

# How to Keep Resolution 2803 From Becoming a U.S.–Run Occupation

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# Executive Summary

**P**resident Trump's peace plan for Gaza — adopted by the U.N. Security Council as Resolution 2803 — risks becoming yet another U.S.-run occupation. Coming on the heels of U.N. findings that Israel has committed genocide in Gaza, the plan would place Washington at the center of a post-genocide mission. This brief lays out how the U.S. can avoid a quagmire by aligning implementation with genocide-prevention obligations, Palestinian self-determination, and a credible exit strategy.

Resolution 2803 creates a U.S.-led Board of Peace as a transitional administration for Gaza, with a new international Stabilization Force, the ISF, under its umbrella, leaving Palestinian self-rule to a vague later “pathway.” This “interim” regime risks becoming “Oslo with helmets”: heavy on external control and light on rights. Without Palestinian co-ownership and a political horizon, such an arrangement is unlikely to succeed. It is more likely to fuel support for armed groups and to drag the U.S. into an indefinite security commitment it says it does not want.

To avoid that outcome — and the resulting political blowback — this brief recommends that the U.S. use the tools it controls to reshape Resolution 2803 around three pillars:

- **Post-genocide safeguards.** Embed genocide-prevention and accountability into the mission's mandate by requiring cooperation with the U.N. Commission of Inquiry and relevant international courts and by aligning any security assistance and arms transfers with prevention obligations. The U.S. cannot credibly send troops to protect Palestinians while continuing to arm the same campaign that devastated Gaza.
- **Palestinian co-ownership.** Allocate half of the Board of Peace's votes to Palestinian representatives from national institutions and to Gaza-based municipal and civil society actors, and recognize the Palestinian executive committee as the core body for day-to-day governance. Any extension of the board and ISF beyond 2027 should require both a new Security Council vote and clear Palestinian consent.
- **A rights-anchored transition and exit.** Pair these institutional changes with a transition roadmap that goes beyond security indicators, including lifting movement and access restrictions, reopening crossings, rebuilding health and education systems, restoring due process, and creating civilian-protection mechanisms. Link this roadmap to halting settlement expansion and settler violence so Gaza's transition is embedded in a broader shift away from permanent occupation.

If President Trump ties his plan to enforceable benchmarks along these lines — and checks Israeli obstructionism rather than indulging it — the U.S. can help stabilize Gaza and secure a viable exit instead of inheriting an endless mission.

# Introduction

On Nov. 17, 2025, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 2803 endorsing President Trump's 20-point plan for Gaza and authorizing a new International Stabilization Force, the ISF, alongside a U.S.-led "Board of Peace" that will govern the territory for at least two years.<sup>1</sup>

Supporters are calling it a breakthrough: a Security Council-mandated ceasefire framework, an international force to secure the strip, and a transitional administration to rebuild Gaza and supposedly prepare the way for Palestinian self-determination.<sup>2</sup> After more than two years of a war that has killed over 70,000 Palestinians and reduced large parts of Gaza to rubble, that sounds like progress.<sup>3</sup>

From inside Gaza's reality, it looks more dangerous than that. The architecture created by Resolution 2803 risks turning Gaza into Oslo with helmets: a heavily securitized "interim" regime dominated by external powers that doesn't resolve the conflict, and in which Palestinian sovereignty is always coming but never arrives.<sup>4</sup>

For Washington, that design carries its own dangers. The plan is effectively one of occupation and nation-building with echoes of U.S. President George W. Bush's disastrous designs for Iraq. Rather than pulling

the U.S. out of the Middle East militarily, the plan will further cement America's military overextension in the region and entangle it in its conflicts. Moreover, if the mission drifts, fails, or faces resistance, the United States — not the U.N. — will absorb the blame, the costs, and the strategic fallout.

That risk would be troubling in any context. In Gaza, it comes on top of something worse: a genocide already identified by the U.N.'s own investigators.

In September, the U.N. Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry concluded that Israel has committed genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, finding four of the five acts listed in the 1948 Genocide Convention: mass killing, serious bodily and mental harm, deliberately inflicting destructive conditions of life, and measures intended to prevent births.<sup>5</sup> The commission highlighted the scale of civilian deaths, the systematic destruction of homes, schools, and health facilities, including reproductive health care, and statements by senior Israeli officials as evidence of genocidal intent.<sup>6</sup>

Another U.N. report, titled "Gaza Genocide: A Collective Crime," presented to the General Assembly in October, went further, arguing that the ongoing destruction is sustained by the complicity of

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- 1 United Nations, "U.N. Security Council Authorizes Temporary International Force for Gaza," press release, Nov. 18, 2025, <https://turkiye.un.org/en/305497-un-security-council-authorizes-temporary-international-force-gaza>; United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 2803," S/RES/2803, Nov. 17, 2025, [https://documents.un.org/access.nsf/get?DS=S/RES/2803%20\(2025\)&Lang=E&Open=.](https://documents.un.org/access.nsf/get?DS=S/RES/2803%20(2025)&Lang=E&Open=.)
  - 2 "U.N. Security Council Approves U.S.-Brokered Gaza Peace Plan," *CBS News*, Nov. 17, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/un-security-council-approves-us-brokered-gaza-peace-plan/>.
  - 3 James Cook, "More Than 70,000 Killed in Gaza Since Israel Offensive Began, Hamas-Run Health Ministry Says," *BBC News*, Nov. 28, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8e97kl240lo>.
  - 4 'Oslo' refers to the Oslo Peace Accords signed in 1993.
  - 5 Philippe Ricard, "War in Gaza: Israel Has Committed Genocide, According to a U.N. Commission," *Le Monde*, Sept. 16, 2025, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/09/16/war-in-gaza-israel-has-committed-genocide-according-to-a-un-commission\\_6745456\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/09/16/war-in-gaza-israel-has-committed-genocide-according-to-a-un-commission_6745456_4.html).
  - 6 Amnesty International, "Israel/OPT: U.N. Report Concluding Israel Is Committing Genocide in Gaza Must Spur International Action," Sept. 16, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/09/israel-opt-un-report-concluding-israel-is-committing-genocide-in-gaza-must-spur-international-action/>.



powerful third states that have continued to provide military, diplomatic, and economic support.<sup>7</sup>

Resolution 2803 is therefore not a neutral peacekeeping blueprint dropped into a vacuum. It is an American attempt to design Gaza's future in the shadow of a genocide that the U.N. system

itself has named. The question is whether this new architecture will interrupt that crime or quietly institutionalize its results — and whether it will create a time-limited mission or an American trusteeship that will trap Washington endlessly in Gaza.

Right now, it does not lean toward the first option.

## The problem with 2803's architecture

The basic design is clear. The resolution “welcomes” Trump's comprehensive plan, including the establishment of a Board of Peace as a transitional administration for Gaza.<sup>8</sup> It authorizes the board to set up the ISF and to hand-pick the unified command that will deploy in Gaza, secure the territory, oversee borders, and “support the demilitarization” of non-state armed groups.

The Board of Peace will coordinate reconstruction and effectively govern Gaza until the end of 2027, when its mandate and that of the ISF are due to expire, unless renewed. The resolution “allows for” the establishment of a Palestinian executive committee to run day-to-day administration under this umbrella, and it nods to a “credible pathway” to Palestinian self-determination and statehood once Gaza is rebuilt and the Palestinian Authority is reformed.

Notice the hierarchy.

The Board of Peace and the ISF are defined in detail, with explicit powers and timelines. Palestinian self-rule is left to a later “pathway,” and the Palestinian executive committee is treated as optional and undefined. The language on an eventual state is deliberately vague. The key obligations that have structured this conflict for decades — no acquisition of territory by force, the illegality of settlements, and the status of the occupied Palestinian territory as a single unit — are not reaffirmed.

In practice, that means Gaza's future will be shaped primarily by Washington, the Board of Peace it leads, and the ISF it authorizes to “use all necessary measures” in the name of demilitarization and security. Once the Security Council confers this mandate on the board, its role largely shrinks to receiving periodic reports from the secretary-general. The board is not required to seek the council's approval for its key decisions on the ISF or Gaza's governance, and it does not answer to any U.N. political body in real time. In effect, the council underwrites a U.S.-led transitional authority and then steps back, closer to a rubber stamp than a supervising political organ. Consequently, the United States will fully own the outcome — just as it did in Afghanistan and Iraq.

For Palestinians, this is a familiar pattern: a security-first “interim” arrangement dominated by external actors, with sovereignty permanently deferred. It is Oslo again, only this time the guns and mandates belong not just to Israel and Palestinian factions but to a U.S.-engineered force.

For the United States, the danger is different but no less real: an architecture that appears to maximize U.S. control also maximizes U.S. exposure. A model that sidelines Palestinians guarantees long-term resistance, instability, and blame, creating exactly the kind of open-ended security problem Washington has repeatedly said it does not want. Leaving Gaza's political future vague while locking in an externally

7 United Nations, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967,” A/80/492, Oct. 20, 2025, <https://documents.un.org/access.nsf/get?DS=A/80/492&Lang=E&Open=>.

8 Carol Daniel-Kasbari, “Gaza Plan: Looks Like Peace, Acts like Occupation,” *Responsible Statecraft*, Oct. 6, 2025, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/gaza-ceasefire-trump/>.

designed security regime also reproduces the vacuum in which Hamas has repeatedly reasserted itself. Each time the guns fall silent without a coherent political framework for what comes next, the most organized actor on the ground fills the void — not only as an armed group, but as a social and institutional network in Gaza’s ruins. Resolution 2803, as currently framed, risks entrenching that pattern rather than breaking it.

It is also important to be clear about what this mission cannot legitimately do. Neither the United States nor the U.N. has any democratic mandate or moral legitimacy to decide who governs Palestinians. Any attempt to use the Board of Peace or the ISF to predetermine Gaza’s political leadership would turn a stabilization effort into a de facto regime-change project, a model with a long and well-documented record of failure. As Philip H. Gordon has noted, the United States has pursued at least seven major regime-change efforts in the Middle East since

1953 — in Iran, Afghanistan (twice), Iraq, Egypt, Libya, and Syria — and many analysts count even more when including failed attempts and internal Palestinian power-shift efforts.<sup>9</sup> None produced legitimate, stable governance; most produced the opposite. Beyond the principle, externally engineered leadership would delegitimize any emerging Palestinian authorities and is likely to strengthen, not weaken, the very actors Washington says it wants to sideline.

If nothing changes in how Resolution 2803 is implemented, Gaza will be placed under a de facto international trusteeship built on the rubble of a genocide.

There is still time to prevent that. But it requires states — not least the United States and European allies — to confront three uncomfortable facts and to reengineer the plan around them.

## This is a post-genocide mission, not a normal peacekeeping operation

When a U.N. commission of Inquiry, or COI, concludes that genocide is being committed or that there is a serious risk of it, states cannot simply treat the situation as an ordinary armed conflict. A COI finding does not carry the binding legal force of an International Court of Justice ruling, but it does trigger states’ duty of due diligence under the Genocide Convention: the obligation to take all reasonable steps to prevent further harm once credible indicators of genocide are present. For the United States and its partners, ignoring those findings while leading the implementation of Resolution 2803 would carry real costs — political, legal, and strategic — undermining the mission’s legitimacy, exposing Washington to charges of complicity, and increasing the risk that the U.S.

becomes drawn into an open-ended security commitment in Gaza.

The text of Resolution 2803 does not spell out what a post-genocide duty of prevention looks like in practice, but it also does not forbid states from tightening standards in how they design the mission. The question for Washington is whether it wants to run a high-risk operation in Gaza without safeguards that reduce liability, keep U.S. forces out of a policing role, and ensure that other states share real responsibility for outcomes on the ground. For the United States, these measures are not moral add-ons; they are basic risk management to avoid a costly mission that exposes American personnel, leaves U.S. taxpayers carrying the bill, and hands adversaries an easy narrative of American hypocrisy.

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9 Philip H. Gordon, *Losing the Long Game: The False Promise of Regime Change in the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2020).

Critically, incorporating these safeguards does not require reopening Resolution 2803. They can be built into the Board of Peace's statutes, the ISF's rules of engagement, and the guidance the secretary-general issues to the mission. These are standard tools used to operationalize Security Council mandates.

At a minimum, implementation of Resolution 2803 must:

- **Embed genocide prevention and accountability into the mission's mandate.** The Board of Peace and ISF should be required to fully cooperate with the Commission of Inquiry, the International Court of Justice, and the International Criminal Court, facilitating access, preserving evidence, and protecting witnesses rather than quietly shielding suspects. The United States should ensure that its role on the board and in the ISF does not obstruct U.N. or international investigations, and that no U.S. personnel, contractors, or funds are used to shield suspects from accountability. For Washington, this is not only a legal matter; it is about insulating a U.S.-backed mission from future legal challenges and reputational

damage that could erode domestic and international support.

- **Align security assistance with prevention obligations.** States implementing Resolution 2803 should follow the COI's recommendations to halt arms transfers and other forms of assistance that risk enabling further genocidal acts, and they should vet any security assistance against genocide-prevention obligations.<sup>10</sup> States cannot credibly send troops to protect Palestinians while continuing to arm the same campaign that destroyed their homes, schools, and hospitals. That contradiction would erode U.S. leverage with Arab and European partners, hand adversaries easy talking points at the U.N., and undermine the mission's prospects for success.

Without these safeguards, Resolution 2803 will function as crisis management for the aftermath of a genocide while the legal and political architecture of that crime remains untouched, and it will do so under a U.S. flag, exposing Washington to long-term political and strategic blowback.

## Palestinians must be co-authors of the new order, not its clients

Resolution 2803 welcomes the Board of Peace as a transitional administration "overseen" by the U.S. president and gives it sweeping authority over reconstruction and governance. The ISF, authorized under that same umbrella, is tasked with securing borders, demilitarizing Gaza, and coordinating with Egypt and Israel.

Palestinians appear primarily as objects of policy: to be pacified, demilitarized, and prepared. That is the heart of the Oslo problem. To avoid Oslo with helmets, three design changes are essential:

- **A Palestinian majority on the Board of Peace.** Seats should be allocated so that Palestinian representatives, drawn not only

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, "Legal Analysis of the Conduct of Israel in Gaza Pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide," A/HRC/60/CRP.3, Sept. 16, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session60/advance-version/a-hrc-60-crp-3.pdf>.

from the existing Palestinian Authority but also from Gaza-based municipal leaders, professional associations, women's networks, and civil society, hold at least half of the board's votes. This avoids creating a foreign-designed parallel authority and allows the transitional structure to support, rather than undermine, unified governance between the West Bank and Gaza. Egypt is already facilitating discussions along similar lines; implementation of Resolution 2803 should reinforce that trajectory, not replace it. The same logic applies to the question of Hamas's disarmament. Any attempt to solve Gaza's security problem by outsourcing demilitarization to an external force, while sidelining a legitimate Palestinian national framework, will be viewed as another form of occupation and will provoke fierce resistance. Durable demobilization of armed groups can only come under a unified, Palestinian-led national authority that enjoys internal credibility and international backing, not from a foreign-designed security mandate that asks Palestinians to disarm into continued statelessness.

- **The Palestinian executive committee should be the primary civilian authority.** The committee mentioned in Resolution 2803 must not become a glorified municipal office. It should be recognized in practice as the core executive body for day-to-day governance, with the Board of Peace in a supervisory, support, and coordination role rather than as the de facto government.
- **No extension without Palestinian consent.** The Board of Peace and ISF mandates currently expire at the end of 2027. Any extension should require not only a new

Security Council vote but clear evidence of Palestinian consent, through elections or another representative mechanism, not just signatures from a narrow leadership circle.

If Palestinians cannot set priorities, overrule decisions, or refuse an endless "transition," then the mission may stabilize Gaza, but it will do so as an international occupation in all but name.

For Washington, Palestinian co-ownership is not a favor; it is the only way to avoid governing Gaza by default. A Board of Peace, seen as an American instrument, will generate resistance, undermine regional cooperation, and place U.S. partners like Egypt and Jordan in impossible political positions. A model that shares power also shares risk.

For the same reason, the goal cannot be to "design" replacement leaders for Hamas from foreign capitals. If the political message to Palestinians is that they are free to choose their representatives as long as they choose the people Washington prefers, the mission will have failed before it starts.

Experience from the occupied Palestinian territory over the past three decades shows that when diplomatic tracks repeatedly collapse, and the political horizon is endlessly deferred, support for armed groups and confrontational forms of resistance tends to rise, not fall.<sup>11</sup> In that context, whether Hamas rises or falls, some form of armed resistance will remain attractive as long as Palestinians see peaceful and diplomatic pathways repeatedly blocked by an international system that aligns itself with increasingly maximalist Israeli policies on settlements, Jerusalem, and long-term territorial control, while materially enabling those policies through political cover, arms, and economic ties.<sup>12</sup> Trying to neutralize Hamas while leaving that incentive structure intact is not a strategy; it is an incubator for the next iteration of armed groups.

The only sustainable way to shift Gaza's political landscape is to create conditions under which

11 Alaa Lahlouh, "Armed Groups in Northern West Bank: The Beginning of an Armed Intifada or the Seeds of an Internal Palestinian Conflict?" Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2023, <https://pcpsr.org/en/node/948>.

12 Philip H. Gordon, "Rethinking U.S. Policy Toward the Palestinians: Why Punishment and Coercion Will Backfire," Council on Foreign Relations, Feb. 28, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/report/rethinking-us-policy-toward-palestinians>; Amnesty International, "Confronting the Global Political Economy Enabling Israel's Genocide, Occupation and Apartheid," Sept. 18, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/09/global-political-economy-enabling-israels-genocide-occupation-apartheid/>.

Palestinians themselves can freely choose alternatives through a credible, representative mechanism, without external vetoes on the outcome.<sup>13</sup> That means treating Palestinian institutions not as a blank slate to be redesigned from New York or Washington, but as a fragmented

system that must be renewed, legitimized, and restructured by Palestinians themselves through national dialogue, powersharing, and representative processes that a transitional mission protects rather than predetermines.

## Build a protection system, not just a security machine

Resolution 2803 gives the ISF a familiar toolkit: stabilize the environment, support the “permanent decommissioning of weapons” from non-state armed groups, train and vet Palestinian police, and secure humanitarian corridors. It authorizes the force to use “all necessary measures” consistent with international law, U.N. code for the use of military force.

What it does not specify is how ordinary Palestinians are supposed to feel safe living under yet another set of armed men after surviving two years of exterminatory violence.

The answer cannot be more guns alone. It has to be an integrated protection system, armed and unarmed, international and local, designed so that Palestinian civilians are the mission’s primary constituency, not collateral.

That means:

- **A dedicated civilian protection pillar** within the Board of Peace, with its own leadership, budget, and authority equal to infrastructure or security portfolios.
- **Locally rooted, unarmed civilian protection teams** drawn from women’s groups, youth organizations, religious leaders, and neighborhood committees, trained to monitor ceasefire violations, accompany vulnerable

groups, and mediate local disputes. Their reporting channels must lead directly into the Board of Peace and ISF liaison structures, with clear, pre-agreed responses when they flag threats.

- **Accessible complaint mechanisms** so that a family whose child is beaten at a checkpoint, or whose home is raided at night, can trigger a real investigation and remedial action rather than shouting into the void.

Without that unarmed layer, the ISF will inevitably be seen as just another foreign force policing Palestinians in the name of someone else’s security.

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<sup>13</sup> Hugh Lovatt and Muhammad Shehada, “Dealing with Trump, Israel, and Hamas: The Path to Peace in the Middle East,” European Council on Foreign Relations, Dec. 11, 2024, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/dealing-with-trump-israel-and-hamas-the-path-to-peace-in-the-middle-east/>.



# Make the sunset real, and link Gaza back to the whole conflict

Finally, Resolution 2803's temporary nature is only as credible as the exit strategy attached to it.

Right now, Israeli withdrawal is tied to demilitarization benchmarks and conditions negotiated among the ISF, Israel, the United States, and ceasefire guarantors. The credible pathway to Palestinian statehood is conditioned on progress in reconstruction and Palestinian Authority reforms, with no timetable and no firm guarantee.

If, as many in Washington insist, Hamas should not govern Gaza, the answer cannot be to engineer a leadership from the outside while keeping Palestinians besieged and stateless. The only durable way to reduce support for Hamas is to change the structural conditions that make its narrative persuasive: the absence of a viable path of self-determination, the experience of collective punishment, and the sense that diplomacy leads nowhere. A genuine diplomatic path toward statehood and self-determination gives Palestinians a political alternative to armed resistance. In its absence, many will conclude that armed struggle is the only remaining way to assert their rights.

The role of the Board of Peace and ISF in this period must therefore be strictly limited to removing the coercive conditions that have made institutional renewal impossible, not to designing new Palestinian institutions themselves. Their function is to protect the civic and political space in which Palestinians can rebuild, reform, and choose their own governing authorities through representative mechanisms, free of external vetoes.

As I have argued elsewhere on earlier proposed ceasefires and demilitarization arrangements for Gaza, treating disarmament as a form of surrender — demanding that armed groups give up their

leverage before there are enforceable guarantees on rights, safety, and political participation — does not end conflict, it only drives it into new forms.<sup>14</sup> Demilitarization that is front-loaded, absolute, and detached from a credible political compact will be experienced in Gaza as capitulation under siege, not as a part of a negotiated transition. That is how you freeze weapons in the short term but keep the logic for war alive in the long term.

To avoid a permanent interim:

- The Board of Peace should publish a time-bound transition roadmap, with milestones that center rights, lift movement and access restrictions, reopen Gaza's crossings, rebuild health and education systems, and restore due process.<sup>15</sup> Classic security indicators alone will not suffice.
- Follow-on Security Council mechanisms, including any mandate renewal, should explicitly reanchor Gaza in the broader legal framework: the inadmissibility of acquiring territory by force, the illegality of settlements, and the unity of the occupied Palestinian territory, including the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Those products should be paired with a robust international-regional oversight mechanism, including Arab states and European partners, that tracks agreed milestones, publicly reports on compliance, and links progress or backsliding to concrete consequences. Previous efforts failed not only because of bad intentions in some quarters, but because there were no enforceable steps, no monitoring body with real authority, and no cost for ignoring agreed benchmarks.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel-Kasbari, "Gaza Plan."

<sup>15</sup> Daniel-Kasbari, "Gaza Plan."

Within the two-year mandate, that roadmap should do more than manage rubble; it should lay out concrete pathways toward Palestinian self-determination tied to clear benchmarks. In the first year, that could include ending practices of collective punishment, easing the blockade in measurable stages, reopening crossings on a predictable schedule, and restoring basic civic space so that political parties, unions, and community organizations can operate without arbitrary repression. In parallel, Palestinian institutions in Gaza and the West Bank should be supported to begin an inclusive national dialogue on governance arrangements, with a view to preparing representative mechanisms, whether elections, a reconstituted Palestinian National Council, or another agreed forum, that can credibly speak for Palestinians as a people.

Demilitarization benchmarks should be sequenced with, and conditional on, progress in these areas. Steps such as the phased decommissioning of weapons, the integration of former fighters into reformed security structures, or the withdrawal and downsizing of external forces should not be triggered by weapons-count metrics alone, but by a broader assessment of whether Palestinian rights, mobility, and political space are actually expanding. A model that demands disarmament into a political and legal vacuum is an invitation to splinter groups and spoiler violence, not a recipe for long-term stability.

In the second year, these processes should converge into a defined decision point: Palestinians themselves, through those representative mechanisms, must be able to choose their governing authorities and articulate their preferred end-state, including the parameters of statehood. International actors can support, monitor, and guarantee the process, but they cannot dictate the outcome. Any extension of the Board of Peace or the ISF should be explicitly tied to the completion of these steps and to an international commitment, including from the United States, to respond to an agreed set of benchmarks with concrete political recognition, such as recognition of a Palestinian state once defined criteria are met, not just renewed promises of a future state.

That, in turn, requires being honest about the language of a political horizon. Over the last three

decades, the phrase has too often functioned as a diplomatic device to defer Palestinian self-determination indefinitely while entrenching the status quo. A horizon that is not tied to clear, enforceable benchmarks and consequences is not a horizon at all; it is a mechanism of delay. For the United States, anchoring Gaza's transition in time-bound, measurable commitments rather than vague promises is the only way to avoid owning yet another endless, unpopular project in the Middle East.

Likewise, a so-called withdrawal that preserves external control over Gaza's airspace, crossings, and perimeter security, and that leaves key decisions about movement and trade in the hands of outside actors, will not be experienced as the end of occupation, only its rebranding. That is the trap that Resolution 2803 currently risks setting: an apparent transition that, in practice, consolidates a different form of the same dependency and keeps Washington tied to managing its fallout.

Anchoring Gaza's transition in this wider framework also means addressing the drivers of despair beyond the strip. That includes halting the expansion of Israeli settlements, dismantling illegal outposts, and ending settler violence that systematically undermines any claim of a credible pathway to peace. The principles long reflected in relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative — no annexation, land for peace, and a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel — must inform how Resolution 2803 is interpreted in practice. A Gaza track that ignores this broader context will not be read as a step toward resolution, only as an attempt to repackage the status quo.

This is the difference between conflict management and conflict resolution. A mission that focuses narrowly on stabilizing violence and managing risks for external actors, without systematically advancing a two-state reality grounded in rights and law, keeps the underlying conflict structure intact. For Washington, that is not de-escalation; it is institutionalized crisis management with no end-state.

Gaza cannot be turned into a separate international laboratory while West Bank settlements expand, and annexation deepens next door. A mission

that “succeeds” inside the strip while the wider system of domination hardens outside it will not be remembered as peacekeeping. It will be remembered as containment.

For the U.S., a credible exit strategy is not optional. Without it, a mission sold as temporary will harden into a prolonged U.S.-owned trusteeship that is politically unsustainable, strategically costly, and easily exploited by adversaries.

## Conclusion

Resolution 2803 opens a narrow window. For the first time, the Security Council has authorized an international force and a transitional administration for Gaza, with broad Arab and Muslim participation and at least rhetorical recognition of Palestinian statehood as a possible outcome.

But it does so in the ruins of a U.N.-documented genocide and in the long shadow of a failed peace process that trained Palestinians to distrust every promise of an interim solution. If states implement Resolution 2803 as a technocratic stabilization plan and ignore that history, they will build Oslo with helmets: a polished international regime that manages the consequences of a crime instead of dismantling the structures that made it possible. For the United States, that would also mean presiding over a volatile enclave that never truly stabilizes, absorbing the political blame when things go wrong, getting further entrapped in the Middle East, and watching rivals use Gaza as a standing indictment of American double standards. Meanwhile, the core sources of Gaza’s instability — rooted in decades of Israeli blockade, settlement expansion, and military policy identified in repeated U.N. reports — will remain unaddressed. That is conflict management dressed up as statecraft, not as a serious attempt to

resolve the underlying conflict or to move Israelis and Palestinians toward a sustainable two-state reality.

There is an alternative. Treating genocide prevention and de-occupation as the mission’s starting point, rebalancing power inside the Board of Peace, embedding Palestinian co-ownership, and building a serious protection system from below are not concessions to someone else’s agenda. They are the conditions for a mission that Washington can lead without indefinitely owning, that shares burdens rather than concentrating them, and that ultimately creates a path out rather than a trap.

If the administration uses the tools it still controls in implementation — the board’s statutes, the ISF’s rules of engagement, and the operational guidance the secretary-general will issue to U.N. agencies and humanitarian actors — the trajectory of this mission can still shift. Gaza’s new architecture can become a bridge rather than a cage: a structure that protects civilians, preserves U.S. credibility, and aligns international participation behind a coherent endgame rather than an indefinite holding pattern. Most importantly, it can give Washington a viable exit from Gaza that reduces, rather than deepens, long-term U.S. military entanglement in the region.

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Her award-winning doctoral research on everyday resistance and power relations earned her the 2020 Best Dissertation Award from the Peace and Justice Studies Association and the American Association of University Women Ph.D. Award. A former nonresident scholar at the Middle East Institute, her work has appeared in *The Hill*, *Washington Post*, *Haaretz Daily*, *Al-Quds*, and leading academic journals.

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