must be held accountable under international law, just like any other state. Invoking Article 25 of the UN Charter could remind member states of their moral and legal obligations to implement UN resolutions.

The root cause of the conflict is the military occupation, which must end. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is examining the legality of this occupation. The Israeli military occupation is responsible for the instability in the Middle East. The International Criminal Court (ICC) referrals against individual criminals are a significant step toward accountability and ending impunity.

Israel must be held accountable for violating numerous international conventions and agreements. The international community has made progress in statements and positions, but concrete actions are needed to restore Palestinian faith in international mechanisms. The impunity provided by the United States allows Israel to continue its violations and crimes against Palestinians.

The two-state solution, based on the 1967 borders, remains achievable if international players are serious about their rhetoric. The expansion of Israeli settlements, however, poses a significant obstacle to this solution. The international community must address this issue to ensure a viable Palestinian state. In the face of the current Israeli right-wing government and the continued provocations of Minister Bezalel Smotrich by legalizing more settlements and *de facto* annexing more land, the international community is expected to put an end to those illegal policies that undermine

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any prospects for peace. Procrastination would only mean accepting the status quo of the settler colonial reality with the continued confiscation of land, annexation, and settlements expansion at the expense of a lasting peace. The international community must act out of moral responsibility and legal obligations. Israel's internal instability and the peak of documented crimes have made international involvement crucial.

## Comprehensive Approach to Post-Ceasefire Efforts Needed

To guarantee strategic peace, Hamas must be included in any future political framework. Post-ceasefire efforts should focus on Gaza's reconstruction, Palestinian reunification, and building a new Middle East. The private sector's involvement is key to this phase, with a focus on political solutions over economic ones. Elections as a tool toward democracy should not be delayed. A pragmatic approach is needed, involving both the private and public sectors under national unity.

Economic peace initiatives within the framework of reconstruction and humanitarian aid in Gaza should not be tolerated. The international community needs to realize that a new Marshall Plan is doomed to fail if

it deals with Gaza as a separate entity. Gaza remains part of Palestine, and any deals must recognize the right to national self-determination on the 1967 borders based on the territorial contiguity of the Palestinian state. Diplomacy and multilateralism have failed humanity in Gaza; numerous condemnations by international organizations have fallen on deaf ears and have not netted actual, concrete changes for Gaza, given the immense power of the well-organized and amply financed Israeli lobby. Gaza reconstruction plans and rhetoric of development under occupation can't be tolerated any more, with the millions of dollars that are carpeted with Israeli missiles. A political path must now come before any economic one.

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The international community must consider a consortium of mediators as the U.S. alone has been disqualified from being the honest broker; the Qatari role, from Lebanon to Afghanistan to Venezuela, reflects the confidence of everyone, including the U.S. and Israel, enhancing its role as a mediator in the region. While a Saudi megadeal might be carried out within the framework of the "deal of the century," it will not end the bloodshed; rather, it would capitalize on the high price Gaza has paid and introduce yet another "historic" Middle East deal. On the other hand, Qatar's diplomatic efforts aim to renew the truce and pursue a political process for a lasting peace.

## Palestinian Involvement in Transitional Phase

This requires a transitional phase for Gaza. So far, Israel has rejected the involvement of Hamas and Fateh or any other Palestinian entity. However, the international community has reiterated several times that Gaza is part of the future State of Palestine in the context of the two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.

A strategic lesson that has been learned is that the Palestinians must be involved in this transition. The Middle East won't enjoy peace, security, and prosperity as long as the Palestinians are excluded from the equation. Another important lesson necessary to restore the social fabric requires the coordinated involvement of the Palestinian private sector in any mega plans for Gaza.

Concerning international legitimacy, the international system, UN resolutions, children's rights treaties, women's rights treaties, and the Declaration of Human Rights, Israel violates every single convention or agreement, humanitarian law or international law that we can think of. It

violated the Genocide Convention; it crossed every limit. International community members have made progress in their statements and positions, but they have yet to walk their talk.

The Palestinian public has lost faith in the international community, and this trust can't be restored without concrete actions; yet it feels as if Israel is acting against any norms, laws, or humanitarian regulations. And the only thing that allows Israel to continue its crimes, violations, genocide, and targeting of every Palestinian is its impunity, because the U.S. Administration shields Israel at the UN and other international forums. It provides Israel with military, intelligence and financial assistance that it uses against Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the West Bank. The number of Palestinian civilians targeted and killed by the Israeli army is approximately 40,000 in Gaza and 630 in the West Bank. What can stop Israel in the face of the international member states that protect and shield it against international courts and platforms?

## The Two-State Solution

From an academic point of view, the form of the solution is not important to Palestinians today, three decades after the start of the peace process in the early nineties based on the international community's proposition of a two-state solution. If we want to look at it from a geopolitical perspective through maps, yes, it can be achieved. If we believe in the two-state solution, in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict, if we adhere to international law and legitimacy, this is the basis of the peace process.

The increased trend of recognition coming from international players inspired by legitimacy based on a peaceful solution shouldn't be complicated. If we are talking about the 1967 borders, if the countries



*The UN Security Council meets on the situation in the Middle East including the Palestinian question.*

advocating the two-state solution are serious, it should be easy to implement and enforce this peaceful solution, as Josep Borrell, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, said. However, talking *realpolitik*; taking a tour of Palestine from north to south and viewing the density and increase in the number of settlements and outposts erected at every junction, city, and camp, one realizes the concrete barrier to the two-state solution. The number of settlers has not only multiplied; it has more than tripled in recent decades and now stands at more than 750,000. Therefore, it is legitimate to question whether Israeli Governments intend to leave any space geographically for a future Palestinian state.

Two states remain the best-case scenario for sustainable peace. However, with intensified settlement on the ground, the reality is one-state apartheid, which is unsustainable. The important thing is to protect rights, which means political rights, social rights, economic rights, and, of course, the right to self-determination and the right to freedom from a military occupation that has been declared illegal. It's not just about Gaza or the West Bank, it's not just about Fatah or Hamas. It's not about whether Hamas won. This is about the rights of the Palestinian people. It is not a favor that any party or state is expected to give to the Palestinian people; these are established inalienable rights. It would be very wise to take the situation in Northern Ireland as an example. If we compare the peace process that took place there and the agreement brokered by the U.S., it was not possible to reach the Good Friday Agreement until the military wing of the IRA and Sinn Féin came to the negotiating table. This should be a motivating and inspiring example for international players who are now enthusiastic about a peaceful solution in the region and the Middle East.

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## Conclusion

The international community is expected to act not only inspired by moral responsibility and legal obligations but also because Israel is in serious trouble today, Israel faces a scenario of self-destruction. Israel's internal stability has been so shaken that its strategic existence in the region is under serious threat. This situation greatly worries Israel's allies around the world and, for example, the Jewish lobbies in the United States. Those who care about the strategic presence of a stable Israel in the region are now very worried. Involvement is also inspired by the peak of violence and the



intensity of crimes that have been documented on every screen for eleven months, as well as Israel's current trial at the ICJ for plausibility of Genocide and ICC arrest warrants, in addition to the panic of those concerned about Israel's continuity and sustainability.

To conclude, I will argue that to guarantee strategic peace, Hamas is indispensable in any future political paradigms. Elections as a tool toward democracy should not be put off. A golden opportunity is on the horizon, with the Palestinians at the table. A historic pragmatic deal between the Arab League and Israel can be concluded that would serve security for Israel and self-determination aspirations for Palestinians and restore stability and peace in the whole region.

Post-ceasefire efforts must focus on Gaza's reconstruction, Palestinian reunification, war prevention, and building a new Middle East. A more involved private sector is key in this phase. There must not be an economic path at the expense of the political. Pragmatism, however, is very much

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needed, and it will only be achieved when the private and public sectors join forces under a national Palestinian unity. The first round of elections might not guarantee the desired secular results that would bring about reform with a checks-and-balances

system. Yet when elections are regular and systematic, when the Palestinian legislative body gets activated, that would guarantee the intended reforms within a democratic Palestinian political system.

October 7, did not make Hamas a leader or grant it the power or legitimacy to own the PLO. Hamas may have gained popularity on the streets of Palestine after October 7, but this does not mean that the majority of Palestinian people support Hamas's ideology. This should be obvious. Its popularity may stem from its success in putting the Palestinian cause back on the table, along with the Palestinians' right to resist occupation, with liberation, dignity, and freedom. However, this does not mean that the Palestinian people support the Hamas ideology. Only elections and votes can show the current reality. The people must have the right to choose their leadership. That's something we need to pay very, very close attention to, not just analyze or judge or point out that we don't have winners or losers. If we respect democracy, if we respect the rights of the Palestinian people, then the international community must focus on elections and votes and the need for political leaders and decision-makers to be determined through a democratic process on behalf of the Palestinian people via ballots, not bullets.

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