

PEACE AND SECURITY

TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Palestinian Perspectives on the
Reconstruction of Gaza

Dalal Iriqat
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The war in Gaza underscores the urgent need for an inclusive governance approach, involving all political factions, young people and women to achieve Palestinian unity and lasting peace.



A future Palestinian state, including Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, must be built on inclusivity, equity and democratic governance to ensure sustainable development and peace.



Despite the ongoing conflict, practicing democracy and holding leadership accountable are essential for Palestinian self-determination and preventing Hamas from monopolising negotiations.

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The devastation in Gaza highlights the need for a new governance approach that actively involves all political factions, young people and women in the Palestinian political system. A unified, inclusive political framework, led by a revitalised PLO, is crucial for Palestinian self-determination and lasting peace in the Middle East.



A future Palestinian state that encompasses Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem under a the right to self-determination must be built on a foundation of inclusivity and equity. Only through the active involvement of all its citizens can sustainable development, peace, and democratic governance be realized, paving the way for a brighter and more hopeful future for all Palestinians.



Despite the ongoing war in Gaza, it is essential for Palestinians to practice democracy and hold their leadership accountable. Progress toward Palestinian unity is critical to preventing Hamas from monopolising negotiations and ensuring that the Palestinian people's voice is heard in their pursuit of self-determination and peace.

Further information on the topic can be found here:

<https://palestine.fes.de/topics/palestinian-perspectives-on-the-reconstruction-of-gaza>

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In cooperation with:



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and Security Affairs

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INTRODUCTION

Diplomatic efforts and multilateral approaches to date have consistently failed to tackle the crisis in Gaza. Numerous condemnations by international organisations have been ineffective; the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in January on the plausibility that Israel is committing genocide; the International Criminal Court (ICC) is about to issue arrest warrants; in July the ICJ, again, ruled on the illegality of the Israeli military occupation; but diplomatic and legal tools have been unable to bring an end to the atrocities.

In addition, in Palestine we are witnessing unchecked violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers, even under the vigilant oversight of Israeli soldiers, not to mention military incursions into West Bank cities that have resulted in the tragic loss of over 600 Palestinian lives in the West Bank alone over the past nine months (Human Rights Watch 2024). The Palestinian prisoner count has soared to over 9,650 civilians, many of them held in administrative detention without trial.¹ These practices flagrantly violate international law and demonstrate that Israel's actions are not targeting Hamas alone. In Gaza, 2.3 million civilians have endured a devastating blockade for 17 years, during which Israeli military forces have engaged in repeated wars. The current conflagration is the fifth such war and the death toll has already reached 40,000 souls.

The two-state solution has regained prominence in global discourse in the wake of 7 October. Despite the daunting reality and substantial loss of life, the emerging political paradigm is of critical importance, contrary to the views of those who argue that discussions on the future should be deferred until after hostilities have ceased.

Some argue that Gaza's reconstruction plans, which are predicated on the rhetoric of development under occupation, can no longer be accepted. In fact, even the terminology "reconstruction" has become problematic in that context. Over the years, reconstruction in Gaza has come in economic peace plans or humanitarian initiatives which have proven ineffective. One frequent mistake is to delve into the details and be shattered by them instead of adopting a comprehensive approach in dealing with reality.

It is imperative that we engage in discussions about the future now. Significant events have occurred, longstanding myths and taboos have been dismantled, and global opinions have shifted in unprecedented ways. A new reality is unmistakably emerging. In that context, we also need immediately to engage in dialogue about a new political paradigm regarding Palestinian unity and good governance.

This paper addresses the need for unity and reconciliation to achieve a national Palestinian political system and proceed towards the aspired-to political framework of one Palestine, the main building block for an independent Palestinian state.

¹ The Commission of Detainees Affairs, Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/freedom2pal>

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REUNIFICATION OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Thinking about the “Day After” necessitates a comprehensive discussion on governance for Gaza, and the devising of strategies to reset and construct the nascent Palestinian state, with the whole of the Gaza Strip as an integral part of it. This requires strategic leadership and an inclusive approach, in which Palestinians engage in meaningful dialogue with all the parties and actors involved to end the divide and reconcile. The Beijing unity agreement brokered by China in July 2024 offers some hope in that respect. However, it needs to be translated by practical steps. Similar reconciliation efforts and agreements to form unity governments have been reached previously, but were not effective in healing the divide.

If Palestinian rights are to be respected by the international community, inclusivity is essential. Hamas should therefore join a coalition that unites all political factions. The priority should be to end divisions and work towards reconciliation. A comprehensive deal, with guarantees from brokering third parties to implement agreements, can bring together various political parties focused on liberation, dignity and self-determination, rather than putting party interests or power struggles first. The rights of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, must be prioritised, transcending the party interests of Fatah or Hamas. The real issue here is the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, not favours granted by any party or state. The Northern Ireland peace process, culminating in the Good Friday Agreement brokered by the USA, serves as a shining example – peace was unattainable until all parties, including the military wing of the IRA and Sinn Féin, its political wing, came to the table.

Indeed, 7 October did not legitimise Hamas as leader of the Palestinians. Despite its increased street popularity, popular support does not equate to widespread support for Hamas’s ideology. Only elections can truly reflect the people’s choice, emphasising the need for democratic processes to determine political leadership. To respect democracy and Palestinian rights, the focus must be on elections and the democratic process, ensuring that political leaders are chosen through ballots, not bullets.

The challenges facing Palestinian reconciliation are multifaceted, involving both internal divisions and external pressures. Internally, the split between Hamas and Fatah has led

to a geographical, political and social divide in Palestinian society in Gaza and the West Bank. Externally, one significant obstacle to Palestinian unity is the complex regional politics, in which certain regional players, including some Arab states, reject Hamas and thus do not see any interest in Palestinian unity. These countries have attempted to undermine reconciliation efforts, fearing that Hamas’s inclusion in the political system could embolden similar political Islamist groups within their own borders. In addition, Benjamin Netanyahu has succeeded in diverting attention from the Palestinian issue to Iran and has depicted Hamas as an Iranian proxy in that context. What is more, Israel has played a direct, pivotal role in hindering reconciliation. By maintaining a policy of isolating Gaza and fragmenting the Palestinian territories, Israel has upheld a “divide and rule” strategy, which effectively stands as a barrier to Palestinian unity. This strategy aims to weaken the Palestinian national movement and prevents the establishment of a cohesive political entity that could negotiate more effectively for self-determination and a two-state solution.

To overcome these challenges, Palestinians must pursue a multi-faceted strategy. First, fostering unity among Palestinian factions is crucial, necessitating a dialogue that prioritises national interests over individual party agendas or external players’ interests. This could be achieved by forming a coalition/unity government that includes new and younger representatives who have the approval of all major factions, ensuring fair representation and shared responsibilities rather than party affiliation. Secondly, leveraging international support is essential. The Palestinian leadership should actively seek backing from global powers and international organisations to mediate and support reconciliation efforts, emphasising the importance of a unified Palestinian front in achieving lasting peace.

Moreover, addressing the concerns of regional players requires diplomatic engagement, demonstrating that a unified Palestinian state can contribute to regional stability and security. Building alliances with sympathetic states can also help counteract the influence of those opposed to reconciliation. Finally, Palestinians must continue to advocate for their rights on the global stage, capitalising on legal developments in world courts, highlighting the detrimental effects of Israeli policies on peace efforts and building international pressure on Israel to support rather than obstruct Palestinian unity.

Through a combination of internal dialogue, international diplomacy, and strategic alliances, Palestinians could and should navigate the complex landscape of regional politics and external pressures, ultimately working towards a unified and sovereign state.

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RECONCILIATION AS A PRECONDITION

When we envision a road map towards Palestinian unity and future governance, several critical factors must be considered for the day after the war in Gaza. Foremost among these is the necessity of democratic elections, which serve as the foundation for legitimate and representative governance. Without elections, there can be no true reflection of the people's will, and consequently no sustainable unity. Equally important is the inclusion of women and the younger generation, whose voices and perspectives are essential for a vibrant and dynamic political landscape. Today's absence of women and the younger generation in the political process undermines the potential for comprehensive and forward-thinking solutions to the challenges faced by Palestinians.

Furthermore, true unity cannot be achieved without embracing democratic principles and ensuring the participation of all factions. The integration of these factions is crucial for fostering a holistic and inclusive political environment. This applies not only to Gaza, but also to the West Bank. The fact that the Palestinian Legislative Council was dismantled by the president in 2018 and that the executive controls legislation in Palestine has led to the centralisation of power within a small circle, from which many feel excluded, if not totally side-lined. Exclusion often leads to disenfranchisement and extremism, whereas inclusion can pave the way for dialogue, moderation and peaceful coexistence.

In Palestine, models for a governmental political system that covers the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem could take a federal, semi-presidential or semi-parliamentarian form. Regardless of the form of the system, however, there are certain requirements that we need to take into account, such as reunification, reconciliation, inclusion and regular political participation, so that people can exercise their political rights to ensure accountability and the best choice of leaders. This inclusive approach would ensure a representative and cohesive leadership for the future, reducing the risk of radicalism and fostering a stable and peaceful political landscape.

The inclusion of Hamas and other military factions in Palestinian governance is necessary to ensure sustainable peace and security for the region, as evidenced by past experiences. Hamas's amendment of their charter and their participation in elections based on peace accords demonstrate a will-

ingness to engage in the political process and adhere to agreements. This move indicates a political appetite and potential for cooperation that should not be ignored. Furthermore, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) now has a historic and perhaps final opportunity to take the lead and assert its legitimate international status as the representative of the Palestinian people. By embracing an inclusive approach that integrates Hamas and other factions, the PLO could reinforce its commitment to self-determination and the end of military occupation.

In considering the future unification of the Palestinian political system, several critical factors should be addressed. It is essential to understand Hamas' vision for its role in a future political framework. Recent discussions suggest that while Hamas may not seek direct control over governance, it does desire integration into the political system. Analysing Hamas' potential development of its political programme is also crucial; the organisation may evolve from its pre-7 October stance, potentially adopting a more pragmatic approach. One of the issues here is Hamas' implicit recognition of Israel's right to exist through its inclusion in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). This could facilitate Hamas' integration in the PLO while maintaining the PLO's vision. Additionally, an approach in which Hamas participates in the political system without decision-making power could be considered if Hamas continues to refuse to recognise Israel. This would allow for involvement without exacerbating conflict and it could take the form of a series of political faction meetings to achieve national consensus and engage in continued dialogue. The creation of a consensus government until elections is another vital aspect. Whether through a power-sharing arrangement or a non-partisan transitional government, this approach must be planned meticulously. The role of the PLO in guiding the presidency and government is also paramount, ensuring continuity and legitimacy. Furthermore, the future of President Abbas and the potential for new leadership, such as Mahmoud al-Aloul or Marwan Barghouti, must be evaluated to determine whether moderate perspectives could drive peaceful resolutions with Israel. By integrating Hamas into the political system, defining the nature of transitional governance and exploring new leadership, a comprehensive and inclusive approach can be developed, paving the way for a democratic and unified Palestinian leadership that genuinely represents its people.

Such an inclusive strategy would not only be essential for the internal cohesion of Palestinian governance but also form a cornerstone of a comprehensive Middle East peace deal. Such a deal, aimed at restoring peace, security and prosperity for all, would require the involvement of all regional stakeholders, including Israel, neighbouring Arab states and international actors. The PLO, leveraging its legal and international recognition, could engage in negotiations that address long-standing issues, such as borders, the right of return and the status of Jerusalem. Integrating diverse Palestinian factions into the process would ensure that a peace agreement is comprehensive and enjoys broad-based support, reducing the likelihood of future conflicts. But this would require the PLO / Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to produce a young and pragmatic leadership that can best utilise the diplomatic, legal and political tools of the twenty-first century.

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INCLUSION OF WOMEN

In considering a road map for Palestinian reform, a prominent role for women is indispensable. The participation of women in politics across the Middle East remains modest, with their involvement is often limited to lower-tier positions. This underrepresentation does not reflect the capabilities and qualifications of Palestinian women. For instance, within the Palestinian National Council, the diplomatic corps, the cabinet and governorates, women are scarcely present in external negotiations and, more importantly, in internal Palestinian reconciliation talks. In the Beijing talks in July 2024, where representatives of 14 Palestinian factions gathered, only one woman was present and she is clearly not an active politician.

We are not advocating the inclusion of women based merely on checking the gender box. Rather, it is important that merits override loyalties and political affiliations, and that women's skills and capabilities determine their roles. Women are not only capable but deserve to hold more senior positions in terms of both quantity and quality. The challenge lies in overcoming the entrenched patriarchal culture. The Middle East needs a women-led macro framework with a top-bottom approach to end the occupation, recognise the Palestinian state and establish the borders of Israel. This framework could be set up in cooperation between the UN and the Arab League, and UN Women could be empowered to take the lead to ensure that women are part of the senior decision-making ranks. This would entail the delegation of real authority and not just lip service to the notion of gender equality.

The State of Palestine's successive National Policy Agendas already envision promoting gender equality and include concrete steps to achieve this. Also, the Palestinian National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325 emphasises the need to strengthen women's participation in official institutions and incorporate their perspectives in discussions on the occupation. In practice, however, Palestinian women view these commitments as mere rhetoric. Despite forming a significant part of key institutions, women remain absent from higher leadership and decision-making roles. Highly educated and competent Palestinian women are often excluded from governance and conflict resolution processes. The issue is not a lack of capacity among women, but rather structural and multi-layered challenges that hinder their meaningful participation. To envision future sustainable governance in Palestine, women need to be at the table.

Also, the role of women in development is crucial for achieving sustainable progress. Women have historically played a significant role in Palestinian society, contributing to both the social and economic spheres. More prominent participation in development initiatives could drive community resilience, economic growth and social cohesion. Empowering women through education and employment in senior decision-making roles, leadership opportunities not only enhance their individual capabilities but would also have a multiplier effect on broader society.

In addition, the inclusion of women in reconciliation efforts is essential for several reasons. Women bring unique perspectives and approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding, often emphasising collaboration, empathy and community welfare. Their involvement can ensure that peace processes are more inclusive and address the needs of all segments of the population. Studies have shown that peace agreements are more durable and effective when women are involved in their negotiation and implementation (WeWorld 2020).

Ensuring the active participation of women in development and reconciliation processes is thus not just a matter of achieving equality but a strategic imperative for building a peaceful, prosperous and inclusive Palestinian state.

5

INCLUSION OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION

Another key element in the way forward, particularly in the day-after scenario in Gaza, is the inclusion of young people and the younger generation. As over 60 per cent of the Palestinian population is under the age of 30 (PCBS 2023), young people represent a significant demographic group that should not be overlooked. Their sheer numbers make them a pivotal force in shaping any future governance structure that aspires to unify Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The inclusion of young Palestinians in decision-making processes is not merely an option but a necessity for ensuring policies and strategies that resonate with the broader population's aspirations.

The energy, creativity and resilience of Palestinian youth are invaluable assets in addressing the myriad socio-economic and political challenges facing the region. Their involvement can infuse fresh perspectives and innovative solutions that are crucial for sustainable development. By empowering young people through education, employment opportunities and leadership roles, Palestine can harness their potential to drive positive change. Young people in Palestine are educated and talented. In Gaza in particular, young people are digitally skilled and can manage virtual tasks remotely. What they need is an opportunity to focus on developing their talents instead of the suffering they are enduring.

This approach could also help bridge the generational divide, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among young people, and building a more resilient and inclusive political landscape. As a rule, the younger generation is more pragmatic. From a conflict transformation perspective, younger generations focus on enjoying life and on serving their personal and family interests rather than the national interests. Thus, the active participation of young people would be crucial in fostering a culture of peace and democratic values. As personal experiences show, young people are often more open to dialogue and reconciliation, making them key players in efforts to achieve lasting peace. Their engagement in governance can also counteract the frustration and disenfranchisement that often lead to unrest and radicalisation. By including young people in the political process, Palestine can promote a more stable and secure environment conducive to long-term peace and prosperity.

Empowering the younger generation to lead, take senior positions and be considered key players in governance –

the average age of those in senior political positions today is 60 – involves several strategic measures. First, access to high-quality education is essential. Young people need to be well-versed in political science, international relations, law and public administration. This foundational knowledge is crucial for understanding the complexities of governance and policymaking. Palestinian public administration and good governance require substantive knowledge, not only administrators who are chosen for their loyalty or years of sacrifice. Alongside formal education, enhancing political literacy is vital. Young Palestinians should be knowledgeable about their political rights and the workings of their political system, including democratic processes, governance structures and civic responsibilities. There should be a public administration with a monitoring and evaluation department, which is goal-oriented and in which civil servants are incentivised to reach their goals and sanctioned when they don't. The current Palestinian public administration structures lack any mechanisms for accountability and the political system lacks a system of checks and balances that could guarantee good governance.

Also, structured leadership programmes and capacity-building initiatives are necessary to develop the essential skills of young leaders. These programmes should focus on leadership, negotiation, international law and conflict resolution. Additionally, establishing mentorship networks could provide young leaders with guidance and the necessary tools to navigate the political landscape. Economic stability also plays a critical role in empowering young people. Creating job opportunities that provide financial independence allows young people to focus on political activism and leadership roles. Supporting entrepreneurship can moreover help young people to develop innovative solutions to economic challenges, fostering a sense of agency and empowerment.

It is crucial to ensure that young people have platforms for participation, such as youth councils, as well as significant roles within political parties, universities and municipalities. Implementing youth quotas in government bodies and creating advisory roles for young people in various organisations could ensure that their voices are heard. International support and networks are also significant in the implementation of these strategic actions.

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CONCLUSION

In the face of the devastating war in Gaza, the loss of hope and widespread despair have underscored the urgent need for a new governance approach. Rebuilding the region and restoring faith in the future require an inclusive political framework that actively involves all segments of society. In this context, the integration of all political factions within the Palestinian political system, led by a pragmatic and rejuvenated PLO, is crucial not only for Palestinian self-determination but also for achieving a lasting and inclusive peace in the Middle East. Moreover, the participation of young people and women is not merely beneficial, but essential for the creation of a cohesive and unified state that truly reflects the will of its people. A future Palestinian state that encompasses Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem under a right to self-determination must be built on a foundation of inclusivity and equity. Only through the active involvement of all its citizens can sustainable development, peace and democratic governance be realised, paving the way for a brighter and more hopeful future for all Palestinians.

It should be common sense that Palestinians, like any other nation, have the right to choose their leadership, hold them to account and guarantee their protection and national and human rights. At this point in time and realistically, it is impossible to imagine carrying out elections as long as the devastating war in Gaza continues. That should not be an excuse for not practising democracy, however. It is exactly at this critical moment of Palestinian history – when Palestinians are deprived of basic needs and confronted with war crimes, famine and forcible displacement, annexation and an attempt to eliminate the Palestinian right to self-determination – that the people should have a say. Without progress towards Palestinian unity, Hamas will continue to negotiate on behalf of Gaza's 2.3 million civilians and Israel will use Hamas as a fig leaf for achieving short-term gains and personal interests at the expense of reaching a peaceful settlement.

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

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In this context, they do not regard the Gaza Strip as a separate entity, but as part of the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967. They also hold that all approaches, be they short or long term, should be compatible with the principle of Palestinian self-determination. The objective is to highlight key insights from Palestinian experiences and expertise and introduce them into the international debate. Papers cover aspects such as security arrangements, governance, the role of women and urban planning for recovery and reconstruction. They reflect the author's views only.

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