Israel Risks Losing Influence Over Gaza's Future

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Brief Analysis

Facing an increasingly assertive Board of Peace, Israel needs a more realistic and proactive strategy for ending Hamas control of Gaza, balancing its security demands with immediate efforts to start advancing alternative governing structures and humanitarian relief.

Recent statements by the U.S.-led Board of Peace suggest a more assertive approach to implementing President Trump's plan for the Gaza Strip—whether Israel wants to proceed or not. While BoP representatives have criticized Jerusalem's approach to Gaza in the past, the latest statements go further by explicitly linking Israel to delays in implementation and demanding greater operational space for the board. The BoP's November 17 report to the UN Security Council reinforced this trend by highlighting Israeli hesitance on key matters such as enabling the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG) to begin operating on the ground, facilitating the **training and deployment (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/moroccan-police-training-can-help-break-gaza-deadlock)** of Palestinian police, and advancing the deployment of the International Stabilization Force (ISF).

The growing criticism reflects the board's frustration with the limited progress in implementing the Trump plan. Although Hamas's refusal to fulfill its disarmament commitments remains a major obstacle, the stalemate has been greatly exacerbated by Israeli reservations about advancing alternative governance and security arrangements before complete demilitarization. In Washington's view, continued delays would undermine the credibility of a major presidential initiative and complicate efforts to mobilize Arab partners for reconstruction and security arrangements. As such, Israel cannot assume that U.S. support for its security demands will translate into indefinite tolerance for delays on the plan's civilian components. Pressure is mounting to demonstrate tangible progress on governance, reconstruction, and humanitarian arrangements. Failing that, Hamas will likely deepen its influence over civilian affairs, further obstructing the transition effort.

What the Board Is Saying

On November 9, following Gaza's first major winter storm, the BoP warned of a humanitarian emergency, called for additional temporary shelters, construction materials, and equipment to repair critical infrastructure, and criticized Israel for failing to meet its commitments under the Sharm al-Sheikh Humanitarian Protocol (a framework established by the October 2025 ceasefire). The board argued that Israeli delays had not only **worsened humanitarian conditions (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/gazas-frozen-humanitarian-crisis)** , but also postponed the processes of decommissioning Hamas's weapons and transferring governing authority to the NCAG. At the same time, the statement urged Hamas to fulfill its obligations—though the group has cunningly exploited the weather crisis by launching a media campaign portraying Israel as responsible for the suffering.

On November 12, after Israel struck a hospital in Khan Yunis that militants were using as cover for their activities, the BoP issued another unusual statement. While condemning Hamas's use of civilian infrastructure for military purposes, the board also expressed concern over civilian casualties, called on both sides to honor their commitments, and once again demanded the authority and operational space necessary for implementation, including arrangements for safe, demilitarized medical facilities and other steps.

The board's sharper tone may reflect Washington's growing willingness to exert pressure following Israel's elections. Earlier this month, President Trump phoned Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and **reportedly told him (https://www.axios.com/2026/11/08/trump-netanyahu-implement-gaza-peace-plan)** that he expects progress on implementing the Gaza plan after holding off on that issue during the election campaign.

The international funding gap may also help explain the board's increased urgency. Earlier this year, donors pledged approximately $17 billion to the BoP for Gaza's recovery and reconstruction, separate from various smaller appeals by the UN and other organizations. So far, however, only about $280 million of this money has been made available for preparatory activities. On September 23, the board **unveiled (https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2026/09/board-of-peace-unveils-gaza-recovery-plan-israel-reports-18-ceasefire-violations-sept-15-29.php)** a $2.45 billion recovery program encompassing sixty-six projects, but implementation has not proceeded due in part to the funding gap.

For its part, Israel has rejected the board's criticism, reaffirmed its commitment to Trump's Gaza plan, argued that Hamas continues to divert humanitarian materials **for military purposes (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/gazas-frozen-humanitarian-crisis)** , and restated its insistence that Gaza must be demilitarized before reconstruction can proceed. Yet the gap between Israel's security priorities and the BoP's implementation agenda is becoming increasingly visible.

Stalemate Benefits Hamas and Increases Pressure on Israel

With international attention focused on humanitarian conditions and demilitarization, Hamas has continued its efforts to solidify control over civilian affairs and prevent alternative governing authorities from taking root. According to author conversations with Palestinian sources, Hamas recently instructed dozens of Palestinian Authority employees who had resumed certain tasks in Gaza to halt any activities not coordinated with Hamas. These included personnel working with international organizations—for instance, Hamas apparently disrupted a joint project by the PA Ministry of Public Works and the UN Development Programme to build housing compounds for displaced Palestinians, even confiscating equipment intended for the project. The group has also reportedly sought to deter local actors from cooperating with the NCAG.

Indeed, Hamas's deep military and territorial losses should not obscure the dominance it has been able to retain inside Gaza amid delayed implementation of the transition plan. Its territorial control has shrunk to less than 40 percent of the Strip, and its governing capacity has become increasingly fragmented, particularly in northern and

southern areas. Yet far than disappearing, Hamas has adapted by relying on decentralized administrative, economic, and security networks to influence civilian life, control key resources, collect revenues, and exercise informal enforcement powers. Rather than letting this situation fester, a better approach would be to use the group's weakened military and organizational position as an opportunity to challenge its civilian grip through the establishment of credible alternative institutions.

Doing so will require countering Hamas's demonstrated tactical flexibility in the political arena. On July 30, the group joined other Palestinian factions in accepting the BoP's **fifteen-point roadmap (https://boardofpeace.org/gaza-roadmap)** , which outlined the transfer of authority to the NCAG and a phased disarmament process subject to international verification. Simply signing the agreement has enabled Hamas to portray itself as willing to advance the plan, while Israel has balked at implementation amid concerns that the proposed arrangements may enable the group to retain significant military capabilities. These concerns reflect past experience with Hamas diverting reconstruction materials and evading weak oversight mechanisms.

Yet by insisting on complete disarmament before alternative civilian institutions can begin operating, Israel may prolong the survival of the Hamas control structures it seeks to eliminate. Supervised reconstruction and a gradual transfer of civilian authority should therefore be viewed not solely as the outcome of demilitarization, but also as tools that can help dismantle Hamas by reducing the population's dependence on the group.

Israel Needs to Take the Initiative

The BoP's growing assertiveness requires Israel to reconsider its objectives and how to achieve them. Of course, it should not abandon its demand that Hamas disarm and relinquish control of Gaza. Yet Jerusalem must adopt a more realistic and proactive strategy for reaching that goal—one that balances security requirements with immediate, incremental efforts to advance alternative governing structures **and humanitarian relief (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/gazas-frozen-humanitarian-crisis)** .

First, Israel should use existing coordination and verification frameworks to reach agreement with Washington and the BoP on clear implementation benchmarks, distinguishing between measures that can begin immediately and those that should wait for verified progress on disarmament. Such arrangements would help Israel avoid further blame for holding up implementation while at the same time preserving its influence over critical security decisions related to deploying alternative authorities and ISF units.

Second, Israel should move beyond its initial approval of a limited disarmament pilot zone and facilitate a wider "Rafah First" approach. This means expeditiously agreeing on security arrangements that enable the NCAG (led by Ali Shaath) to begin operating in Rafah alongside phased deployment of the ISF and **newly trained Palestinian police units (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/moroccan-police-training-can-help-break-gaza-deadlock)** . Israel should also approve the necessary arrangements for additional police training in Egypt. Initial reconstruction projects and the transfer of responsibility for public services could then begin in this area without waiting for complete demilitarization across Gaza, and the model could expand gradually as security conditions permit. Relatedly, Israel should facilitate the transfer of vetted civilian populations into areas outside Hamas control, thereby reducing their dependence on the group and strengthening alternative governing structures.

Third, Israel should increase access to urgently needed humanitarian assistance while maintaining safeguards against the diversion of supplies and materials for military purposes. As outlined **in a previous PolicyWatch (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/gazas-frozen-humanitarian-crisis)** , the provision of temporary shelters, medical equipment, and essential water and sanitation supplies should not be contingent on complete disarmament, even if certain more sensitive construction materials remain subject to strict monitoring.

Finally, BoP members—particularly Egypt, Qatar, and Turkey—should increase pressure on Hamas to fulfill its

disarmament commitments and stop obstructing civilian initiatives. Pressure on Israel alone will not resolve the stalemate as long as Hamas continues to prevent other authorities from taking hold.

At the same time, Jerusalem must not let disagreements over implementation derail the Trump plan, which largely serves Israeli interests by promoting an alternative to Hamas rule and establishing a security-oriented framework for Gaza's future. From this perspective, Israel should treat the board's growing assertiveness as an opportunity to advance its own objectives in Gaza. Taking the initiative would enable Jerusalem to shape the emerging arrangements and gradually weaken Hamas's control, whereas continuing the current approach might simply reduce Israel's influence over political and security decisions that will determine Gaza's future.

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