



المركز الفلسطيني
للبحوث
السياسية والمسحية
Palestinian Center for
POLICY and
SURVEY RESEARCH

Critical Policy Brief

Number 1/2025

Gaza's Future:

Why the Trump Plan Pauses War but Cannot Make Peace



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Nov 2025



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The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom funded the preparation of this publication. The interpretations and conclusions presented here are those of the author alone.

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I. Introduction

At a White House press conference on 29 September 2025, President Donald Trump unveiled a 20-point plan aimed at ending the war in the Gaza Strip and creating a pathway toward a wider regional accommodation. Hailed as a diplomatic breakthrough, its first phase—securing a ceasefire and the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners—was quickly agreed to by both Israel and Hamas. This initial success, however, masks a fundamentally flawed and unsustainable architecture. The Trump Plan, while achieving a short-term cessation of hostilities, fails to address the core political dynamics that have long fueled the conflict: the absence of a legitimate and unified Palestinian leadership, the unresolved question of Palestinian sovereignty, and the deep-seated realities of public opinion forged by decades of occupation.

This Policy Brief takes stock of what the plan does, why it achieved an initial breakthrough, why it is unlikely to be sustainable in its current form, and what a viable Palestinian strategy—especially for the Palestinian Authority (PA)—would require. It integrates current Palestinian public opinion to assess feasibility and legitimacy constraints, drawing primarily on the latest national survey by PCPSR. It argues that the Trump Plan, despite its ambitious multilateral design, is destined for failure beyond its first phase because it attempts to impose a technocratic, externally managed solution onto a deeply political problem. Its structure ignores Palestinian agency, sidesteps the core demand for self-determination, and collides with a public opinion landscape defined by a profound crisis of internal leadership and an unwavering opposition to the disarmament of resistance factions without a viable political horizon.

II. Context: The Unwinnable War and the Political Vacuum

The 2023-2025 Gaza war lasted longer than any previous Israeli-Palestinian confrontation for two primary reasons. Israel's inability to achieve its stated goal of eradicating Hamas and Prime Minister Netanyahu's political incentive to prolong the conflict. First, Israel's military campaign, while inflicting immense destruction on Gaza's infrastructure and population, failed to defeat Hamas as a political movement and an insurgency. As counterinsurgency literature has long demonstrated, military force alone cannot extinguish a deeply embedded socio-political entity. Israel destroyed Hamas's conventional military capabilities but could not eliminate its governing or its guerrilla capacity. This failure was starkly illustrated by three factors: Hamas's continued ability to hold Israeli hostages, which remained its most powerful leverage and necessitated negotiation; the absence of a popular uprising against Hamas rule, as the Gazan population, despite immense suffering, continued to primarily blame Israel and the United States for their plight; and the complete failure by Israel and its allies to formulate and implement a viable "day after" governance alternative. For two years, Netanyahu's government actively resisted any plan that would empower the Palestinian Authority (PA) or any other entity to govern the Gaza Strip, creating a vacuum that ensured Hamas's administrative and social structures would persist.

Second, the war's protraction served Netanyahu's political interests. Facing intense domestic criticism for the security failures of October 7th and potential legal challenges, an ongoing war without a clear endpoint became a shield against political accountability. Ending the war without a declared "total victory"—an impossible objective—would have been perceived as a catastrophic defeat, forcing a reckoning with the Israeli public. Until an external political price was imposed, Netanyahu could prolong operations without committing to a political settlement or a credible alternative governance formula for Gaza. The Trump initiative is the first major external push that exchanged a hostage/prisoner framework and a partial withdrawal for a fragile ceasefire—yet it left multiple "off-ramps" for renewed fighting if Hamas refused disarmament or if Israel judged Gaza insufficiently "deradicalized."

In this context, the Palestinian Authority's role was defined by passivity and absence. Having failed to achieve national reconciliation between 2008 and 2021, and being completely sidelined from the Gaza scene since October 7, 2023, the PA was seen as an irrelevant actor. It took no initiative to lead negotiations, propose an alternative governance model for Gaza, or represent Palestinian interests on the international stage. This inaction deepened the public's perception of the PA as an ineffective and illegitimate body, further widening the political vacuum that the Trump Plan would later attempt to fill with external actors.

III. Deconstructing the Trump Plan: A Four-Phase Architecture

The Trump Plan is a comprehensive framework structured in three operative phases (with an unstated fourth).

Phase One (war termination): Immediate cessation of hostilities once the plan is accepted; a staged Israeli withdrawal to an agreed line; a comprehensive hostage/prisoner exchange; expanded humanitarian access, rubble clearance, opening the Rafah Crossing in both directions; and a freeze of battle lines "until conditions are met for further staged withdrawal. The plan gestures toward Gaza's future as a "deradicalized terror-free zone" "redeveloped for the benefit of the people of Gaza," and offers Hamas cadres a choice between amnesty conditioned on "decommission[ing] their weapons" or safe exit.

Phase Two: Transitional Governance and Security: This is the plan's most ambitious and problematic section. It outlines a temporary governance structure for Gaza based on four key institutions:

- *A Transitional Technocratic Committee (TTC):* Composed of "qualified Palestinians and international experts," this apolitical body would be responsible for the day-to-day administration of Gaza. Critically, it is designed to be independent of both Hamas and the PA. While remaining outside Palestinian accountability and oversight, the TTC is designed to be supervised by the "Board of Peace (BP)."
- *An International Stabilization Force (ISF):* Composed of Arab and international troops, this force would deploy to secure areas as the Israeli army withdraws, with a mandate to maintain security and oversee the disarmament of Hamas.
- *The "Board of Peace":* An international oversight body, chaired by President Trump and including figures like Tony Blair, tasked with setting the framework for reconstruction and supervising the TTC until the PA completes a prescribed reform program.
- *Reconstruction:* While not explicitly assigning a body or a vehicle, the plan envisions a massive reconstruction effort funded and overseen by the international community via the Board of Peace.

Phase Three: A Political Horizon

This phase is deliberately vague, calling for the start of a “dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians to agree on a political horizon for peaceful and prosperous co-existence.” This euphemistic language avoids direct reference to a two-state solution, international law, or established parameters like the 1967 borders, leaving its substance entirely open to future negotiation.

Phase Four: Regional Integration

Though not an official part of the 20-point document, Trump has consistently linked the plan to a broader vision of “Middle East peace,” centered on the normalization of relations between Israel and key Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia. This phase represents the strategic prize for the United States and Israel but is a source of deep suspicion for Palestinians, who fear it will proceed without the establishment of their own state.

IV. Why Phase I worked—and why the plan looks strong on paper

Two strengths explain the Phase I breakthrough. First, presidential ownership. Trump’s personal imprint signaled to Israel that Washington would invest political capital to deliver a ceasefire/hostage deal; to Doha, Cairo, and Ankara that the US would honor their mediation leverage; and to Hamas that a negotiated outcome could be secured. Second, the plan is explicitly multilateral. It invites Qatar, Egypt, Turkey and others to underwrite compliance, deliver Hamas on hostage release, and help incubate a post-war order in Gaza. After two years in which regional actors sought leverage without an integrated channel, the plan at least coordinates incentives.

Substantively, Phase I also tackled three necessary conditions for a pause: (a) a credible hostage/prisoner exchange; (b) clear humanitarian and access provisions; and (c) a line of withdrawal that reduces daily friction. On those metrics, it achieved more than any prior US initiative since October 2023.

V. Design weaknesses that imperil sustainability

Yet the plan’s architecture is not a roadmap to a durable outcome. Several design flaws are acute:

1. *A Palestinian legitimacy vacuum by design*: First, the plan’s governance model is a form of neo-colonialism. The TTC is explicitly “not affiliated with the PA or Hamas,” and is overseen by a foreign-chaired Board of Peace. However wise the impulse to firewall Gaza’s day-to-day administration from factional capture, the optics and authority structure resemble a mandate—“another colonial authority,” as critics in Gaza and the West Bank have already warned. This structure denies Palestinians agency and is guaranteed to be rejected by the public as a puppet regime. No Palestinian technocrat, however qualified, could gain legitimacy while reporting to an unelected international board. Without either a path to elections or a negotiated national consensus on the TTC’s composition, the body is unlikely to earn public legitimacy, and will be attacked by both the PA and Hamas.
2. *Ambiguity on statehood*: The deliberate ambiguity of the political horizon renders the entire framework hollow. Without a clear and credible pathway to a sovereign Palestinian state based on international law, there is no incentive for Palestinian factions to decommission their weapons or for the public to grant legitimacy to the transitional process. The fear that the Trump Plan is simply a revised version of his 2020 “Deal of the Century”—which was rejected outright by Palestinians—poisons any prospect of genuine political buy-in. Trump publicly “understood” Israel’s reservations about Palestinian statehood. If statehood is reduced to a long-term aspiration without defined parameters (1967 borders, East Jerusalem, settlements, security arrangements), Hamas gains public support for keeping its arms, Israel would have no incentive to finalize

withdrawal, and Arab normalization loses its Palestinian anchor. The assassination of a clear horizon for final status is what stalled Oslo; it would do the same here.

3. *Unrealistic governing and security sequencing*: The plan begins phase I before deploying an alternative governing structure thereby creating ideal conditions for Hamas to consolidate its control over the population of the Gaza Strip. Moreover, it deploys the ISF before full Israeli withdrawal, alongside Hamas remnants and reconstituted Palestinian police. Four armed actors operating concurrently in dense urban terrain create intolerable risk. No credible Arab or international force will consent to disarm Hamas in open conflict; states will insist on full Israeli withdrawal lines, a clear mandate, a time-bound mission, rules of engagement, and political cover from a legitimate Palestinian authority.
4. *No timelines beyond hostages*: Apart from the 72-hour release window, the plan lacks dates for staged withdrawal completion, TTC tenure, ISF deployment length, or BP sunset. Open-endedness invites spoiler tactics and domestic political gamesmanship.
5. *A partial-implementation trap*: The plan explicitly allows portions to proceed “in the terror-free areas handed over from the IDF to the ISF” if Hamas “delays or rejects” some terms (e.g., disarmament). That creates patchwork governance zones, diffusion of accountability, and incentives for both Hamas and Israel to calibrate low-level violations.

VI. What Palestinians think: the public-opinion constraint

The Trump Plan’s top-down design collides sharply with the realities of Palestinian public opinion. Polling conducted by PCPSR in the last week of October 2025 reveals a deeply divided, skeptical, and defiant public whose priorities and red lines are largely ignored by the plan’s framework. Furthermore, overwhelming skepticism shrouds the plan’s long-term viability. A vast majority (70%) does not believe it will lead to an independent Palestinian state within five years, and 62% doubt it will permanently end the war. Nearly half (49%) fear it will simply pave the way for Arab-Israeli normalization without resolving the Palestinian question. This deep-seated distrust is a direct consequence of the plan’s vague political horizon and its failure to ground itself in international law or prior agreements.

Here are the most relevant themes:

Awareness, framing, and overall support: About 71% have heard of the plan. When presented in Arab/Islamic framing—end the war, exchange hostages/prisoners, roll back forced transfer, expand aid, phased Israeli withdrawal, disarm Hamas, reform the PA, and begin a political process toward statehood—Palestinians split nearly evenly (47% support, 49% oppose). The split masks a territorial divergence: nearly 60% of Gazans support the plan under this framing, while roughly 60% of West Bankers oppose it. Support is higher among those aware of the plan (about 50%) than among the unaware (about 40%).

Ceasefire durability and statehood prospects: A strong majority (62%) doubts the plan will end the Gaza war “once and for all,” and an even larger majority (about 70%) does not believe it will yield a Palestinian state within five years. Pessimism is more pronounced in the West Bank than in Gaza. Reflecting statements by Israel’s leadership that war would resume if Hamas does not disarm, most West Bankers expect renewed fighting soon; Gazans are divided.

Disarmament: the core red line. Roughly 69% oppose disarming Hamas even “if this is a condition for the war not to return to the Gaza Strip,” with opposition at about 78% in the West Bank and 55% in Gaza. Only 18% of West Bankers and 44% of Gazans support disarmament under that condition. Any design that makes disarmament a near-term gate to ceasefire or reconstruction will face intense public resistance—especially in the West Bank.

Day-after governance: When asked about a committee of Palestinian professionals unaffiliated with the PA or Hamas to run Gaza under an international umbrella (as envisioned in the plan), a slight majority overall opposes it (53% vs 45%), with a slim majority in Gaza in favor (51%) and a minority in the West Bank (41%) supportive. When reframed as a Palestinian expert committee overseeing reconstruction “under international auspices and support,” omitting the non-affiliation and disarmament trigger, support surges to 67% overall (67% West Bank; 66% Gaza). Only about one-third back full or shared PA control over Gaza; pluralities reject both a technocratic committee and a PA return.

Armed forces: About 68% oppose the entry of an armed Arab force to “maintain security and disarm Hamas” (78% West Bank; 52% Gaza). When the disarmament mission is dropped and the force is tasked with border security and internal coordination with local police and the committee, Gazan support rises to 53%, while West Bank support reaches 43%.

Domestic balance of power, leadership, and elections: The plan’s attempt to bypass existing political actors is complicated by a profound crisis of internal leadership. The PA, the entity the plan theoretically aims to reform and eventually empower, suffers from a catastrophic lack of legitimacy. The public’s judgment of the PA is strongly negative: around 80% see corruption in PA institutions; majorities view the PA as a burden (56%) and want President Abbas to resign (80%). This leadership vacuum has elevated two alternative poles of power in the public imagination.

First is Marwan Barghouti. The imprisoned Fatah leader consistently emerges as the most popular political figure. In a hypothetical three-way presidential election, Barghouti would win decisively with 49% of the vote, compared to 36% for Hamas’s Khalid Mishal and a mere 13% for Abbas. In a two-way race against Mishal, Barghouti’s support climbs to 58%. He is seen as a unity figure capable of bridging the Fatah-Hamas divide and embodying both resistance and a political path forward.

Second is Hamas. During the past two years, as an organization, it consistently outpolled Fatah. 35% of the public identifies with Hamas compared to 24% for Fatah. In a legislative election, Hamas would win with 44% of the vote to Fatah’s 30%. While support for the October 7th attack has slowly declined from its peak, it remains a majority view (53%), and public satisfaction with Hamas’s performance during the war (60%) dwarfs that for President Abbas (21%). This demonstrates that, for a significant portion of the public, Hamas represents a more effective and legitimate agent of national resistance than the current PA leadership. Asked who “deserves” to lead today, 41% select Hamas, 22% choose Fatah/Abbas, and 31% say neither.

Crucially, about two-thirds want elections within a year of a Gaza ceasefire, but 60% doubt the PA intends to hold them and expect they will not happen; majorities oppose Abbas’s precondition that candidates must accept PLO obligations, including agreements with Israel. On East Jerusalem voting if Israel blocks Oslo-style arrangements, the public prefers internet voting (41%), then voting in holy places (31%), then busing to PA areas (22%).

War attitudes: A declining majority (around 53%) still says Hamas’s 7 October decision was “right,” with Gazan support lower (44%) than in the West Bank (59%); expectations that Hamas will “win” the war have fallen to 39% nationwide, with just 27% of Gazans expecting Hamas victory and 29% expecting Israel to win (only 6% in the West Bank expect an Israeli victory). Humanitarian indicators in Gaza are grim but show some improvement in daily food access; about 72% report a killed or injured family member. Responsibility for the suffering of Gazans is primarily assigned to Israel and the US; a minority blames Hamas or the PA. Satisfaction levels during the war favor Hamas (60% overall) over Fatah (30%), the PA (29%), and Abbas (21%). Regionally, the Houthis,

Qatar, and Hizballah score highest; internationally, China and (to a lesser extent) Russia and Spain outrank the United States.

The upshot is straightforward: if implementation requires near-term disarmament, a PA takeover, or an armed foreign force—the plan will lack Palestinian legitimacy and face resistance, especially in the West Bank. If implementation emphasizes reconstruction, governance by Palestinian professionals, and a credible path to elections and statehood, it has a social base—especially in Gaza.

VII. What would make the plan sustainable?

For Trump's plan to be viable, it needs more than the personal commitment of the US President and more than regional involvement and consensus. A sustainable approach must realign incentives, clarify end states, and embed Palestinian legitimacy at each stage.

1. Decouple immediate ceasefire and reconstruction from irreversible political concessions. Disarmament should be sequenced—verified, attritional, and tied to tangible, time-bound gains: complete Israeli withdrawal to declared lines; freedom of movement; and reconstruction milestones.
2. Anchor the TTC in Palestinian legitimacy. The TTC can work if (a) its membership is selected through an all-Palestinian consultative process (factions, independents, syndicates, municipalities, camp committees, women's and youth organizations); (b) it has a clear, 18–24 month mandate; and (c) it is paired with a firm commitment to presidential and legislative elections within that window, with modalities for East Jerusalem voting that the public has already endorsed (internet/holy sites/busing). The BP should include Palestinian figures of high credibility and set a sunset clause upon PA reform benchmarks, not open-ended oversight.
3. Define the political horizon now. “Political horizon” must be clarified as a two-state outcome on the 1967 lines with agreed swaps and East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, in line with international law and prior parameters. Ambiguity invites spoilers; clarity constrains them. Without this, disarmament will be seen as capitulation; with it, demobilization can be framed as part of national strategy.
4. Set hard timelines and verification mechanisms. Every core deliverable requires dates, benchmarks, and third-party monitoring: Israeli withdrawal phases, ISF deployment and exit, TTC mandate and succession, reconstruction tranches. A Joint Implementation Commission—comprising the US, EU, UN, Egypt, Qatar, Turkey, and a reformed PA—can publish monthly compliance reports.
5. De-risk the security track. No ISF should deploy until Israeli regular forces have vacated the areas in which it will operate. ISF rules of engagement must preclude disarmament raids; internal security should be led by vetted Palestinian police with international training and monitoring. Border security and counter-smuggling can be shared tasks for the ISF, Egypt, and a reconstituted Palestinian border force. Israel's security concerns can be addressed through remote sensing, demilitarized corridors, and liaison mechanisms—not indefinite re-entries.
6. Integrate regional incentives and do not separate normalization from statehood. Arab and Islamic states will invest and help stabilize Gaza if a real path to statehood is credible and near-term. If normalization is decoupled from Palestinian progress, the plan forfeits leverage over Israel and credibility with Palestinians.

VIII. What the PA should do

The PA confronts a legitimacy crisis and an opportunity. PCPSR shows overwhelming public dissatisfaction with President Abbas, perceptions of entrenched corruption, and a widespread preference for elections that include all factions, including Hamas. The PA's strategic goals should be threefold:

1. Make the ceasefire last. In cooperation with Hamas and the main regional powers, the PA should lean hard into a ceasefire-first, disarmament-later sequence, publicly oppose any requirement to disarm as a precondition for reconstruction (consistent with public opinion), and propose a robust compliance mechanism that holds all parties accountable. It should support a border-security ISF role (which Gazans narrowly accept) and oppose an armed force tasked with domestic disarmament (which majorities reject).
2. Rebuild legitimacy through inclusion and reforms. The PA should (a) announce and begin a time-bound anti-corruption and service-delivery agenda with independent oversight; (b) publicly commit to presidential and legislative elections within 12–18 months of a stabilized ceasefire, accept alternative voting arrangements for East Jerusalem, and drop preconditions that require candidates to accept past PLO obligations (which most Palestinians oppose); (c) negotiate a transitional arrangement in which the TTC is Palestinian-selected and accountable to a broad national council of factions and independents, with the PA in a coordinating—not commanding—role (favored by Gazans, opposed by most West Bankers but improvable with legitimacy steps).
3. Use the plan as a platform to restart final-status negotiations. The PA should insist on defining Phase III now and tie all Phase II disarmament milestones to progress on borders, Jerusalem, settlements, security, and mutual recognition. It should rally Arab and Islamic partners to condition key normalization steps on measurable movement toward statehood.

These steps would not magically repair deep fractures. But they would align PA policy with public preferences, give Palestinians agency in day-after governance, and increase the cost to any actor—Israeli or Palestinian—of rekindling war.

Conclusion

The Trump Plan succeeded in stopping the bleeding, but it offers no cure for the underlying disease. The Plan delivered what two years of attrition could not: a ceasefire, a hostage/prisoner exchange, and a partial withdrawal. It did so by concentrating on the minimal ingredients of a pause and leveraging regional mediation. Its sustainability, however, is undermined by three design failures: an externalized governance architecture that sidelines Palestinian legitimacy; an ambiguous political horizon that blurs statehood; and a security concept that risks pitting an international force against residual armed actors before political conditions change.

Palestinian public opinion, as captured by PCPSR, is unambiguous on the constraints: resistance to disarmament as a precondition; skepticism about a PA-led return to Gaza; openness—especially in Gaza—to technocratic committee-led reconstruction under international auspices; and a powerful demand for elections and anti-corruption reforms. If the plan is to move from pause to peace, it must be recalibrated to these realities.

For the Palestinian Authority, the current moment presents both a danger and an opportunity. To simply acquiesce to the plan's framework would be to seal its irrelevance and be complicit in the establishment of a foreign-run entity in Gaza, formalizing the division it has long claimed to oppose. A more strategic path requires rejecting the plan's colonial logic and championing an alternative rooted in national legitimacy. The PA's primary goal should be to insist on, and facilitate, immediate presidential and

legislative elections across the West Bank and Gaza. This is the only mechanism that can produce a new, legitimate leadership—whether led by Barghouti, or a coalition of Palestinian factions—that has a popular mandate to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinian people. Such a leadership could then form a national unity government to oversee reconstruction in Gaza, replacing the externally imposed TTC with an authentic Palestinian body. It could also negotiate the terms of an international presence, inviting forces not as occupiers or disarmers, but as partners in stabilization under Palestinian sovereignty.

The Trump Plan treats the Palestinian leadership crisis as an obstacle to be bypassed. In reality, resolving this crisis is the prerequisite for any sustainable peace. The international community, including the United States, must abandon the fantasy of imposing a solution and instead invest its diplomatic capital in empowering Palestinians to choose their own representatives. Only a leadership that enjoys the trust of its people can make the difficult compromises necessary for a lasting peace and finally address the dual crises of occupation and internal legitimacy that continue to plague the Palestinian nation.

Absent those corrections, the plan will replicate the logic of earlier efforts: partial implementation, resumed violence, and another turn of Gaza's tragic cycle.

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