



GAZA WAR: REGIONAL ACTORS AND IMPLICATIONS

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The Gaza War of 2023, triggered by Hamas's 07 October attack on Israel, has had profound regional and global implications. Israel's full-scale invasion of Gaza was described as a genocidal war aiming at evacuating Palestinians out of the Gaza strip, resulting so far in over 34,454 Palestinian deaths and more than 1.9 million displaced. The intensity of the current war highlights Israel's changing military tactics and its broader geopolitical implications. This policy brief, based on a workshop organized by the Center for International Policy Research (CIPR), examines the roles of key regional stakeholders in the conflict. It also explores possible end-of-war scenarios and propose a pathway to peace based on a three-phased approach involving a humanitarian ceasefire, the establishment of a Palestinian state, and long-term reconstruction plans.

Introduction

The Gaza War of 2023 following Hamas's 07 October attack on Israel has been a significant event that had far-reaching implications both globally and regionally. Following the attack that resulted in 1,200 deaths and 240 hostages taken into Gaza, Israel launched a full-scale air and ground invasion of the Gaza Strip. This resulted in more than 34,454 Palestinian fatalities, 70% of whom were women and children, and 77,575 injuries. The invasion also led to the destruction of approximately 62% of all homes in Gaza, leaving 1.9 million people internally displaced as of the first of April (Al Jazeera, 2024). [1] The intensity and scale of the attack draw significant international attention and prompted a series of military and political responses at Israel. As a result, diplomatic efforts intensified in the hopes of de-escalating the situation and reaching a permanent resolution; however, mediation efforts led by Qatar faced significant challenges, and were only successful in breaking a temporary ceasefire and hostage exchange agreement. On 28 February 2024, the Center for International Policy Research (CIPR) organized a workshop on "Gaza War: Regional Actors and Implications" to examine the roles of regional stakeholders in the conflict and their impact on the broader Middle East, the ideas and discussions in the workshop served as the basis for the development of this policy brief.

Understanding the Conflict and the Key Players

The October 2023 confrontation between Israel and Hamas marks a significant intensification of the long-standing tensions around the Gaza Strip. Following Hamas' electoral victory in 2006, the geopolitical situation in Gaza has been marked by periodic conflicts and a total blockade imposed by Israel. The 2023 war, however, sets itself apart by seeking to radically change the current status quo. According to many reports, Israel's goals are to

totally evacuate the Strip and eliminate the possibility of a two-state solution, indicating a significant change in tactics and serious repercussions for the Palestinian question. Israel's decision to modify its strategy has important ramifications for the geopolitical equilibrium in the region, as it pushes the uncertain future of the Palestinian situation.

The intensifying nature of the ongoing war emphasizes the urgent need for regional and international players to work together and create an integrated strategy that seeks to terminate current hostilities and pave the way for a comprehensive peace agreement. Along with major world powers like the US, the UK, France, Germany, and Italy, participation of key regional actors like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Jordan is imperative. A united consensus from these countries (5+5) could prove quite significant in promoting the establishment and recognition of a viable Palestinian state, which is a critical aspect of achieving a sustained and lasting peace in the region.

Furthermore, the engagement of Western nations in post-war recovery process, particularly those that have traditionally backed Israel, would be crucial in any activities linked to post-war reconstruction. Taking a stake in rebuilding Gaza by western countries would be essential to reduce the likelihood of future hostilities and promote a long-term peace process; or at least, prevent Israeli attacks on western-funded projects. In addition to addressing the urgent humanitarian issues that have arisen as a result of the conflict, this engagement would also serve to demonstrate a commitment to striking a balance between geopolitical objectives and real humanitarian concerns. Therefore, taking part of post-war reconstruction would provide the groundwork for a more secure and lasting peace, demonstrating a commitment to long-term stability above short-term tactical benefits.

Pathway to Peace: A Proposed Framework

Besides previous ideas on the day after scenarios, current mediators between Hamas and Israel are proposing a new solution that, unlike previous initiatives, does not only focus on the objective of ending the war and establishing a permanent peace, but rather sets a framework and timeline of actions that would permanently end the war and ensure the establishment of an independent, sustained Palestinian State. The proposed solution is based on a three-phased approach to end the conflict and set a political roadmap for Palestinian statehood.



1. Humanitarian Pause: The first phase of the solution involves initiating a ceasefire that encompasses immediate and extensive aid delivery along with a prisoner exchange deal. This phase would set the groundwork for more structured peace efforts. It would also allow for the assessment of humanitarian needs and the stabilization of the region in the short term as a pre-condition of entering the following phases.

2. Establishment of a Palestinian State: Moving from ceasefire to the establishment of a Palestinian state would involve detailed planning, international support, and regional cooperation to ensure the political and territorial integrity of the new state. This phase is critical as it lays the political foundations necessary for lasting peace and addresses the core political issues at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

3. Reconstruction and Development: The final phase in this process would focus on sustained recovery plans beyond immediate humanitarian relief. It would focus on the reconstruction of Gaza and the implementation of a long-term peace plan, supported by international investments and oversight to ensure adherence to agreed terms. This phase would not only rebuild the physical infrastructure destroyed during the conflict but also promote economic development and social cohesion, essential for the sustainable development of a Palestinian state.

International and Regional Players

The continuous war in Gaza has a profound impact on regional and global affairs as it represents a dynamic and changing environment that highlights serious military, political, and intelligence weaknesses for Israel. In addition to drawing attention to Israel's security vulnerabilities, the war affected the larger geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. Besides exposing military weaknesses, the recent war disrupted plans of regional normalization with Israel, obstructing confirmed Saudi normalization efforts. This ongoing war not only impeded normalization processes but also reshaped regional and international alliances, as many countries reassessed their political alliances in response to the genocide happening in Gaza.

Non-state actors, including Islamic and resistance movements in Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen, also posed some serious challenges to Israel, showcasing their deterrence abilities and shifting regional geopolitical

calculations. These groups, primarily motivated by ideological beliefs rather than political and economic gains, carried out precise attacks that disrupt established power structures and forced a reassessment of existing alliances and perceived threats. The Houthi's attacks in the red sea, which came in solidarity with Palestinians facing Israeli genocidal acts in Gaza, disrupted global supply chains and placed severe economic pressure on Israel. In reaction, the US has had to reconsider its strategy in the Middle East, increasing its military presence with the aim of stabilizing its strategic interests and reestablish its influence in the region.

Israel's internal crises have increasingly spilled over into international arenas, with the assassination of foreign political leaders on foreign soil serving as a prime illustration of this externalization. Historically, Israel's national security concerns were primarily focused on the conventional military threats from neighbouring states such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. Although these countries once represented significant threats to Israel's national security, their current military and geopolitical positions do not carry the same level of importance. This transformation underlines a dynamic security environment in which national political concerns and non-traditional threats have gain increased significance in determining Israel's foreign policy and influencing war and peace decisions.

End of War Scenarios

There are two potential scenarios for the conclusion of the conflict in Gaza, varying significantly in their outcomes. The first scenario has the battle ending with Hamas weakened but keeping a residual presence in Gaza, without participating in the government. This decline in Hamas' political influence may result in a severe leadership vacancy. Mohammad Dahlan enters into this void and emerges as a significant

candidate for leadership. Dahlan's candidacy is notable because of his considerable political connections and previous political responsibilities. Despite gathering notable regional support, Dahlan's chances are obstructed by insufficient support within both Gaza and the West Bank, limiting his influence and prospects for a national leadership role. Alternatively, the Palestinian Authority (PA), historically seen as the legitimate representative body of the Palestinian people, is unlikely to seize control of Gaza if it seems to be done by Israeli assistance. This is partly because such a relationship might destroy the PA's credibility among Palestinians, who may see any power shift as a service for Israeli objectives. As a result, the postwar political environment may remain unstable and controversial, with many groups competing for dominance in the absence of a strong, widely supported governmental authority.

The second, more tragic option includes Israel remaining in the battle until Hamas is fully defeated and then establishing a loyal government in Gaza. This administration is likely to enact measures that benefit Israeli interests. These policies might include strict security measures, land seizure, or the deliberate demolition of houses and infrastructure. Such actions, employed under the pretext of security or redevelopment, may compel the Palestinian community into forcible evacuation. In addition to worsening the already grave refugee situation, this forced relocation may trigger a third big wave of Palestinian or a new Nakba, further destabilizing the area. This outcome would not only exacerbate the humanitarian catastrophe but would also put a burden on international assistance institutions and increase tensions in the region.

Post-war Reconstruction Scenarios

Post-war reconstruction in Gaza is anticipated to occur under three distinct scenarios, each with its own set of implications and probability. Undoubtedly improbable but optimistic, the first scenario suggests

a new political arrangement results in Israel's total withdrawal from Gaza, thereby enabling an independent reconstruction endeavour. On the contrary, the second and more likely scenario entails Israel maintaining partial control over the reconstruction process, specifically in relation to its borders, while Egypt oversees its borders. Furthermore, it is thought that the formation of a maritime corridor spanning from the coast of Gaza to the Mediterranean Sea, which could potentially be observed by Israel and other nations, including Turkey, is extremely probable. The worst-case scenario, denoted as the third scenario, entails Israel assuming complete authority over the reconstruction efforts. Israel may impede the post-conflict recovery and postpone reconstruction initiatives, potentially with the intention of evacuating the strip. Such actions would further complicate the humanitarian and political predicaments in the area. The degree of control and influence that each scenario entails have a substantial effect on Gaza's trajectory towards recovery and long-term stability.

Governance in the Day After

In the context of post-war governance in Gaza, many scenarios materialize that range from optimal to extremely adverse results, reflecting the complicated political dynamics and external factors impacting the region. One possible scenario involves reaching a peace agreement in which Hamas – usually regarded as a terrorist group by western powers— drops its military wing and joins in a technocratic government. In this case, Hamas would have to change significantly from being a military resistance organization to a political organization in order to maintain stability and potentially gaining international recognition and support. This scenario represents the ideal solution in which a cooperative government may bring about long-term peace and prosperity to Gaza.

On the other end of the spectrum, the scenarios become progressively dire. The second scenario posits a situation where Israel effectively demolishes Hamas, leading to the U.S. to start initiating efforts to revive the two-state solution. This would involve establishing a unified government that administrates both the West Bank and Gaza, potentially creating a new political landscape aimed at lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The third scenario prolongs the war until Israel achieves a clear and visible victory. At that point, a strong regional actor with a good relationship with Israel, possibly the UAE, is delegated to assume control as Gaza's administrative authority, replacing Hamas and overseeing the day-to-day governance in Gaza. This transition would represent a significant shift in regional alliances and power dynamics, potentially introducing new governance strategies under the new leadership. This result may potentially tip the Palestinian political power balance and result in major changes in Gaza's internal and foreign policy.

Finally, the fourth scenario, representing the worst-case scenario, depicts a significant escalation in right-wing extremism inside Israel, leading to sustained severe policies towards Gaza. This could lead to continued, intensified genocidal actions, resulting in the systematic displacement of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip. Such a violent measure would not only create a massive humanitarian crisis but also significantly disrupt the demographic and geopolitical landscape of the region. This scenario could isolate Israel internationally, drawing severe criticism from the global community and potentially leading to sanctions or other punitive measures. The long-term consequences would include profound shifts in the Middle East peace process, challenging any prospects for a future Palestinian State, reconciliation, or stability in the region.

Endnotes

[1] Al Jazeera. (2024, April 7). Israel's war on Gaza: Six relentless months of death and destruction. Retrieved from <https://urlis.net/kxrm746f>.

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