

Policy Brief

RECONSTRUCTING SOVEREIGNTY: GAZA'S FUTURE BEYOND RUBBLE

A Palestinian-led Vision

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Following the Arab League emergency meeting in early March, momentum around Gaza's reconstruction has grown amid regional urgency and renewed international focus. At the heart of this effort lies a pivotal question: Will reconstruction serve as a tool for Palestinian sovereignty or be co-opted into another externally imposed process and prolonged military occupation?

This Policy Brief argues that Gaza's reconstruction must be led by Palestinians, underpinned by inclusive governance, and shielded from the geopolitical leverage of external actors. Drawing on lessons from past reconstruction efforts in the context of Trump-era regional dynamics, it hopes to offer a blueprint for a sovereign, inclusive, and future-oriented rebuilding strategy. Key to this vision is the integration of Palestinian women and youth not as passive beneficiaries, but as central actors in shaping Gaza's future and national legitimacy. It also combines regional and international policy analysis with actionable recommendations that position reconstruction as a foundation for self-determination and long-term peace.

A CRITICAL INFLECTION POINT FOR GAZA

As Gaza is subjected to unprecedented devastation by Israel's ongoing military bombardment, the imperative for a sovereign, fair, and Palestinian-driven reconstruction has never been more pressing. The humanitarian disaster across the entirety of the 365 km² Strip is not the result of war—it is the result of deliberate and calculated policies designed for displacement, dispossession, and demographic erasure. As more than 60,000 Palestinians are estimated to have been killed since October 2023—with 70% of the verified deaths being women and children—and with more than 60% of Gaza's infrastructure damaged or destroyed, the scale of destruction demands accountability and a strategic intervention premised on justice.

Following the collapse of the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas in mid-March, Israel resumed its attack on Gaza after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refused to enter the second phase of the accord. He sought to bypass this phase, which would have involved negotiations on long-term political arrangements and reconstruction, in favor of a single-minded focus on hostage rescue and territorial control. The decision not to pursue the second phase of negotiations underscores a broader strategy: to preclude any political horizon that could lead to lasting peace or Palestinian sovereignty. Netanyahu knows that proceeding to the next stage would necessitate regional and global debate of a political framework—precisely what his government is attempting to prevent.

This escalation in Gaza cannot be separated from the routine settler violence and annexation efforts in the West Bank, which persist without accountability under Israel's extreme right-wing coalition. The occupation has not only intensified militarily but also

militarized legal ambiguity with impunity, amidst mounting evidence of international crimes. At the same time, international legal institutions have begun to act. In 2023, South Africa initiated proceedings against Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing it of having committed acts of genocide in Gaza under the Genocide Convention. While provisional measures were commanded, such as barring acts of genocide and ordering unhindered humanitarian aid, violations have persisted with alarming frequency. Meanwhile, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants against Israeli political and military leaders for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the targeting of civilians and starving a population as a method of warfare.

These steps offer a necessary legal foundation for reconstruction talks. Without resolving the legal and political situation that led to its destruction, reconstruction of Gaza cannot occur. Accountability is not separated from reconstruction—it is a prerequisite to not repeating it again.

In the meantime, shifting regional dynamics allow for a limited window of opportunity. United States (US) President Donald Trump has indicated willingness to work on bringing regional stability through close collaboration with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and other key Arab stakeholders. This alignment—if exploited in a politically creative and legally rigorous manner—could anchor Gaza’s reconstruction in a regional framework that guarantees sustainability and legitimacy. However, this requires sincere political will from all parties, including Palestinian leadership, to rise above internal divisions and regain control over the reconstruction process.

In short, then, the issue is no longer whether Gaza will be rebuilt, but who will rebuild it, under what vision, and to whose benefit. To be sustainable, reconstruction must be based on international law, driven by Palestinians, and seen as a step toward an end to occupation—not entrenching it.

ENGAGING THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Looking ahead, it is imperative for Palestinians to adopt a pragmatic diplomatic approach to the evolving geopolitical context, particularly with the return of the Trump administration in the US. While Trump’s past policies sidelined the Palestinian issue, the current environment may offer new opportunities—especially given the Trump camp’s emphasis on regional stability, economic prosperity, and strategic alliances with Arab states such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

To seize this opportunity, Palestinians must proactively engage, not reactively respond. A bold and practical step would be to establish a dedicated Palestinian envoy or strategic diplomatic team tasked with engaging the Trump administration. This team should include experienced diplomats, policy experts, and strategic communicators

capable of articulating a compelling, pragmatic vision that aligns Palestinian national aspirations with regional peace and prosperity.

This Palestinian envoy would leverage the solid relationships some Arab states enjoy with Trump's circle to advocate for a regional and inclusive political framework. The envoy should emphasize Palestinian agency in leading reconstruction and governance efforts and highlight the shared interest in ending cycles of violence, promoting stability, and fostering economic development. A key mission of the envoy would be to frame reconstruction not as charity, but as a strategic investment in peace and regional security.

A constructive, professional diplomatic track—inspired by realpolitik and anchored in values of justice and sovereignty—will be essential. It must not shy away from the difficult conversations, but instead reframe them with new narratives and forward-looking proposals. In this regard, Arab-Palestinian coordination should be institutionalized to ensure political coherence in post-war recovery. Palestinian leadership should coordinate closely with Arab partners to amplify Palestinian voices through their influence in Washington. Moreover, it should invest in a long-term communications strategy that aligns reconstruction with regional prosperity and global stability.

BUILDING A PALESTINIAN-LED FRAMEWORK

To reclaim agency, Gaza's reconstruction must be managed by a unified Palestinian Reconstruction Authority with wide representation. Such an authority should include diverse political factions. It must also include civil society, municipal leadership, and youth and women leaders, ensuring intergenerational legitimacy. The authority needs to operate transparently, with legal mechanisms for anti-corruption, public oversight, and donor accountability. It must also have a clear mandate for implementation, oversight, and resource governance. Past failures—particularly the 2014 Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM)—highlight the dangers of Israeli veto power and bypassing Palestinian institutions.

In this regard, reconciliation amongst the Palestinians is a necessity. The youth of Gaza and the West Bank need to be reunited in one Palestine and all scenarios to separate Gaza from Palestine must be rejected in action. A state of Gaza alone can only serve the interests of non-state actors in the region and regional powers aligning with the project of Greater Israel. Those advocating for peace and stability for the region must work to realize Palestinian self-determination in one state with territorial contiguity and sovereignty between Gaza and the West Bank.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE: FROM HUMANITARIAN RELIEF TO SELF-DETERMINATION

The shift from short-term relief to long-term development is vital. In the short-term, donor funds should be channeled through Palestinian financial oversight bodies to guarantee Palestinian agency in the relief process. Furthermore, international funding should be conditioned on equitable participation metrics. Beyond short-term relief, it is essential for development initiatives to focus on sustainable economic revival. Reconstruction should guarantee Palestinians the rights and access to natural resources in the West Bank and Gaza, including the exclusive economic zones and maritime resources in Gaza. Efforts should focus on building independent technological infrastructure to maximize the potential of artificial intelligence and technological innovation. Moreover, reconstruction should prioritize local procurement, job creation, and small enterprise support as well as investments in renewable energy, agriculture, and educational infrastructure. Finally, women and youth must be integral to this economic revival—not only as recipients of aid but as designers of new industries, entrepreneurs, and decision-makers. A crucial policy recommendation in this regard is to create targeted economic programs for youth and women, especially in the technology sector, through green jobs, and in local governance.

SECURITY & SOVEREIGNTY: BEYOND THE SIEGE

Any security arrangement attached to the reconstruction of Gaza must be based on the safety of all civilians—Palestinian and Israeli. This cannot, however, come at the expense of Palestinian political rights or as a mechanism for entrenching the current power disparity. Security frameworks that prioritize “stability” for one side while perpetuating ongoing dispossession and occupation for the other are neither equitable nor sustainable.

There must be a paradigm shift beyond Israel’s “security-first” doctrine that has historically delayed or derailed Palestinian governance. Reconstruction must be linked to the cessation of the blockade on Gaza and the restoration of the complete freedom of movement of people and goods, which are not only prerequisites for economic recovery but also for the restoration of Palestinians’ dignity and agency. Furthermore, it is essential to ensure that demilitarization initiatives, if tried, are not selectively applied nor used to suppress Palestinian sovereignty or delay political transformations. Hence, any demilitarization effort must occur in parallel with clear political commitments. Additionally, any international security presence should be conditioned on establishing a clear, enforceable timetable for transferring administrative and security control to Palestinian institutions with guarantees of full border access and movement.

Moreover, there is a need for international security monitoring mechanisms that are led by an international consortium under a United Nations (UN) framework in coordination with the Palestinian authorities. These should be transparent, inclusive, and based on a civilian protection mandate rather than oriented towards upholding the political status quo. Under this framework, a constant, impartial international security monitoring force should be stationed across both Gaza and the West Bank—not to guard the status quo, but to guard human rights and secure a transition to sovereignty.

Security must be imagined as a collective and mutual right—not as a unilateral privilege. Just as Israelis wish to be secure from rockets and violence, Palestinians must be guaranteed security from airstrikes, incursions, arrests, and violence from settlers. Peace can only be tangible if security is not securitized to control, but humanized to protect.

INTERNATIONAL & REGIONAL ALIGNMENT

Europe remains a key actor in Gaza's reconstruction, albeit constrained by transatlantic politics and its reliance on US foreign policy coordination. Nevertheless, its normative commitment to multilateralism, international law, and rights-based governance provides a critical basis for the construction of inclusive, accountable post-conflict institutions. European academic and policy collaborations can serve as an exemplary for strengthening institutions, promoting digital governance, designing evidence-based policy, and enhancing diaspora engagement.

European actors also need to continue supporting legal frameworks founded upon UN resolutions and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. This involves channeling support through Palestinian institutions that reflect gender parity, youth inclusion, and democratic legitimacy. Anchoring Europe-Palestine multilateral cooperation in long-term mechanisms is not just required for recovery in Gaza but to ensure that peace has its foundations in justice and inclusion.

On a regional level, coordination is a paramount gap. The Arab League emergency session at the beginning of March 2025 demonstrated an alarming absence of Arab consensus. Despite declarations of solidarity, they were not followed with concrete action. The fault lines in the Arab world have diminished collective Arab influence and provided space for external actors to assume authority over the reconstruction agenda. To prevent the recurrence of an externally dictated process, earnest efforts should be made to increase coordination among Arab states on the grounds of mutual principles and collective accountability. An Arab collective position is necessary to render reconstruction in Gaza a starting point for Palestinian sovereignty and not a tool of geopolitical bargaining.

This also requires open and strategic coordination between the Palestinian leadership and Arab governments. Arab governments and the Palestinian leadership should establish a joint Arab-Palestinian coordination committee for political coherence, equitable distribution of aid, and local ownership over reconstruction. Without clear communication, trust-building, and joint planning, even well-intentioned Arab aid can fail to meet Palestinian national priorities. The Palestinian leadership must take proactive steps to project one reconstruction vision, and Arab states must convert symbolic support into substantive, coordinated policy action.

Furthermore, international actors should leverage the UN, the Abraham Accords, WPS agenda, and the 2024 ICJ advisory opinion which reiterated the illegality of Israel's occupation to promote inclusive and accountable frameworks for sustained peace. Finally, all actors should promote inclusive diplomacy engaging civil society, women, youth, and diaspora voices across the Arab region.

RECONSTRUCTION AS A PATH TO SOVEREIGNTY

Discussions around the reconstruction of Gaza are taking place as Israel continues to bombard, shell, and carpet bomb the Strip and has recommenced issuing military evacuation orders to residents who have already been displaced several times. The military offense is estimated to have killed at least 60,000 Palestinians and total deaths could account for over 180,000 according to research published in the medical journal *The Lancet*. However, 2 million Palestinians are still in Gaza and refuse to be relocated.

The key question about reconstruction today is who will lead it and who will define Gaza's future. Reconstruction must be a sovereign act of Palestinian will, not a derivative of foreign politics. It must prioritize political inclusion, legal integrity, and social justice. Most importantly, it must elevate Palestinian women and youth as architects of recovery, not symbols of vulnerability. If the international community, Arab states, and donor agencies are serious about peace, they must invest in a model of reconstruction that builds a new social contract between the Palestinian leadership and its people—one based on rights, representation, and resilience.

Reconstruction without resolution of the root causes of conflict is not peacebuilding. Gaza reconstruction cannot be theoretical. If reconstruction lacks a focus on the political and legal realities on the ground, it can be a renovation designed to conceal—and ultimately perpetuate—the root causes of violence and insecurity. On a horizon of conflict resolution, durable peace involves more than technical support and infrastructure; it requires a clear engagement with the structural challenges of occupation, displacement, and the denial of rights. The ICJ advisory opinion in July 2024 on the illegality of the Israeli occupation provided a stark legal context to this call: Any path ahead has to frame overcoming the occupation and settlements as the

primary roadblock to peace. Refusal of this basic fact undermines the legitimacy of reconstruction as an actual peacebuilding measure.

Likewise, current frameworks that pay lip service to the two-state solution cannot be business as usual. Diplomatic speak without political will and tangible action toward justice and sovereignty will fail Palestinians and Israelis alike and further destabilize the region. Reconstruction must not only rebuild Gaza's physical world but also Palestinians' political ability, rights, and dignity. Otherwise, international intervenors risk solidifying the very structures they claim to repair.

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