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Trump's Gaza Plan and What It Means for Palestinians

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Khaled Elgindy 0:20

You okay, good afternoon, and welcome to the Quincy Institute's webinar Trump's Gaza plan and what it means for Palestinians. My name is Khaled Elgindy. I'm a senior fellow here at the Quincy Institute, a trans partisan think tank in Washington that is working to build a world where peace is the norm and war is the exception. As we all know, President Donald Trump's ceasefire and destabilize and stabilization plan for the Gaza Strip has been widely welcomed around the world for having ended more than two years of a truly horrific war in the Gaza strip that has left more than 70,000 Palestinians dead, including more than 18,000 children, and decimated most of Gaza's civilian infrastructure, a war that a recent UN Commission of Inquiry, along with a growing consensus of human rights groups and genocide scholars have described as a genocide as the one group of people that was not consulted in the development of this plan and that is likely to be the most affected by it, we felt it was critical to get the perspectives of Palestinians on both The potential promise and perils of the Trump plan.

So to help us better understand the Trump plan and what it means for Palestinians in the region, I'm truly honored and delighted to welcome a really stellar panel of experts. I'll introduce them briefly here, but you can see their full bios on the landing page for this event on our website. First we have Carol Daniel-Kaspari, who is a non resident fellow with us here at the Quincy Institute and a Senior Associate Director of the conflict resolution program at the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia. Next, we have Mouin Rabbani, who is co-editor of *Jadaliyya*, an online magazine focused on the Middle East. And of course, he is a well known and veteran researcher and analyst specializing in Palestinian affairs, the Arab Israeli conflict and the contemporary Middle East.

And so as a reminder, we welcome questions from our audience. Please use the Q and A function at the bottom of the screen. Is there a Q and A function? Or am I misreading? Yes, there is okay, so please use the Q and A tab to type in your questions, and we'll try to incorporate as many of those as we can. Okay, so without further ado, let's go ahead and get started. Maureen, I'd like to help. I'd like to ask you to help us kind of set the scene. I think you know, if we go back to February when this administration first began, Donald Trump's thinking about Gaza has seems to have undergone a pretty major shift from initially calling for the removal of Gaza's population at the start of this year to expressly precluding that possibility in the context of his 20 point plan. Could you give us a brief overview of what is or isn't in the plan and and how it came about in terms of the ceasefire, phase one, phase two, that sort of thing in in broad strokes?

Mouin Rabbani 4:30

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Yes, thank you, Khaled, and thank you to you and the Quincy Institute for inviting me to participate in this discussion, alongside Carol and Mohammed, who I suspect will be joining us momentarily. I think first point I would like to make is that it's important to emphasize that we're not talking about a peace plan, nor are we talking about a. A diplomatic initiative. Rather, this is more or less a ceasefire initiative that seeks to end the most active phase of the genocide in Gaza by reducing hostilities and then transferring governance and administration of the Gaza Strip, from Palestinians to a foreign body known as a board of peace. In terms of antecedents, there was, of course, the ceasefire agreement in January, right when Trump entered office, which Israel was subsequently permitted to sabotage. Then you had, as you mentioned, the Trump Riviera proposal in February.

And I think the reason we now have this initiative is for two reasons. The first is that Israel failed. It was unable to expel the Palestinian population from the Gaza Strip. It was unable to decisively defeat Hamas and the other Palestinian groups within the Gaza Strip, and that essentially rendered Trump's Riviera initiative moot. And the second, I think, a key turning point, was the Israeli bombing of the Qatari capital Doha in September. And at that point, I think the Gulf states began exercising the leverage and influence that they have on the United States to bring this, to bring this to an end. And that is kind of the genesis of this agreement, which I would, which I would characterize more as an Israeli initiative presented by the Americans, rather than an American initiative imposed on, imposed on the Israelis, even, even as the Israelis were dragged unwillingly into it.

It consists of three phases. The first is dealing with the immediate issues, and that was the substance of the October 8 agreement reached in Egypt between Israel and the Palestinians. It dealt with issues like ceasefire, humanitarian aid, exchange of captives, and the extent of Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. And that is now more or less nearing completion, even as Israel consistently violates each and every one of the commitments it undertook under that agreement, while the Americans are apparently said to be surprised by the extent to which the Palestinians have fulfilled their commitments and respected their commitments under that agreement. The second phase, which has yet to be negotiated and is unlikely to be implemented in anywhere near the form presented in the Trump administration, consists of governance and administration of the Gaza Strip and issues such as establishment of a board of peace, the deployment of what's known as an international stabilization force, the disarmament of the Palestinians and so on. And we'll talk about this later.

But here, I think you basically have incompatible contradictions and parties which are supposed to be responsible for this aspect of it, unwilling and unable to enter into a situation where there is no clarity on what their role is and where, most importantly, they do not want to end up doing Israel and Washington's dirty work on their behalf, particularly after Israel failed. And the third phase, and the second phase, sorry, would basically establish a kind of international mandate over the Gaza Strip and completely separate it from the Gaza strip from the West Bank, and put it under foreign tutelage. The third aspect consists of long term political aspects, and here it's very incoherent. It's very conditional. And I think it's fair to say that rather than

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presenting a plan on how to resolve the underlying political crisis, this agreement tries to marginalize any significant political element, remove the prospect of Palestinian statehood and self determination from the agenda, and kind of return the situation to what we had on October 6, where Israel would be considered free to unilaterally deal with the Palestinians as it sees fit, without either regional or international interference.

Khaled Elgindy 9:50

So let me turn to Carol and bring you into the discussion since, since Palestinians, of course, feel free to respond to the question I posed to Mohammed, but, but the specific question I'm posing to you is, since Palestinians were not consulted in this plan, what are the most problematic elements that you see from a Palestinian perspective of this plan? We heard a little bit from Moyen already, and conversely, Are there aspects of this plan that you think Palestinians can work with? What can Palestinian actors in particular, whether we're talking about the political factions or civil society due to shape implementation of this plan. And while you're at it, maybe if you could comment on the fact that the Palestinian Authority, despite being expressly excluded from this plan, has nonetheless endorsed it. What does that tell us about about this plan and the position of Palestinian actors.

Carol Daniel-Kasbari 12:28

Thank you, Khaled for having me. Let me start by saying something very simple. This is a post genocide mission, as Marine mentioned, it's not a normal stabilization plan, and that shapes every Palestinian concern about 2803, so when the UN Commission of Inquiry has found genocide, mass killings and deliberate destruction, in addition to statement of intent, Palestinian cannot look at this plan as a fresh diplomatic initiative. They see it as a blueprint written after a crime but without any meaningful input from the population that survived it. So from a Palestinian perspective, there are many troubling elements, but I will put them in three different categories.

The first one is the architecture itself, as you said, the resolution places Gaza under US LED board of peace with sweeping authority over governance, reconstruction, security and Palestinians appear almost as an afterthought, an optional executive committee whose scope is still undefined. That is exactly what Palestinians actually have lived through for decades. Right systems design in foreign capitals, security, first, rights leader and sovereignty eventually. So that's something that they're used to. So it's a familiar pattern. I actually, in my recent policy brief, I described this design as Oslo with helmets, an externally engineered interim regime where Palestinians self rule is always promised, but never actually delivered. So the structure is almost guaranteed to generate resistance and not compliance.

The second problem with it is that the plan is entirely detached from the genocide context, once a situation in any country has been identified as one where genocide occurred. States carry clear duties to prevent further harm, to ensure accountability and to design any interventions with those obligations in mind. So. But none of this is reflected in this plan. There are no

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obligations, there are no safeguards, no prevention framework, and no mechanism that connects stabilization to accountability. So the Palestinians are effectively being asked to place their future under an externally designed authority that does not acknowledge, let's alone, address, the failures that allowed the crimes and the violence to continue for two years.

So in practice, that means asking Palestinians who survived extreme destruction to trust the same system that was unable or unwilling to protect them. That is not realistic foundation for legitimacy or stability. The third problem with it is there's no credible political horizon. The plan actually avoids reaffirming even the basic pillars of international law, such as no acquisition of territory by force, or the issue of the illegality of settlements or the unity of the occupied territories. So without those anchors, Palestinians fear, this becomes a de facto trusteeship, a long term foreign administration that manages Gaza while Israel actually is consolidating control over the West Bank.

Now, as there to your question, are there any elements Palestinian can work with? I say yes, but if the implementation is re engineered as I detail, very much I put in detail in my policy brief published yesterday, the three things Palestinians could do. First, they could demand real seats on the board, not symbolic consultations. That means insisting that at least half of the voting seats are held by Palestinian representatives, including Gaza municipality, municipalities, professional union, women organization, civil society, not just one faction or or just from Ramallah. If the board of peace is going to make decisions that shape everyday life in Gaza, Palestinians must be decision makers. They're not clients.

The second thing they can work with is that they could use international law as leverage. The genocide findings, the ICJ, the ICC processes, these are not just moral talking points. They create legal duties for states, so the Palestinian political actors can actually insist that the Board of peace and ISF cooperate fully with investigations, preserve evidence and align with security assistance with genocide prevention obligations. So that is one of the few levers that could reshape how to eight or three is implemented without reopening the resolution itself.

And third, they could work the Palestinian could work toward a unified Palestinian position on governance. And I will say that's the hardest one. But this is where the pa's endorsement for your question versus Hamas and civil society rejection become important. The PA sees an opening to return to Gaza under international framework. Many in society, including Hamas, see a foreign actually a foreign run trusteeship that undermines them and sidelines Palestinian agency. So both perspective, I would say, capture part of the truth. However, if Palestinians do not articulate a shared minimum position on how they want to engage this plan, others will fill that vacuum for them, and we have seen this before, even a temporary, tactical national framework agreeing on red lines around representation or consent for any extension beyond 2027 and basic right benchmarks that would give Palestinian more leverage than fragmented responses.

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So in short, yes, the palace that the plan is deeply, deeply flawed, but that does not mean the Palestinians have no agency. If they organize around co ownership, accountability and real political horizon, they can still shape how this imposed framework plays out on the ground.

Khaled Elgindy 19:37

Thanks for that, Carol. It seems that we're still having problems with Mohammed's connection. So if I could Marine, I'd like to ask you to maybe address this question of the current realities on the ground, the de facto partition of Gaza, the CMCC, the yellow line, the aid situation. In, there is enough aid getting in, is it the right kind of assistance? Could you give us the sort of paint that picture for us?

Mouin Rabbani 20:09

Yes, if I could first brief comment on Carol's very insightful comments, I agree with everything she said, but would like to make three brief caveats. The first she, I think, correctly, describes the Trump initiative as Oslo with helmets, to which I would add it is Oslo with a much lower political ceiling. The second point is that we are very unlikely to see this implemented, and I will address that in the next part of our discussion, and it will be far from the first initiative that essentially ends up in the dustbin of history because it is unable to survive the confrontation with reality. And the third, and I think the key point Carol made, and one which I would very much like to amplify, is it very much depends also on what the Palestinians do next. Are they able to overcome the constant obstructionism of Mahmoud Abbas specifically, and seek to find a way of national reconciliation, of developing some form of unity so that they can much more effectively address the challenges that they are currently confronting and that they will be confronting.

Regarding your question, Khaled, in the situation on the ground, as I pointed out, Israel is ascended. When you have when Israel enters into an agreement, there are basically three phases. The first is negotiations about the agreement itself. Then once an agreement has been reached, there are then negotiations about how the agreement is going to be implemented, in which Israel essentially treats the agreement it has reached as as more or less irrelevant to how it is going to be implemented. In other words, it tries to transform what was agreed into a different agreement. And the third is how it is actually implemented. And in this phase, Israel essentially treats its obligations and commitments as elective, as opinions, rather than as obligations.

And we're seeing that very much now in the Gaza Strip, there is supposed to be a comprehensive and complete ceasefire, yet Israel, while on a much lower scale than during the height of the genocide, continues with daily killings, with bombings throughout the Gaza Strip. I think something on the order of 400 Palestinians have been killed since the agreement went into force in October. On October 8, its second commitment concerns the exchange of captives. And here, Israel released less captives than it was obliged to, not all in the categories it agreed to, and then at the last moment, deported a number of whom were supposed to be returned to their homes, particularly in the West Bank and the third and the one that's been most

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often in the news in recent weeks is Israel's brazen violation of its obligations to vastly surge the delivery delivery and supplies to the Gaza Strip, it committed to allowing in at least 600 trucks per day. I think the current rate is something on the order of 200 or less trucks per day. You may have heard of the severe storms that are now engulfing the Mediterranean coast, including the Gaza Strip, for which much more shelter supplies are needed, in terms of poles for tents, containers and so on, and Israel is essentially Preventing the entry of any of those goods and supplies on the pretext that they constitute dual use items.

It's a bit similar to Iraq during the 1990s where Israel is essentially seeking to deprive everything the Palestinians need, or most of what the Palestinians need on the pretext that all these items are dual use and can be used for military purposes, most famously, of course, tents and tent poles and containers. And this is having a very severe impact on the civilian population of the Gaza Strip. And I think. What Israel is trying to demonstrate is that, first of all, it will decide if and how and to what extent this agreement is going to be implemented. And secondly, it is seeking to demonstrate to the to the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip and Palestinians more generally, that they have achieved nothing through this agreement. And then the last element, of course, concerns the Israeli withdrawal. It was supposed to withdraw from almost half of the Gaza Strip. It initially did so, but since then, has been encroaching increasingly westwards, in other words, unilaterally expanding the area of the Gaza strip that remains under direct Israeli occupation. We've seen all kinds of press reports that the Americans are unhappy with this. We see the usual pro forma statements from the Europeans about the requirement for Israel to meet its obligations, ink on paper, word hot air, because it's never followed up by consequences for Israel's violations. And this has put Israel, I think, in a position where it feels it is able to basically deal with the remainder of this agreement as it sees fit. Think of it as Israel positioning itself advantageously for the next phase.

Khaled Elgindy 26:30

Yeah, thanks that, that makes a lot of sense. Carol, if I could come to you and I'd like to dig a little bit deeper into into the details of this plan. As you know, last month, the Security Council endorsed the Trump plan resolution 2803 I believe it is including the creation of this board of peace and the International stabilization force, which will effectively govern Gaza for at least two years. Some have charged that this whole arrangement violates international law for reasons that I think you outlined by creating bodies that operate outside the control of the the UN and also by violating directly the basic right, the Palestinian right to self determination. So what do you think is the significance of the Security Council endorsement. Does it mean that the Security Council now has an obligation to enforce the ceasefire, or is it more likely to simply create an international trusteeship, or worse, a US led occupation, or co-occupation over Gaza.

Carol Daniel-Kasbari 27:43

Yeah, the Security Council endorsement for your question is both extremely significant, but it's also extremely dangerous. In theory, when a Security Council endorses a ceasefire framework, it creates a political expectation that the parties and the council itself will work to uphold it. But

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resolution 2803, does something quiet unusual, I would say, first time in history. It does not simply authorize a UN mission. It authorizes the creation of two new bodies, the BOP and the ISF, that are not UN agencies, and they do not report to UN political body in real time. In practice, that means the council has handed a great deal of authority to US led structure and then step back, it will receive periodic reports, as per the plan from the Secretary General, but it will not supervise day to day political decisions.

So it is a more of a rubber stamp than a supervising authority. That is very different model from traditional peacekeeping, and this is why many legal scholars, including Palestinian jurists, are warning that we are looking at a kind of international trusteeship, but one that lacks the usual safeguards of a former formal trusteeship system, and because the US chairs the BOP, it effectively sets that command structure of the ISF. So it will be perceived without no doubt, inside Gaza and across the region as a US run occupation with a un stamp on the front cover.

So there are three implications for that. First, it blurs the line between peacekeeping and occupation. This is not a classic blue helmet of. Operation under Title and command. So the ISF answers to the BOP, which is shared by the US and shaped by what the US interests and preferences are. And you know, it's, it's, and this is why it's more of an operational control by a foreign power than neutral peacekeeping. And second, and undermines Palestinian self determination. The resolution allows for a Palestinian executive committee, but it does not define its powers, or it does not require it to exist at all, and clearly places it under B, O, P. So the political authority over Gaza is not Palestinian. It's external. So when you combine this with an absence of a clear timeline and benchmark for restoring Palestinian sovereignty, it starts looking like a long term administration without meaningful consent. And third, it increases it increases us ownership, not un ownership. So once the council has blessed this design, and once the US occupies the central chair, Washington becomes the address of both expectations and anger. If the ceasefire phrase, if the ISF is implicated in abuses. If their reconstruction stalls or politicized Palestinians and the broader region will not say the UN failed. They will say the US failed. And so the council endorsement does not distribute responsibility evenly, it concentrates it, and that is a huge problem.

So what so does 2803, create a duty to your question, to enforce the ceasefire? On paper, it gestures in that direction. And in reality, the continuing bombardment, as we saw since the ceasefire has been announced, show that the council has very limited will or capacity to enforce anything against Israel. So what it does, clearly create is a structure that functions in many respects, like American trusteeship, unless it is reshaped around three things that I mentioned earlier, the Palestinian co ownership, the genocide prevention, safeguard and incredible time bound exit. It will drift toward being experienced as a foreign occupation, and once that perception hardens, it will be extremely difficult to reverse.

Khaled Elgindy 32:45

Thanks, Carol. Just to clarify for our audience, when we use abbreviations like Bop and ISF, the BOP is the board of peace that is the supposedly political body that will oversee the governance

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over Gaza, and the ISF is the International stabilization force that is also called for in this plan and the UN resolution, and that's specifically what I'd like to ask you about. Moyne. What do you see as a as the role for this international stabilization force. How realistic is it? We know that Israel would like to see it perform the role of disarming Hamas sooner rather than later. Is that feasible? Who or what are the entities or countries that are likely to serve on the ISF or the board of peace. We've seen Tony Blair's name thrown around, but also apparently now he may be off the table. But give us a sense of what you see, specifically this international stabilization force role playing in some ways, you've answered this question in that you don't see it playing out realistically. But what does that leave in its wake? Then, if nothing is going to be there, where does that leave Gaza?

Mouin Rabbani 34:15

Well, this is where the initiative runs into what I believe are insurmountable contradictions that will make it a dead letter, quite apart from the reality that that by design, this this initiative gives Israel total impunity zero accountability, and once again, as An Oslo, makes the Palestinians responsible for the security of the occupier and in this case, the perpetrator of genocide. So the plan calls for the disarmament of Hamas. Hamas has indicated that it is prepared to surrender all. Of its weaponry, but only to the national authority of an independent Palestinian state, which means that if you, if you want, to form an international stabilization force, in the absence of what the Arab states have called for, namely a credible, irreversible and time bound pathway to the end of occupation and independent Palestinian state that would put the force in direct military conflict with Hamas, which all the proposed candidates for the stabilization force have said they are unprepared to do, because they would see themselves as essentially fighting Israel's war more broadly, given that the plan and in order to appease Israel, removes the Palestinian Authority from any role in the Gaza strip that creates an additional problem, because the Arab states that are being called upon to finance the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and to along with Muslim states compose the stabilization force, have insisted on a role for The Palestinian Authority and have insisted on a clear political pathway to a Palestinian state.

So absent these conditions, you run into the insurmountable obstacle of those who have been earmarked to perform defined roles in this initiative are unprepared and unwilling to do so unless preconditions that have been deliberately excluded from the initiative are incorporated into it. It is, you know, not entirely imaginative to suspect that perhaps Trump will in January or February when he realizes this is a dead letter to kind of try to rewrite the plan to accommodate these Arab concerns. But I think what is more likely is that he will simply lose interest. And that would also, I think, suit Israel, because for Israel, an indefinite perpetuation of the current status quo is perfectly fine with it. Israel is not as invested in the implementation and completion of the second phase of this agreement as is, for example, the United States or the Europeans, or, for that matter, the Arab states.

Khaled Elgindy 37:39

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Thanks, Mouin, Carol, I'd like to come back to you and and zoom in a little bit on the role of of the Palestinians and the specifically the Palestinian Authority. The plan calls for very conditional role to be played by the PA to return to Gaza based on various unspecified reforms. Now, reform means very different things to different groups. It doesn't mean in the West. What it means, I think, to many Palestinians. I think we can all agree that the Palestinian leadership is in quite a sorry state. But in the meantime, there is supposed to be a plan until you can have a credible Palestinian leadership. The plan calls for the day to day affairs of Gaza to be run by a Palestinian technocratic committee that reports directly to this board of peace. What is the status, as far as you know, of this technocratic committee? Do we know who's on it? Have all of the Palestinian factions agreed? Do they have buy in from a Palestinian civil society? Or where does, where do things stand on that front?

Carol Daniel-Kasbari 39:09

Oh, sorry, I was muted. I don't think this committee has been finalized. It's it's been spoken about. It's been discussed at several levels. I don't think there are final figures that are starting to work together or talking about this in any serious shape or form. I also agree with mine that not sure the plan as is will be implemented, or the plan at all will will be implemented. But if, if today, Hamas or Abbas leadership ask, in general, how to alleviate suffering and plan for Gaza's rehabilitation. And reintegration. I would start by saying, you cannot control the whole framework, but you still have room to shape it, to shape what happens inside it, and that matters. Before you know this technocratic committee, I think there is a need to create a unified position on governance during this interim period. These two years, the fragmentation has been a gift to external actors who want to design Gaza future for Palestinians.

So both sides, Hamas Fatah and also others are speaking different or having different voices, entirely separate voices. And so what will happen eventually, if this board of peace is talking to Palestinians, they will proceed with the easiest partners, and claim that they have had Palestinian consultation. So I would urge them to agree, even reluctantly, now, on a joint Palestinian mechanism that can speak with some authority in the implementation phase, whether it is a revived PLO framework with broader inclusion a joint committee or another agreed forum, so it does not need to resolve every Palestinian dispute between them. It needs to provide a minimum unified platform to say, these are our red lines. These are our consent. These are rights. And as I said, and you already mentioned, this, the genocide findings and international law, they are tools. They're not rhetoric, and Palestinians need to use them. And how do they use them? If they participate in in the technocratic community, if they're participate any state, first of all, that participates in the in the ISF international stabilization force or the board of peace, they should really limit any participation, to first fully cooperate with investigations, to protect evidence to talk about arts transfer, it should not only be around providing basic services, which is really like crucial and needed and urgent, but Palestinians need some basis to push for changes In the rules of engagement in the design mission and in everything.

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And the most important thing, actually, in this, in the engagement of Palestinians at the end, is if you talk to Palestinians in Gaza, after everything they have endured, many will tell you they do not equate their security with more armed men. So and real protection will depend on trusted local structures, such as neighborhood committees, youth organization. We have seen this during the last two years, where some people were actually protecting civilians, religious leaders, I would, I would advise any committee that is formed to support the formation of such a local Protection Network, to train them, to connect them, to insist that they will be integrated into The mission. Because those protection structures can monitor, not just cease fire violation. They could accompany vulnerable groups. They could raise alarm when abuses occur. So and and the BOP will have to listen to these local voices and to treat Palestinians, not as passive objects.

And you know, most important thing now that we're talking also about demilitarization, and Marine has mentioned this a little bit about what Hamas is willing to do. I think there is a need to link any discussion of demilitarization to concrete political guarantees, rather than treating disarmament as a precondition for everything else. So if armed group and here, I'm not just talking about Hamas, because my fear is there are going to be many other smaller groups that are going to be appearing, resisting what's happening, not finding their basic their basic needs. So we can imagine many scenarios, but let's put it this way, if an armed group are told, first you disarm, then you get your rights, then you get to move freely from one place to another. Then you get to participate politically. The rationale response is, would be to hold onto weapons. So instead, demobilization is has to be sequenced with real steps that people can feel, easing the blockade, providing basic, basic health and education services, opening crossings, freeing political space. That is the only way to committing to Representative mechanism in a defined framework, a time frame in a defined framework, but also to give a defined time frame, then you know.

So I'm talking about the incentive structure that needs to change. So the message should be by Palestinians, you are not that there should not be disarming into a void. They should be trading weapons for a framework that has some enforceable content. So And lastly, and most importantly for Palestinians now is the issue of reintegration with the best bank. I would say slogans are not enough. If Gaza is rebuilt, is Gaza? If is is run as a separate international project, and the West Bank continues to on a separate track of settlement expansion and fragmentation, there is no real national project left. So I would urge them to push for tangible steps toward institutional integration, joint planning between Gaza and West Bank ministries, shared approaches to legal reform, coordinated thinking on security sector restructuring, and I Don't know, crucially, a shared roadmap toward representative, national institutions that could be renewed. So again, I don't think Palestinians should wait for two, eight or three to somehow become a just plan. It will not, but Palestinians could decide whether they're present in the room as authors or only as subjects.

Khaled Elgindy 47:29

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I mean, this seems to be, I think, a common theme cutting across what both of you are saying and what a lot of people are saying, and that is the absence of Palestinian agency. Not that Palestinians don't have agency, but they're that on the one hand, the Trump plan. The Israelis are actively trying to sideline Palestinian agency, but then we also see Palestinian actors, kind of, you know, like the Palestinian Authority, forfeiting their own agency. So both of you have also talked about this question of unity as a kind of first step to rebuilding the Palestinian national movement, but also to dealing with the catastrophic conditions that exist in Gaza, but, but also in the West Bank to a lesser not on the same scale, but, but, but equally horrible. Moyen I'd like to ask you on this question of Palestinian unity. If you could magically, sort of, you know, rearrange Palestinian politics, or at least lay out the sequence for what you think should happen, what would you do to kind of put the Palestinian polity back together as a as a kind of first step?

Mouin Rabbani 48:50

Well, fortunately, it doesn't require magic, because the agreements regarding this issue are already there. Namely, first and foremost, the integration of Hamas and Islamic Jihad into the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the establishment of a temporary Leadership Committee prior to that, including representatives of those groups that are not now part of the PLO, pending the restructuring of the PLO. And I think, you know, we can discuss these larger, broader strategic issues about what should and what shouldn't be done and how and when and where. I think the key issue is the development of legitimate, credible and credibly representative Palestinian national institutions that can themselves, discuss, debate and decide on these issues.

And I think the obvious place for that to happen is within a rejuvenated PLO that incorporates those groups that have been outside of it up until now. And secondly, to rearrange the relationship between the policy between the PLO and the Palestinian Authority so that it reflects the decisions regarding the establishment of the Palestinian Authority that were initially made in 1993 and 1994 namely, that it is a subordinate administrative agency for specific tasks in the occupied territory. So it doesn't need a president, it doesn't need a prime minister. You know, it doesn't need all these big titles, but it should be an agency of the PLO, rather than the current reality we have where the PLO is essentially a branch office of the Palestinian Authority. I

If I could just make one more point in response to Carol's latest comments, which I agree with fully, but I also think we need to recognize that what we are dealing now is a competition, if you will, a struggle between two very different perspectives of not only Gaza and Palestine, but the world more broadly, in which the Trump administration following on everything that was done by the Biden administration. Is seeking to make international law, international institutions, the norms and values, global norms and values, particularly those that developed during the era of decolonization, to make them irrelevant and substitute them with the law of the jungle, where might and only might makes right, and we've now reached the stage where the United States and its European allies are using the Security Council to reorder the international system. We saw this with its recent resolution on Western Sahara, which basically seeks to eliminate the

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right to self determination of the Sahrawis, as confirmed, for example, by the International Court of Justice, and reduce them to an autonomous status within a sovereign Morocco.

And we're seeing it now with the Gaza resolution, which basically seeks to eliminate the entire international consensus on inalienable Palestinian rights that has developed since the 1970s and replace it with this literally British Mandate led by Tony Blair. And we're likely to see something similar regarding Ukraine. And on the other hand, you of course, have global opinion, the Global South, those who believe that impunity is not an international value, that accountability and the same norms and values and laws and regulations apply to us all, and that is a struggle, I think, that will intensify in the years ahead.

Khaled Elgindy 53:03

Mouni, I'd like to just sort of ask to stay with, I want to stay with you for a moment, and push on this question, because we have a question in our in our audience, and I think a lot of people are thinking about this from the beginning, Israel has said that Hamas has to be wiped out, and there is a kind of broad international consensus that Hamas cannot have a role in the future. Now people understand that role differently, but is it possible to move forward without Hamas, at least in terms of Hamas consent? Not that Hamas is going to continue to govern Gaza. But is it possible to move ahead without a role for Hamas at a political level? And what? How do you sidestep, Sidestep this kind of international you know, recoiling at the concept of of Hamas playing any sort of role in in Palestinian politics going forward. Is there a way around that?

Mouin Rabbani 54:10

Yes, you sidestep it by ignoring it. And what I mean by that is that the Palestinians should rebuild their national movement and order their priorities on the basis of what best serves Palestinian interests, not what is most desirable in Tel Aviv or Brussels or Washington. And so long as Palestinians continue to make national decisions based on the interests of others, including their enemies and adversaries and those who do not have their interests at heart and have only the interests of their occupiers at heart, we will continue to have these discussions about who was in and who was out and who was legitimate and who was illegitimate. If the Palestinians establish a credible representative unified national. Movement the world will have to deal with it as it is, not as it would want it to be.

Now regarding specifically Gaza, it is one thing to have Administration and Governance that excludes Hamas, provided others are excluded as well, and the Palestinians have already agreed to this, but to have governance structures that do not enjoy the consent of Hamas, I think again, is a dead letter. It would be possible if Israel had succeeded in administering a decisive defeat to the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. It succeeded in genocide. It succeeded in systematic destruction. But Israeli analysts themselves, Israeli officials themselves, are saying that Hamas weakened, battered, yes, but is still on its feet and is reasserting its authority. And the idea that you can somehow pretend this doesn't exist is not going to get you very far. Thanks.

Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes

Khaled Elgindy 56:02

Carol, I'd like to come to you last you'll have the last word before we close, and I'd love to hear your thoughts on this question of Palestinian unity. But also, I want to ask you more specifically about the future of Gaza. I think it's not unreasonable to look at the scale of destruction in Gaza and conclude a, this is not accidental and and B, there is a very real possibility that Gaza simply cannot be rebuilt, and that, particularly if, if there is no reconstruction of humanitarian aid is still going to be restricted, does Gaza have a future. How do Palestinians mitigate the threat of gradual depopulation over time and and, and lastly, if, in fact, as I think, what both of you seem to be saying, that there is no real hope for this phase two, what is the more likely outcome that will just sort of the status quo will continue indefinitely, or that will return to a kind of more, more of the what the war at the scale that it was before October? And if you could do all of that in exactly one minute, that would be great.

Carol Daniel-Kasbari 57:24

Oh, wow. Very difficult question, very hard to predict the future, but knowing the Palestinian resilience, I'm not expecting most Palestinians will leave Gaza. First, there is nowhere, no place to leave to. That's one thing. And second, I'm not, I'm not sure the PA or any faction see like we know, there are numbers of people that are leaving naturally, if they have families in Egypt or elsewhere. But most of the Palestinians, no matter which faction it is or from which you know side are not supportive of the you know people, people leaving. But the other, on the other hand, I think the plan is very hard to implement, as is so far, we don't know which countries are involved and which not.

My prediction will be Israel will fill that void. Israel already has said that the yellow line will be the border of Israel. They announced it yesterday. So that being said, they're taking more land, and that's probably in the near future, what we're going to see. They're going to consolidate more power, even in Gaza, and the arrests are going to continue, and the killing and bombing is not going to stop. And not only hope in the international system is the ICJ, the ICC and international law. At the moment, I do not see out of the situation we're in. I just hope and will stay safe.

Khaled Elgindy 59:14

Thank you, Carol. So unfortunately, that is all the time that we have. I want to thank our amazing speakers, Carol Daniel Kasbari and Mouin Rabbani, and we're very sorry that Mohammad could not join us for this discussion, but was, it was, in any case, a really rich and informative discussion. Thanks to all of you out there for joining us, just to know that this is our last webinar of the year, but there will be plenty more to come in 2026 and we hope to see you all again shortly. If you haven't already, please be sure to subscribe to the Quincy mailing list from our homepage. It's quincyinst.org, so you can receive invitations to all our upcoming events and follow our work more generally. Thank you again for your participation today, and I wish you all a safe and enjoyable holiday and a Happy New Year.