

Gaza's governance must remain in Palestinian hands

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Amid plans for external interventions, it is vital to build a consensus around an interim body to manage Gaza's urgent needs and pave the way for unity.

Photo: Palestinian men work amid the rubble of houses destroyed during the 2014 war between Israel and Hamas, in the Eastern Gaza City Shujaiya neighborhood, January 27, 2015. (Aaed Tayeh/Flash90)

After a [year of bloodshed](#), destruction, and unimaginable suffering in the Gaza Strip, the political future of the Palestinian territory remains unclear. From the perspective of most parties to the war — including members of the Israeli government and army — the re-establishment of [direct military rule](#) over Gaza is not a desirable or viable option. But the alternatives have been just as problematic.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's pseudo-fascist government still appears to be fixated on eliminating Hamas and considering imposing some form of governance structure through a network of tribal or village leagues — an idea that Israel [tried but failed](#) in the 1980s. Washington and some Arab states, meanwhile, have floated various ideas to bring Arab or international peacekeeping forces into Gaza to be responsible for security, humanitarian aid, and reconstruction.

There is no shortage of proposals for external intervention in Gaza. But it bears emphasizing that governance of the Strip after the war is an internal Palestinian affair, and anyone who thinks otherwise is deluding themselves. The people of Gaza will settle for nothing less than Palestinian leaders known for their national commitment and moral integrity.

This does not mean, however, that Gaza's future should remain solely in the hands of either Hamas or the Palestinian Authority (PA). By the time the war ends, Hamas' exclusive rule over Gaza will have either ended or reached the verge of collapse. This outcome will partly be due to the exhaustion of its military capabilities and the siege imposed by the invading Israeli army, but for two additional reasons as well.

First, for many Palestinians including in Gaza, Hamas bears its [share of responsibility](#) for the war it ignited and the devastating consequences that followed; and second, Hamas' continued rule is not in the best interests of Gaza's reconstruction — a process that requires astronomical sums from Arab and international donors who are, to say the least, hostile to Hamas and its regional allies. None of this negates the need for both Hamas and Fatah to support whoever governs the Strip after the war; indeed, an agreement between the two parties may be essential for this.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh celebrates with Fatah delegation chief Azzam al-Ahmed after agreeing to form a unity government, in Gaza City, April 23, 2014. (Abed Rahim Khatib /Flash90)

Yet the end of Hamas' rule also does not imply that the PA is capable of governing Gaza after the war, nor that the PA will be welcomed for this role. Hamas, and indeed many Palestinians, accuse

the PA of [inaction and abandonment](#). Israel accuses it of incitement and incompetence, while punishing it for pursuing actions in international forums and courts. The United States likewise accuses the PA of administrative failure and financial corruption, and the Arab states are also unable to help the PA overcome its deficiencies.

Responsibilities of an interim authority

In light of the above, it is vital and urgent to build an internal Palestinian national consensus around forming an interim governing authority or national body to administer the Gaza Strip's affairs. This body should be composed of respected national figures who are accepted, endorsed, and supported by Hamas and the PA (though without the major leaders of either faction), as well as by key states expected to finance Gaza's reconstruction. The tasks and responsibilities of such an interim authority can be summarized as follows:

First, this body should be charged with providing security and personal safety for Gaza residents, curbing lawlessness and disorder, reopening and managing the Strip's land crossings, and ensuring a fair and effective distribution of humanitarian aid throughout the territory. Second, it must oversee the reconstruction of Gaza's public infrastructure, which Israel has systematically destroyed over the past year — from hospitals, schools, universities, courts, and places of worship, to roads, water, electricity, communications, and sanitation.

Third, this body must facilitate the return of displaced people to what remains of their homes, and provide temporary alternative housing for those whose homes have been completely destroyed. Fourth, it should prepare to hold elections for municipalities and village councils in order to rebuild local governance.

Fifth, the interim authority must coordinate between public institutions (including elected local authorities) operating in Gaza and the West Bank; this should also involve close cooperation with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), which remains the major aid organization in Gaza.

Palestinians at the site of an Israeli airstrike at an United Nations (UNRWA) school in the Nuseirat camp in the central Gaza Strip, July 15, 2024. (Abed Rahim Khatib/Flash90)

Sixth, this body should continue to operate until a Palestinian national unity government is formed, or until national elections are held either for legislative and presidential elections under the PA, or for the Palestinian National Council under the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). This is a critical step to restore Palestinian national legitimacy, and in turn, to achieve the complete political reunification of Gaza and the West Bank.

For now, the most urgent priorities in Gaza are clear: to ensure the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territory; to deliver humanitarian aid; to prevent any forced population transfer out of the Strip; and to begin the reconstruction of Gaza. These critical tasks cannot wait for an agreement to form a Palestinian national unity government, nor can they wait for the long-term project of rebuilding the PLO on democratic foundations.

Reaching a consensus around an interim Palestinian body in Gaza is thus arguably more feasible, and will not stand in the way of larger political initiatives. Moreover, such an authority would be better equipped to secure civil order in Gaza, and attract the necessary material and political support from external actors. After a year of devastation, this may be the only viable governance for Gaza after the war — and one that is desperately needed.

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P.S.

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• Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war – the atrocities committed by Hamas in Israel and the massive retaliatory Israeli attacks on Gaza. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing violence.

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed unleashed by these events has reached extreme levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Hamas' murderous assault in southern Israel has devastated and shocked the country to its core. Israel's retaliatory bombing of Gaza is wreaking destruction on the already besieged strip and killing a ballooning number of civilians. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to escalate their attacks on Palestinians.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 13 years covering: Israeli society's growing racism and militarism, the entrenched occupation, and an increasingly normalized siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment – but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

Can we count on your [support](#)? +972 Magazine is the leading media voice of this movement, a desperately needed platform where Palestinian and Israeli journalists and activists can report on and analyze what is happening, guided by humanism, equality, and justice. Join us.

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