

The Gaza ceasefire is chaotic by design – here's why and what to do

Ten days on from President Trump's whirlwind visit to Israel and Egypt, the images of showmanship remain, but the ceasefire (let alone talk of peace) is very evidently and predictably fraying. As I noted [here](#) when the plan was first published – its terms “almost guarantee Netanyahu will resume killing, perhaps initially at lower intensity”.

Even before a familiar day of mass killing of Palestinians on October 19th, Israeli forces had taken the lives of 40 more in Gaza via direct fire, shelling, and air strikes, including 11 members of the Shaaban family. That was in addition to Israel's continued stop-start approach to allowing in the limited aid agreed. The death toll on the 19th was two Israeli soldiers and 45 Palestinians.

The ceasefire generated immense relief – seeing the last twenty Israelis held in Gaza, the military age males, joyously returned to their loved ones; the approximately 1,950 Palestinian prisoners released (albeit some forced into exile), many having been sentenced by the military tribunals of Israel's illegal occupation, many others held without any pretence of legal procedure; the immeasurable hope that the Palestinian Gaza population would no longer face unconscionable daily killing, destruction, displacement and starvation from Israel's relentless assault.

All of that is real, albeit painfully fragile. By contrast, the claims of the American President to have delivered peace after 3,000 years were pure fiction.

It makes sense that U.S. officials are the lead actors – Vice President JD Vance was in Israel following-up Trump's visit, as were envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio due to follow. After all, this was not just Israel's war, but America's – it could not have continued without the limitless supply of American weaponry alongside political, diplomatic and economic support. Indeed, to prove that equation, the ceasefire was declared when America decided it would be (a decision President Biden and his team refused to make in the first 15 months of Israel's killing spree).

An American enabled war has given way to an American dictated deal. The regional mediators working with the U.S. delivered the consent of Hamas to a (deeply flawed) arrangement by for the first time creating maximum plausibility around the hardest sticking point – that this time Israel would not resume its assault. That is already being tested.

Israel attempted to annihilate the Hamas negotiators in the midst of their discussing an American ceasefire plan and conducted that strike in the sovereign territory of Qatar – an American ally and home to the largest U.S. military base in the region. Israel thereby undermined the relations of the Gulf states with the U.S. Meanwhile, international pressure was being dialled up, Netanyahu spoke of isolation and economic autarky, and that did not play well inside Israel. Those elements formed the backdrop to Trump making Netanyahu an offer he couldn't refuse.

Netanyahu has a victory narrative, the embrace of the U.S., and indeed much to like in the 20-point plan. But this agreement was reached under duress – Israel's far-reaching war aims, its total victory, were not achieved.

As is evident, Hamas remains standing. It is militarily diminished but resilient and adding new recruits. Politically, its message of resistance resonates further. The dreams of an ethnically cleansed Gaza becoming a new riviera and of Zionist resettlement have not (for now at least) been realized. Israel's actions since the ceasefire demonstrate that the dream of forcibly displacing Palestinians from “Greater Israel” still resonates.

Despite the bombast, there is no peace plan, the 20-point paper is empty in that respect. No flourish of grandiose claims can make up for that absence. There have been lavish ceremonial gatherings in the past (the Annapolis relaunch of peace efforts in 2007 under President George W. Bush had both more countries and more Arab League member states [in attendance](#)). But on each peace process occasion, when the music has stopped, it has always been the Palestinians still left with no chair.

The haphazard nature of the American proposal (despite Arab states efforts to solidify its content) contains the seeds of its own unravelling. There is no escaping the shadow cast by a combination of U.S. unseriousness and indulgence of Israeli extremism. That predilection is both historic and contemporary. The Trump administration has form – its previous ‘From Peace to Prosperity’ plan of 2020 was cut from this same cloth of enabling a permanent Israeli regime of apartheid over Palestinians. Current efforts are possibly teeing up a division of Gaza into two zones, with half the territory possibly coming under a resumed, [permanent Israeli dominion](#).

Surely then, if Trump turns his attention away from this file, Israel can get away with anything, and if U.S. engagement dominates, then Israel can still get away with anything.

Yes, but: the unpredictability of Trump, his desire to assume the peacemaker (and prize winner) mantle, the personal relations with regional leaders (partly reflecting the shifting map of global geo-economic power), and the newly emerging fissures within the MAGA world regarding America First versus Israel First are all relevant and should be tactically maximized. These may offer a rather thin reed of opportunity to grasp.

Elsewhere, popular mobilization and pressure have pushed Israeli-allied Western governments out of their and Israel's comfort zone – maintaining that push will be crucial.

Certain taboos have been broken in the last weeks. The U.S. is engaged directly with the Hamas leadership – something that should have been obvious all along – but something Democrat administrations conspicuously failed to do, along with European governments. While it would be premature to say that the U.S. monopoly as mediator has been superseded by a genuinely multilateral approach, it is the case that diplomatic interventions now have a more regionalized and internationalized element than previously prevailed. That could make a difference going forward.

The 20-point plan did not play out in Israeli politics as Netanyahu perhaps hoped. His victory narrative has been consistently punctured in mainstream discourse as being a bluff, acknowledging that Hamas has not been vanquished, and that this has been costly to Israel in reputational and other ways. While domestic questioning of what Israel has done to Palestinians remains largely absent and unseen in media, vulnerabilities and divisions are evident. In many respects, the Israeli political environment after the hostage release is a more uncertain one – the effect has been disruptive, and there are new divisions within the pro-Bibi camp. Netanyahu's own political calculation still leans into maintaining the existing coalition in order to drive changes advantageous to managing his court case and political longevity. Israeli society remains fragmented.

Opposite that, there has perhaps never been such clarity in Palestinian politics as to the need for renewal, re-legitimation and a re-unifying of ranks. Given the intensity of engagement with Hamas, the idea that the Fatah-led PA in Ramallah can remain relevant by relying on division has been revealed in all its absurdity. Assuming the mantle of the amenable Palestinian to curry favour with Israel's allies renders the PA irrelevant – a more compromised Palestinian fig leaf of collaborator can always be found (as in any community).

If Fatah and the PLO are again to assume agency, it will require a path of reuniting with other political and social forces, drawing on sources of legitimacy that embrace Palestinian political pluralism and diversity, including struggle. Hamas has stated that national decisions are for a national movement to agree on.

Palestinian representation has been the single most conspicuous absence in this supposed peace festival. Palestinian leadership is needed to plug that gap.

Given the apparent confusion and uncertainty in interpreting current events, in relating to this flimsy plan, and in assessing what can be done, below is an attempt to unpack some key issues:

1. Sustaining a ceasefire or manufacturing chaos

If there were something useful to distil from Trump's Sharm El-Sheikh Summit and Knesset appearances, that would consist in emphasizing to Israel the clear message that the war is over and the ceasefire will hold.

Israel has reneged on previous ceasefires, Netanyahu continues to talk the language of war and has maintained a coalition that exists on a premise of permanent aggression and maximalism towards Palestinians (plenty of opportunity for that is available in the West Bank too).

A Trump support act of 26 leaders gathered at Sharm (in addition, curiously, FIFA football President Gianni Infantino was also present – will football get its own state before the Palestinians do?). Those leaders were there both to ingratiate themselves to the capricious American leader, but also (and less demeaning) to entrench that perception of a moment of great import – the end to a war.

That partly answers the question of how this ceasefire was reached – Hamas was pressured, but it still needed to be convinced that there was maximum plausibility to the ceasefire commitment. That could easily be delivered by a U.S. willing to use its considerable, practical material leverage over Israel. It won't. Therefore, the closest thing to a guarantee was to create this perception.

The problem, as is already very evident, is that the flimsy terms of the agreement – intentional from its Israeli authors (and presumably also some of their American acolytes) allow plenty of wiggle room for interpretation, for continued deadly IDF military interventions, and for undermining any truly better horizon for Palestinians in Gaza.

Hamas too can derive some benefits from this situation – grossly illegitimate external dictates are easier to dismiss and Trump's latest threats are hollow, Israeli backed gangs are particularly unpopular, and if chaos is the default, then the return of Hamas structures will be more readily accepted by the public.

By refusing to engage in a pragmatic, realist fashion – one that genuinely incorporates Palestinian interests, freedoms and rights, or indeed governance and security needs in Gaza – the U.S. plan (and its bias) has an inbuilt structural instability guaranteed.

That is convenient for Israel. It intends for the continued IDF military presence in half of Gaza to be permanent and to enhance its support for armed gangs and militias to ferment disorder. So, while the bar for a return to mass killing and devastation might have been raised higher, one is still seeing daily Palestinian casualties.

In many areas previously heavily populated by Palestinians before the destruction and displacement, Israeli forces remain in parts of cities and neighbourhoods, creating very obvious and immediate points of friction. Because there is no serious plan with any Palestinian ownership for future governance, chaos is the default. For Israel, it is the preference.

The only option for filling that vacuum is the presence of the civil police force associated with the previous Hamas governing institutions (who have been sporadically present).

Palestinians have shown remarkable resilience, and Israeli schemes tend to generate highly predictable blowback. Hamas has demonstrated that in spite of its losses, it can reassert its presence on the ground.

While Israel may try to carve out zones of control for the gangs it is arming and will try to deploy those militias as a destabilizing force, Palestinians are very unlikely to volunteer to live in Israeli-controlled zones (even if Jared Kushner [has now appeared](#) to bless such a plan for construction zones, presumably with lots of lucrative contracts for building and supplies to be awarded).

Hamas has long agreed (also prior to 2023) to step back from governance in Gaza, and it has discussed a formula with mediators for certain weaponry to be handed to a legitimate Palestinian successor structure and for non-display of other weapons. Hamas cannot be expected to disarm – resistance does not stand down when an illegal armed occupation is still in place.

Israel seems to be pursuing a policy of civil war promotion (which is not new, see under Lebanon and Syria). The release of 20 living Israelis in an agreement after long months in which Israel tried and failed to launch rescue operations, without any defections or betrayals on the part of the armed resistance groups holding Israelis (including also Palestinian Islamic Jihad), and after two years of an Israeli siege, are all evidence of Hamas durability that should not be taken lightly.

However, Israel and the U.S. have thus far rejected the kind of realism that is needed and has been demonstrated in conflicts elsewhere which involve armed anti-occupation resistance. Instead, they have sought to impose colonial style, external governance structures, with at most a co-opted sprinkling of token Palestinians.

One question for the coming days and weeks is whether the attempt to design an International Stabilization Force (ISF) can be an alternative to this trajectory of chaos.

2. The International Stabilization Force (ISF)

One issue around which there has been intense diplomatic contacts over the last week is that of creating an ISF.

In the plan the ISF is tasked to secure border areas, prevent munitions entering Gaza and to train Palestinian police. It does not reference what is most needed in such a force, namely, to protect Palestinians and act as a tripwire against renewed Israeli killings and incursions. That is hardly surprising — it aligns with the overall indifference to Palestinian life displayed in the 20-point plan, which is also a bi-partisan constant of American policy.

The ISF is depicted as the key to unlocking the further withdrawal of Israel's occupation forces from the more than 50% of Gaza which they continue to directly control. The physical demarcation of this so-called [yellow line](#) implies that Israel's forces are not withdrawing anytime soon. A constructive ISF mandate and structure could serve as a precedent for the West Bank. And these are precisely the reasons Israel is not enthusiastic.

It is my understanding that those details are currently under discussion, being led by U.S. CENTCOM commander, Admiral Brad Cooper, in consultation with regional parties and with what are touted to be the main contributors, Indonesia (whose president has openly spoken of sending 20,000 troops) and possibly Azerbaijan. We know that the U.S. has 200 of its forces in Israel, not Gaza, and other states would send a contingent mostly for training, coordinating and specific missions, rather than large deployments. Egypt will undoubtedly play a lead role. And for all the talk of a regional presence, any contribution from the Gulf, Jordan or others, including Türkiye, will be circumscribed in size and mandate.

The fact that the Civil-Military Coordination Center (CMCC) is based inside Israel is a hardly subtle hint as to who the Americans will take their cues from. For instance, during his visit, U.S. Vice President JD Vance got to “see Gaza” through the eyes of Israeli/U.S. drone surveillance at that sterile CMCC facility in Kiryat Gat (he really didn’t need to fly 10 plus hours from the Beltway for that).

If Indonesia establishes channels with Israel as part of a constructive ISF mandate then that should not be confused with normalization (although the latter will be the spin) – but there are other ways this could play out with Indonesia which would be unhelpful to both the domestic politics of the leadership in Jakarta and in sending the wrong signal of impunity to Israel.

One question is whether the force will come under a UN Security Council mandate or at least have the Council's endorsement or whether any UN consent is rejected (as happened with the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai).

Back-to-back understandings could be reached with Hamas regarding the role of the ISF (along the lines described in point 1 above). But if the mandate of the force is to disarm Hamas, then its fate as a bloody failure will be sealed, and that is precisely what Israel's government wants. In spite of hints to the contrary, the IDF will not vacate the areas of Gaza it has reoccupied in order to make way for an ISF.

The ISF question is worth watching closely – will it take shape, and if so, as another layer of occupation over Palestinians, or a force that can act in accordance with the advancement of international law and the protection of Palestinians?

3. Aid to Gaza

Throughout its’ two-year assault on the Palestinian civilian population, Israel has prevented and weaponized aid and assistance – and lied about it incessantly. It should come as no surprise then that Israel insisted on continuing to control what materials and aid can enter Gaza and at what volume. Within days, Israel was reneging even on the arrangements agreed to in the 20-point plan.

The fact that only under the duress of this deal did the Israeli government accept the entry of aid – exposed (again) that when Israel claimed not to be preventing aid (and blamed Hamas), and when those claims were loyally regurgitated by Western media, it was all just a campaign of disinformation.

Israel's go-to place long before October 2023 has been the criminal collective punishment of the entirety of Gaza’s population by dialling down and up (although invariably down) what is allowed into that territory. Its modus operandi is to play a well-rehearsed game that gives international donor governments access to disburse aid (who get to tell their own publics, ‘look, we are helping’) in exchange for indulging Israel’s constant illegal actions across the occupied Palestinian territories. That was the story of more than a decade and a half of the blockade on Gaza since 2007. The current effort is designed to bring back a show which deserves no re-runs.

The weaponized cruelty around access of desperately needed goods to Gaza was plunged to new depths with the creation of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF). Although the GHF has been thoroughly exposed as a criminal exercise in genocide profiteering and enabling, it is not something that either the Israeli leadership or the GHF private sector beneficiaries will give up without a fight.

It has been announced that [Mike Eisenberg](#) (Israeli-American GHF founder) has been appointed – it seems by both the U.S. and Israel – to serve as a representative to the U.S. command centre that oversees the Gaza deal. There may well be an effort in Israeli controlled areas of Gaza to attempt to lure Palestinians by allowing stocks of goods and reconstruction projects that are prevented from reaching “unoccupied Gaza” –

although the defining disposition of inhumanity towards Palestinians guarantees that such schemes will be of very limited efficacy, attraction, and longevity.

On the aid front, the need could not be clearer: access for what is needed in Gaza – in terms of humanitarian assistance, basic supplies, medicines, materials for reconstruction and even shelter during the winter months – must be secured outside of Israeli control. All states involved in the aid effort who claim to be prioritizing Palestinian wellbeing should insist on this one principle.

The Israeli claims of dual use and security prerequisites are an excuse, and any genuine concerns can effectively be managed by third parties without Israeli interference. In such a context, the most effective routes for dispersing assistance and resuming economic activity should be pursued – whether via the Egyptian border and/or by creating port or landing strip facilities in Gaza that are not under Israeli control.

The issue here is not logistical – it is (along with most key issues to be addressed) a question of political will in standing up to Israeli bullying.

4. Accountability

When a conflict situation transitions, often to an initial highly fragile peace, the question of accountability can be a dilemma – go for justice or turn a page and don't look back. Different modalities in post-conflict settings have been tried in order to address that, such as processes for transitional justice or truth and reconciliation.

That quandary is not in play in this instance – Palestine/Israel is not a post-conflict scenario. It is precisely the absence of accountability, the [absolute impunity and exceptionalism](#) applied to Israel, which ushered in this catastrophe and extremism.

So, accountability matters — not only because it impacts the Israeli incentive structure — but also, because an absence of accountability normalizes this level of war crimes. What has unequivocally been missing in all the talk of ceasefire, is accountability. There is a determined push to move on, nothing to see here, a denial of what has gone on or that those responsible have anything to answer or compensate for.

In fact, the dehumanization of Palestinians continues, and as such, also continues to lay the groundwork for further cruelty and criminality. Security is still talked about as something only Israelis are worthy of. Ensuring the return of all the bodies of slain Israelis is absolutely worthy. The return of Palestinian bodies held by Israel, including [many that have been mutilated](#), is paid scant or zero attention.

While Trump has justifiably and laudably met on multiple occasions with the families of those Israelis who were held in Gaza, no senior American official is recorded to have met a Palestinian survivor of the Gaza atrocities or families impacted by the slaughter.

Western media is still prevented from entering Gaza and largely fails to adequately engage local journalists.

Failing to uphold accountability matters well beyond the confines of the Palestine/Israel space. It is chipping away at the already crumbling edifice of the international architecture for upholding law, charters, and conventions — in other words of protecting people everywhere.

The locus of activity should be precisely in those spaces where the push for continued impunity is most active — particularly against the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court and the implementation of their rulings. The ICC arrest warrant against Netanyahu should matter. Israel's violations of not only the ICJ opinion of July 19, 2024, on the illegality of the occupation in its entirety, but also of the

provisional measures ruled in the South African genocide case and the continuation of that case is where public pressure should be mobilized (in particular, third state complicity).

On October 22nd, the ICJ made another important ruling that ordered Israel to facilitate rather than prevent UNRWA and other UN agencies from providing humanitarian, relief and other assistance in Gaza.

Compliance with all these rulings is what [the Hague Group](#) has been set up to promote. That should also be applied to the issue of compensation – it's the Colin Powell [Pottery Barn rule](#) – Israel broke it, Israel should be on the hook in paying to fix it. And even if that is unlikely to be attainable in the foreseeable future, it matters because it puts Israel on the defensive and can create leverage, rather than *a priori* accepting Netanyahu's primacy in dictating what happens next.

5. A final thought

A faultline is apparently emerging in the diplomacy around this plan. The Palestinians do not have an effective or unified leadership to press their case in governmental circles. Other states have their own priorities vis-a-vis the U.S. administration. Some of the regional parties involved understand the flaws in what is being proposed and will attempt to, in part, mitigate those. Even while operating within the envelope of a hugely problematic American plan, some are prioritizing getting a ceasefire entrenched, preventing a return to killing, getting aid in, and attempting to find a modality where IDF withdrawal might be possible and for the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem not to be forgotten.

But that is not the vision of the U.S. and Israel, who are driving this plan. The intention there is increasingly transparent, and it consists of the following: try to keep the non-IDF controlled zones unliveable for Palestinians with sporadic killing, chaos and the encouragement of civil war (if that leads to mass displacement of Palestinians outside of Gaza, all the better); attempt to create economic and residential zones where the IDF or possible future ISF is in control under a combination of external-colonial and quisling-Palestinian governance (despite its co-optation by Israel, the Palestinian Authority still contains a liberationist nationalist reflex, and is therefore deemed an unacceptable partner).

That model could perhaps be replicated later in the West Bank and, in the meantime, will allow private companies and well-connected individuals à la GHF model, to continue war profiteering. There are divisions within this model between Israeli hardliners who see this as a stepping off point to resuming genocide, and American hardliners who are content with a return to bedding down apartheid and shrinking the Palestinian Bantustans.

In the future, if there is an Israeli government willing to give the Palestinian Bantustans a nomenclature upgrade (state minus?), then the push for normalization will be resumed at full thrust.

If this more or less captures the current state of play, then the alternative position is easier to delineate. That will consist of exposing what is really happening: maintaining and intensifying the public push for pressure on governments to challenge Israeli impunity; working to increase divisions and the questioning of this approach inside Israel; and to stand up a more united Palestinian politics best able to counter such machinations.

While the strength of the U.S.-Israel position would seem hard to challenge, the capacity for hubris, overreach and misreading of realities on the ground should not be underestimated. And occasional U.S.-Israel tensions can be incentivised and utilised. As one saw with the GHF, Israeli-birthed structures are incapable of treating Palestinians humanely, and these zones will not succeed.

Israel's aggression in the West Bank has reached a ferocious intensity that will also not go unnoticed. On 22nd October, Israel's Knesset advanced legislation to annex Palestinian territory (backed on the Zionist side by most of the so-called 'more moderate' opposition). These and measures elsewhere will continue to stir popular opposition globally and locally. Regional governments may bend themselves to America's will, but are not going to risk their own structures of societal consent by endorsing more massacres or resuming premature normalisation. And most of all, Palestinian resilience has not been vanquished.

It would be unwise to take Israeli attempts to project invincibility at face value. The next chapter is yet to be written – it is naïve to assume that the existing penholders are locked-in or immune to pressure and change.