

Peace in the Middle East—A Major Challenge for the United States

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Barring sustained U.S. efforts, Gaza’s de facto division into Hamas and Israeli zones will likely persist, and the ceasefire will be remembered as just the prelude to the next conflict.

In negotiating a ceasefire and the release of hostages in Gaza, President Trump has notched a significant diplomatic achievement. In doing so, he took advantage of a shifting balance of interests: for all parties involved, the alternative to a compromise was looking worse than ever. For Israel, fighting on meant enduring mounting international isolation and domestic discontent for diminishing military gains. For Hamas, Israel’s renewed military campaign meant increasing pressure. And for Qatar and other regional states, the Israeli strikes against Hamas leadership in Doha meant the conflict’s reverberations increasingly threatened them directly.

But the US was not merely plucking a low-hanging fruit. Mr Trump sweetened the deal for each side—delivering the long-term ceasefire that Hamas desired rather than another month-long pause and insisting on Hamas’ disarmament and avoiding explicit reference to Palestinian statehood at Israel’s behest. He also announced the terms of the deal before all had agreed, increasing the diplomatic cost to them for balking. As many countries have learned, openly defying President Trump nearly always incurs a penalty.

Uncertainties About the Road Ahead

The negotiating dynamics, however, do not reveal much about the road ahead. Hamas has already demonstrated it has no intention of hewing to the balance of Trump’s “Twenty Point Plan,” having spent the weeks since it took effect consolidating power and attacking Israeli troops, a far cry from the disarmament and dissolution the plan envisioned for the group. Other problems abound—Hamas has exercised a de facto veto on the membership of the “technocratic” committee being assembled to govern Gaza, potential troop-contributing states have insisted they

will only participate in a planned “International Stabilization Force” if it operates at the invitation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and limits its activities to monitoring the ceasefire rather than enforcing law and order, while Israel has resisted any role for the PA or for Palestinian police trained by Egypt. The Trump Plan entails a long and daunting to-do list: disarm Hamas, deploy an international force, train a Palestinian force, provide humanitarian and economic aid, and restart Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. But these steps will be hampered by the harsh realities attending two years of war—Hamas has not only survived, but its political profile has increased, and the two-state solution and the PA are less popular than ever with both Israelis and Palestinians, among other obstacles.

The US will need to use all of the tools at its disposal—threats of force and diplomatic incentives alike—in order to ensure at each step that the key parties see more to gain in cooperating with President Trump than opposing him. Barring such a sustained effort, Gaza’s current de facto division into Hamas- and Israeli-controlled zones will likely persist, and the ceasefire will be remembered only as the prelude to the next conflict.

Michael Singh is the managing director and Lane-Swig Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute. This article was originally published on the European News Journal website (https://www.european-news-journal.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/ENJ_1.pdf). ❖

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