

One Year After the Gaza Ceasefire (Part 4): Dealing with Differences Between the Regional Mediators

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Oct 8, 2026

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Brief Analysis

Part of a series: [One Year After the Gaza Ceasefire \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/one-year-after-gaza-ceasefire\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/one-year-after-gaza-ceasefire)

or see Part 1: [Overview: Assessing the Gaza Ceasefire, Year One \(/policy-analysis/overview-assessing-gaza-ceasefire-year-one\)](/policy-analysis/overview-assessing-gaza-ceasefire-year-one)

Unless Washington lays out clear principles on Hamas, the differing strategic views that Ankara, Cairo, and Doha hold toward the group will inevitably erode their cooperation, especially as the implementation process enters more difficult terrain.

This PolicyWatch is part of a Washington Institute series analyzing the risks and opportunities in Gaza since the October 2025 ceasefire and offering recommendations for policymakers going forward. *See the full series* (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/one-year-after-gaza-ceasefire>).

Over the past year, three countries have emerged as the key Middle East mediators in Gaza: Egypt, Qatar, and Turkey. Since playing an instrumental role in reaching the ceasefire and joining the Board of Peace, they have led the effort to implement President Trump's [twenty-point plan \(https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/read-trumps-20-point-proposal-to-end-the-war-in-gaza\)](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/read-trumps-20-point-proposal-to-end-the-war-in-gaza). All of them bring unique elements to this effort and have an interest in advancing the implementation process. Yet they also have different views on—and relations with—Hamas, including diametrically opposed visions of what role the group should play after the next stages of Trump's plan are in motion.

The result has been a mixed bag: effective tactical cooperation that produces concrete progress (e.g., Hamas's agreement on a framework for decommissioning its weapons), but also recurring tensions between the mediators that complicate the process. U.S. involvement has been intermittent and unclear on some of the key issues. Without clarity and ongoing, high-level engagement from Washington, the fragile process could reach a stalemate, collapse,

or produce an outcome that mainstreams Hamas and essentially rewards it for its crimes on October 7, 2023.

How Turkey, Qatar, and Egypt View Hamas Talks

Under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan—whose Justice and Development Party shares Hamas’s Islamist ideology—Turkey has maintained longstanding relations with the group’s “political wing.” In 2006, Erdogan received Khaled Mashal, the head of Hamas at the time. This contravened the international consensus on boycotting the group after its victory in that year’s Palestinian election, based on its refusal to renounce terrorism or recognize Israel. At various other junctures over the years, Turkey has hosted top Hamas officials, allowed the group to operate on its soil, maintained diplomatic engagement with its leaders, and provided diplomatic support at times of international pressure. This summer, new Hamas leader Khalil al-Hayya chose Turkey as his first foreign destination and was received by Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan.

Notably, this close relationship has also enabled Ankara to exert significant leverage on Hamas, most recently in convincing the group to accept agreements on Gaza. To this day, however, Turkey **has not legally designated Hamas (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/uk-turkey-and-europe-must-do-more-dismantle-hamas-financial-networks)** as a terrorist organization, and Erdogan repeatedly describes its members as “freedom fighters,” likening them to the nationalist factions that fought for Turkey’s independence in the twentieth century.

Similarly, Qatar was one of the few countries to defy the 2006 boycott on Hamas, engaging the group at the highest diplomatic level. In 2012, Emir Hamad visited Gaza and met with Ismail Haniyeh, who was serving as prime minister of the Hamas-led government at the time and later became the group’s leader. That same year, Qatar began hosting the Hamas leadership in Doha upon Washington’s request after the group was expelled from Syria. And between 2018 and 2023, Qatar and Israel coordinated the transfer of monthly payments to the Hamas-led government in Gaza. While this was intended to maintain governmental functions in the Strip and prevent further instability, it also politically benefited Hamas and enabled the group to invest more resources in building up its terrorist capabilities.

Qatar sees its relationship with Hamas as part of its wider efforts to play a central role in international mediation. Yet Doha tends to cross the line by adopting diplomatic positions supportive of the group, often in partnership with Turkey. Moreover, the Qatari-funded Al Jazeera news channel has consistently adopted a pro-Hamas editorial line. Although Doha’s ties with the group have been strained at times—most recently after Hamas refused to condemn Iranian attacks on Qatar and other Gulf states—they have never neared the point of rupture. Like Turkey, Doha regards the relationship as a means of exercising leverage over Hamas, including on U.S. policy initiatives like reaching the Gaza ceasefire.

In contrast, Cairo sees Hamas as a threat and treats it as a terrorist organization. This antipathy is grounded in three factors: (1) Hamas’s origins in and ongoing relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, the nemesis of multiple Egyptian governments; (2) related Hamas actions and policies that have threatened Egypt’s security, particularly during the Arab Spring era; (3) Cairo’s official position that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is the sole representative of the Palestinian people. Accordingly, Egypt has limited its engagement with Hamas to intelligence channels. Yet even with this adversarial relationship, Egypt enjoys significant leverage over Hamas for several reasons—Cairo’s central role in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, its exceptional intelligence penetration of Gaza, its longstanding relations with Israel, and the geographic reality that Egypt is the only non-Israeli access point in and out of Gaza.

Periodically, these divergent views have led Ankara, Doha, and Cairo to butt heads on Gaza policy. This was most vividly illustrated during the 2014 Israel-Hamas war, when Qatar and Turkey sought to steer Washington toward a ceasefire with terms more favorable to Hamas. Cairo saw their efforts as a bid to not only strengthen Hamas, but also sideline Egypt—both in general regional diplomacy and on Gaza, a file that Cairo considered a top national security

issue and held exclusive purview over during previous crises. Relations between the three countries have since normalized to a large degree, but their deep differences on Hamas remain, and Egypt is ever wary of any steps that could sideline it on Gaza.

Tactical Convergence, Strategic Divergence

The three mediators have a mutual interest in seeing the initial phases of President Trump's twenty-point plan succeed. They all see instability in Gaza as a central driver of regional instability, and they all have populations that are deeply sympathetic to Palestinian suffering. Furthermore, each of them has distinct interests: for Egypt, instability in Gaza is an immediate threat to its own borders and national security; for Qatar, success in Gaza would bolster its status as a diplomatic player; for Turkey, success would strengthen its standing in regional diplomacy and among Arab publics. And all three see the U.S. plan as an avenue for strengthening their respective ties with Washington and showing their value in that relationship.

Accordingly, the mediators worked closely last year to advance the ceasefire and secure the release of Israeli hostages, and again this summer to press Hamas on committing to decommission its weapons. These efforts were well-coordinated, denying Hamas the ability to play the three players against one another.

Yet underneath this cooperative dynamic, the mediators' fundamental disagreements persist regarding Hamas's long-term role in legitimate Palestinian politics. Turkey and Qatar's idea that the group might transform itself into a political party is not new, of course. After Hamas's electoral victory in 2006, the international Quartet (the United States, Russia, the EU, and the UN) conditioned engagement with the group on its renunciation of terrorism, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of past agreements. These so-called "Quartet Principles" were intended to ensure that Hamas did not reap the benefits of international recognition without fundamentally changing both its behavior and its core ideology. Today, these principles would require Hamas to not only decommission its weapons in Gaza, but also renounce terrorism in principle and disarm in the West Bank. The fact that Hamas leaders continue to defend the October 7 massacre illustrates why such conditions are crucial.

Yet Ankara has long ignored the Quartet Principles in its dealings with Hamas, pushing for outcomes in which the group is anointed as a legitimate political party without fundamentally changing. Cairo strongly opposes that idea—a view that may stem from Egypt's opposition to all Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated political parties, its concerns about Hamas's terrorist identity, or a conviction that continued Hamas participation in Palestinian politics is a recipe for perpetual instability.

These differences will of course have practical implications for the current implementation process, whose long duration and complexity will inevitably require the three mediators to put out fires and make tough calls on complicated disputes—including with each other. While they have shown impressive cohesion so far, there will be times when they seek to shape the process in ways that favor their individual preferences. If history is any indicator, this likely means that Egypt will emphasize minimizing concessions to Hamas, using pressure when necessary, and blocking policies that might help mainstream the group. Meanwhile, Turkey and Qatar will likely be more receptive to Hamas's positions, more willing to present it with compromises, and—particularly in Turkey's case—more invested in policies that culminate in recognizing Hamas as a legitimate political and diplomatic actor.

The U.S. Role

Despite Washington's important involvement in various lines of effort to implement the ceasefire, high-level U.S. participation remains intermittent. Yet deeper American engagement is indispensable, especially when it comes to engaging Israel. In practice, Jerusalem's frequent unwillingness to abide by its obligations has wound up strengthening Hamas's negotiating position, reducing the mediators' ability to pressure the group (especially in Egypt's case), and fostering an approach that centers on incentivizing an unrepentant terrorist organization.

Indeed, the Trump administration has sent mixed messages about Hamas's role. The official U.S. position remains anchored in the Quartet Principles: Hamas is expected to not only decommission its weapons in Gaza, but to do the same in the West Bank and other areas of operation, while also ideologically renouncing terrorism. At the same time, however, the administration's repeated, direct engagement with Hamas—particularly the meetings with senior officials like Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff—has created the impression that Washington is flexible about mainstreaming Hamas in the long term.

To dispel these perceptions, the administration should articulate a clear position—grounded in the Quartet Principles—regarding the conditions under which Hamas might be accepted as a political party. U.S. officials should then refrain from further engagement with the group until it meets these conditions, even if the likelihood of it doing so is far-fetched. Drawing this line will also help the administration prepare for the inevitable moments when the tactical alignment between the three mediators breaks down due to their strategic differences.

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