

How to Stop Hamas from Derailing the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Deal

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Given the group's hostile long-term goals, the Trump administration needs an empowered envoy to lead several projects in parallel, from developing a capable Palestinian security force and replacing the PA's leadership to curtailing Israeli fringe elements and resuming Arab normalization talks.

In mid-October 2025, President Trump announced that the “war is over” in the Middle East, having successfully brokered a ceasefire in Gaza after two years. This was no small achievement and one welcomed with relief by both Israelis and Palestinians. Whether it proves the “dawn of a new Middle East” as predicted by Trump, however, depends on what the United States and its regional partners do next.

As is so often the case with diplomatic breakthroughs, the reason a ceasefire took hold in Gaza in October 2025 and not beforehand had mostly to do with how the parties to the conflict assessed their interests in relation to circumstances prevailing at the time. For each party, the benefit of continuing to fight increasingly seemed outweighed by the value of stopping. Israel had already achieved much of what was possible militarily and was facing both discontent at home and increasing isolation abroad. Hamas had been decimated by Israel and faced the prospect of even fiercer attacks and dwindling stockpiles. And Gulf Arab states, which had escaped significant consequences of the previous two years of war raging around them, finally had the war come home when Iran—and then Israel—attacked Qatar in quick succession.

This is not to say that President Trump's personal intervention was unimportant; indeed, he deserves significant credit for transforming an opportunity into an achievement. He sweetened the ceasefire deal for both parties, at least cosmetically—Hamas' desire that the ceasefire be indefinite rather than temporary was addressed, as was Israel's hope to avoid any concrete commitment to Palestinian statehood. At the tactical level, President Trump's

decision to announce the ceasefire before the parties had actually agreed to it put further pressure on them to acquiesce—refusing to do so would have meant publicly rebutting Trump.

The same balance of interests that ended the war, however, may upset the peace. International treaties are bound together not by law, honor, or personal relations first and foremost, but by whether each party at any given moment sees it as beneficial to comply. Israel and Hamas both had an interest in ending their fighting, and the Trump plan provided both the opportunity to do so while portraying themselves as the victor. This does not mean, however, that either party—much less regional states, who have done their best to remain aloof of the conflict for two years—will find it in their interest to implement the plan’s remaining points.

To be clear, **those points are extensive (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/getting-phase-2-gaza-red-lines-and-recommendations>)**, including the disarmament and demobilization of Hamas, the raising of an “International Stabilization Force” and Palestinian police force, the creation of a “technocratic” committee of Palestinians to govern Gaza and the reform of the Palestinian Authority itself, and the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, among other aspirations. The Trump administration has taken to calling the plan “historic and comprehensive”; it is certainly the latter, and would be the former if it were actually implemented successfully.

The plan’s fatal flaw, however, is that it elides the problem of Hamas. Since the outbreak of the conflict in 2023, a chorus of regional and international observers have insisted that the key to resolving Israeli-Palestinian tensions once and for all is to implement—or even impose—a two-state solution. But this gets things backwards. It is not the absence of such a solution that empowers Hamas, but Hamas and its patrons that have prevented such an outcome and fatally undermined both sides’ belief in it. Hamas has two chief foes, the foremost of which is Israel; it has no interest even in the type of cold peace that has characterized Israel’s relations with Egypt, Jordan, and other neighbors. To this end, Hamas’ other foe is Palestinians themselves, or at least those who might dare to choose peace and normalcy over extremism and violence. Hamas’ strength preoccupies both Israel and reasonable Palestinians, raising the specter that any Palestinian state, even if proclaimed by international fiat, would immediately be turned into a platform for attacks on Israel and perhaps others.

Hamas has shown no inclination to disarm or dissolve itself. Indeed, Hamas likely views the past two years of war as a success despite the awful price paid by Palestinians. The group exposed Israeli vulnerabilities, derailed Israeli-Saudi normalization, and perhaps most significantly elevated its own international political profile—it has earned multiple meetings with U.S. officials since its heinous terrorist attack—while marginalizing the Palestinian Authority and other more moderate Palestinians, who have been largely ignored by Washington and others even as they have energetically engaged Hamas. There is no reason Hamas would want to cede what it undoubtedly perceives as gains, nor any mechanism forcing it to do so.

To address this problem, the U.S., Israel, and their partners must contend with two stark realities. First, Hamas enjoys significant support from Palestinians, especially in the West Bank, many of whom see the terrorist group as preferable to the corruption and venality of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Second, there is no party—neither the Arab states nor Western militaries—prepared to take on the group and disarm or defeat it by force other than Israelis and Palestinians themselves. And the past two years have demonstrated that while Israel can cripple the group, it cannot eradicate it completely without a Palestinian force able and willing to finish the job, likely due to both Hamas’ residual strength as well as the fear of being perceived as Israel’s helper.

For now, the U.S. and Israel have responded to this problem by partitioning Gaza into “green” and “red” zones, hoping that focusing reconstruction, development, and security assistance on the green area while isolating Hamas in the red will erode the group’s support. However, this approach carries risks—Hamas can still use the red zone to launch attacks, and will undoubtedly seek to infiltrate the green zone and carry on waging its war against Israel.

Addressing this conundrum will require that the U.S. and partners embark on several long-term projects in parallel. The best time to start was two years ago; but the second-best time is now. First, the U.S. must lead the development of a large and capable Palestinian security force, similar to the effort initiated by Gen. Keith Dayton in the 2000s following the second intifada. Because this cannot succeed in a political vacuum, Washington should tie its support—and, working diplomatically, the support of its regional partners—to profound reform of the Palestinian Authority, beginning with the resignation of its senior leadership, including PA President Mahmoud Abbas, and their replacement with a new generation of officials who enjoy the support of Palestinians and regional partners.

In order to demonstrate its confidence in new Palestinian leadership, Israel should curtail the activities of its own fringe elements, particularly violent settlers in the West Bank and their patrons in the government. For their part, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other regional states should respond by initiating normalization talks with Israel and decisively ending any support to Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups. Accomplishing all of this will take a concerted effort by the United States, which will in turn require that President Trump delegate authority to an empowered envoy focused exclusively on this set of issues, and that he permit a coherent process of interagency and international coordination to take place under that envoy's direction. The United States has the resources and expertise to succeed in this effort, but only if it has the good sense to tap into them.

The conventional wisdom following two years of war provoked by Hamas is that peace and stability in the region depend on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But this is a two-way street. If Israel and its neighbors want to avoid another conflict like the 2023-25 Gaza War, they should work assiduously to take other opportunities to isolate and marginalize Iran and its proxies. This will mean taking advantage of the historic opportunity to complete Hezbollah's disarmament and marginalize it politically, and to advance a Lebanon-Israel peace. It will mean supporting the new government in Syria and encouraging Syria-Israel peace talks as well. It will mean remaining focused on the multiple threats posed by an Iranian regime that is down but not out. And perhaps most importantly, it must mean leading Arab states taking leadership and responsibility for the messy problems of their own neighborhood.

President Trump has suggested that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is no ticket to heaven, and he is right to demur. Grand diplomatic plans and conferences fade into the historical background; the grittier and more earthbound work of turning military success into lasting strategic advantage continues.

Michael Singh is the managing director and Lane-Swig Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute. This article was originally published on the Providence website (<https://providencemag.com/2025/12/how-to-stop-hamas-from-derailing-the-israeli-palestinian-peace-deal/>). ❖

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