

Konstantin Witschel
August 2026

Breaking the Deadlock

*A new Framework for Disarming
 Hamas and Advancing Gaza's
 Transition*

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Abstract

This paper develops a transformative framework for Hamas's disarmament and Gaza's transition. It argues that the 20-Point Plan's security-focused, top-down approach is unlikely to achieve sustainable disarmament because it neglects political integration, local ownership and economic incentives. Drawing on DDR and conflict-transformation research, the paper proposes parallel progress on security, reconstruction, economic recovery and political inclusion. Palestinian self-determination, alongside Israel's long-term security, should guide the process.

Introduction

Ten months after the inauguration of the so-called Board of Peace (BoP) and the signing of the Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict, the so-called 20-point plan (20PP) for Gaza developed by the US administration, the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains largely unchanged on a catastrophic level (UN 2026). Humanitarian access is still severely restricted by Israeli authorities, and the population remains in a status of chronic shortage of basic necessities. At the same time, the political situation has become further complicated with Hamas strengthening its grip over the so-called “red zone” still under its control. It has reestablished itself as a governing authority taking advantage of the window of opportunity the war with Iran created and cracking down on any competing entity on the ground with brutal force (INSS 2026a).

Since the signing of the plan on October 9 more than 1,000 people in Gaza have been killed by Israeli attacks, more than 3,400 have been injured according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA 2026). Furthermore, 17 humanitarian workers, all local staff, have been killed, bringing the total number since 2023 up to 558 (AWSO 2026).

Although the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), a technocratic committee that should oversee everyday administration of Gaza including public security and basic services, was formed in January 2026, it still remains a shell today without staff, a budget and no access to Gaza. So far, the Israeli government has vetoed their entry into Gaza, as well as any suggestion for adequate staffing (The New Arab 2026).

The future of the Gaza Strip is therefore uncertain and the war against Iran in 2026 might have further devastating consequences. Unless an international initiative soon gives the process a boost, the Gaza Strip will remain a region of misery for years and decades to come.

On July 31 an agreement was reached between the BoP representatives for Gaza and Hamas for the disarmament of the movement. The agreement puts into practice, at a technical level, the disarmament provisions set forth in the 20PP. The agreement's chances for success small since it views disarmament through a purely technical, security-oriented lens and leaves the core political issues underlying the conflict untouched. It stays vague when it comes to political transformation and integration, two core pillars of modern peacebuilding processes. On August 3, it was announced that, following talks with the Israeli side, the BoP had significantly altered the terms. The IDF's withdrawal would no longer be carried out in stages based on the progress of disarmament, but only after complete disarmament had been achieved. The new terms also dropped the demand for Israel to withdraw to the initially agreed “yellow line”. Furthermore, the requirement for a complete withdrawal was also removed. Considering the latest developments, the likelihood for success of the proposed disarmament regime is very low.

In light of the current low prospects for success, the aim of this study is to develop a theoretical and conceptual model based on findings from conflict transformation research, whose individual elements have already proven effective in various settings. It proposes a framework that goes beyond technical disarmament by linking it to reconstruction and political inclusion, thereby providing a pathway towards a sustainable resolution of the conflict.

The Actor Landscape in mid-2026

The Israeli Government: Blockade and Sabotage

Although the Israeli government agreed to the 20PP, supported the establishment of the NCAG, and joined the BoP, it has so far blocked any meaningful progress towards advancing the plan and is in direct violation of its commitments.

According to the plan, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) had to withdraw to the defined yellow line, but in recent months the IDF has significantly expanded into territory in the red zone and now controls about 70% of Gaza's territory (Al Jazeera 2026a). The IDF also carries out daily strikes in Gaza, killing more than 1,000 people, among them 265 children, since the ceasefire came into effect (UNICEF 2026). Furthermore, humanitarian access in Gaza remains severely restricted and leaves Gazans with barely enough to survive, although points seven and eight of the plan clearly state that unrestricted access must be granted by both parties without interference (BBC 2026a). A recent poll from June 2026 conducted among Gazans shows that 49% of respondents report a lack of food at humanitarian distribution sites, while 28% report going one or more days without any food (PCPSR 2026a). So far, the Israeli government falls far short of fulfilling their commitments from stage one of the plan.

On 5 August 2025, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu confirmed that Israel is supporting anti-Hamas armed groups in Gaza (TAZ 2026). The best-known group is that of Yasser Abu-Shabab, a criminal who was killed by Hamas, in Rafah. The underlying idea here is to establish a local counterweight and reduce the burden on Israel itself. In reality, however, highly criminal structures were created that are frequently involved in the hijacking and looting of aid convoys, so the strategy must be considered a failure. Nevertheless, it has created another problem that deepens the fragmentation of Gaza and must be resolved as part of a holistic disarmament process.

For the government of Benjamin Netanyahu, 2026 is an election year, and any advancement on the Palestinian file is interpreted as a sign of weakness that could reduce the Prime Minister's chances for reelection. Furthermore, his coalition partners on the far-right spectrum follow a different agenda, which still has the expulsion of the population of Gaza at its core.

The war against Iran and the perception, that Israel lost the war, further reduces the appetite of the government to make concessions in Gaza; so far the overwhelming majority of Israelis believe Israel has not won one war since the attack on October 7 2023 (Middle East Monitor 2026). A recent poll on Iran conducted by the Hebrew University found that even 92% of Israelis think Iran won the war (The Times of Israel 2026b). These numbers are devastating for Benjamin Netanyahu who built his whole political career around the paradigm of security through strength.

It is also questionable whether the U.S. is still in a position to exert sufficient pressure on the Israeli government. In the wake of the abrupt end (or pause) to the war against Iran—which was imposed by the U.S.—criticism of the Israeli government arose within the country, with some openly asking whether Israel was a sovereign state or merely an appendage of the U.S (The Times of Israel 2026c). This impression was further reinforced within Israel by the fact that it was not consulted regarding the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and that Iran succeeded in making the ceasefire in Lebanon an integral part of the agreement, against the expressed will of the Israeli government. These developments could lead Benjamin Netanyahu's government to be less receptive to pressure from the U.S. to fulfill its commitments in the run-up to the upcoming elections, in order to demonstrate that it is capable of acting independently.

Hamas: Consolidation in Ruins

Throughout the last ten months, Hamas managed to consolidate its power over what remains of the Palestinian-controlled territory in the strip using in part brutal force against any opposition. Its police forces patrol the streets while its intelligence agency monitors and targets opposition figures and activists. (BBC 2026b)

Hamas did not participate in the recent local elections in Palestine that were also conducted in Deir al-Balah in Gaza. This election was intended as a pilot scheme for the PA to test whether presidential and parliamentary elections could be held in Gaza at all. For this reason, they were held in just one municipality. (France24 2026)

Under the new electoral law, which requires factions to pledge their support for the PLO's commitments, Hamas, along with five other factions, boycotted the elections

(INSS 2026b). Nevertheless, the Hamas administration supported the holding of the elections, and the civilian police provided security at the polling stations. This seemingly contradictory behavior clearly illustrates Hamas's perception of itself: that its power is so firmly established that it can boycott elections whilst still allowing them to take place. The group can provide logistical support, without having to fear a loss of control, thereby attempting to project the image of an actor who does not obstruct the democratic process.

Although declining, Hamas still maintains a certain level of popularity among the population in Palestine. A poll published in August 2026 shows that 33% of Palestinians in Gaza support the faction (2025: 41%) while 18% (2025: 32%) in the Westbank do so (PCPSR 2026b). Reducing the renewed Hamas control of the remaining territory in Gaza to superior firepower compared to other groups and opposition forces therefore falls short. It neglects the revolutionary legitimacy which had made Hamas popular in certain segments of society before October 7, especially compared to the PLO/PA and its, in the view of many Palestinians failed, approach to rather negotiate a peace agreement with Israel than enforcing it in a kinetic way.

On July 6 Hamas announced the dissolution of its government and hand over power to the NCAG (Al Jazeera 2026b). This move must be seen as largely symbolic, as the NCAG has neither access to Gaza, nor staff, nor financial resources. However, Hamas is using this approach to try to increase the pressure on Israel without having to make any real concessions, as ultimately this does nothing to alter the balance of power in Gaza. In the same light, the agreement between Hamas and the BoP concerning disarmament must be seen.

The dire humanitarian situation and the full economic collapse in Gaza are decisive factors why Hamas was able to rebuild its structure and fill its ranks with new combatants as well as other employees since it is still able to provide a comparatively stable income (Robins 2025). Besides the income, Hamas still provides some of its additional social and welfare services to its members from pre-war times, which makes the faction attractive in a situation of scarcity. This ability and the network of patronage that comes along with it was already an important factor before the current war to maintain power and is even more valuable today since economic opportunities and social services are significantly less than before the war.

The Palestinian Authority: Strategic Inaction and Tactical Compromise

So far, there is no engagement from the Palestinian Authority (PA) to resolve the current deadlock in Gaza. Although Gaza is part of Palestine and falls under its jurisdiction, the PA remains on the sidelines, reduced to the role of an observer. Unlike Israel, the PA was not invited by the U.S. government to join the BoP (ANI News 2026).

The PA currently remains in a holding pattern, currently undergoing a reform process that is seen as imposed from the outside, rather than locally driven. It fears that NCAG's success could harm it. For one thing, it fears that the NCAG created a new parallel structure that could cement the division of Palestine again for years to come. The NCAG reports directly to the chair of the BoP's Gaza Executive Board, former Bulgarian Foreign Minister and United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (2015 – 2020) Nickolai Mladenov. The PA has no formal role in this framework. On the other hand, the PA fears that it could be replaced by a model similar to NCAG, a depoliticized administrative body that handles day-to-day affairs in the West Bank, but no longer has a political framework, thereby causing the Palestinian issue to disappear.

A third concern for the PA is US considerations to ask Israel to transfer to the Board of Peace and subsequently to NCAG at least a portion of the import tax revenue that Israel is required to remit to the PA under the Oslo Accords, but has been withholding for a year (TRT World 2026). After resisting the proposal in the beginning, the PA agreed to the redirection of one billion USD of the now almost 5 billion USD to the BoP in order to secure at least a portion of the funding to ease its financial crisis, but so far, the proposal failed because of Israel's refusal and Finance Minister Smotrich's stated goal to collapse the PA (The Times of Israel 2026c).

From a PA perspective this compromise is also seen as a means to reestablish ties with the Trump-administration that were significantly impaired during Trump's first term when Palestine refused to accept the so-called Deal of the Century. Subsequently, the Trump I administration closed the Palestinian Liberation Organization's (PLO) office in Washington, leaving Palestine without an official representation in the US.

In the mid-term it could help the PA to present itself towards the US as a more rational, constructive actor that is willing to compromise compared to the approach the current Israeli government adopted across all theaters. Furthermore, the Israeli blockage of NCAG plays in the PA's hands. A failure of the NCAG model would leave the PA as the only Palestinian entity with at least some legitimacy to serve as a governing body for Gaza. The approach adopted by the PA can therefore be seen as strategic inaction paired with tactical compromise to improve its position.

The Gulf States and the US: Changes in the Regional Order in 2026

The regional order in mid-2026 is no longer the same as it was at the beginning of the year due to the war that Israel and the US fought against Iran in the first half. The US ignored the advice from its allies in the Persian Gulf not to go to war with Iran. Furthermore, it was not able to protect them during the war. Iranian ballistic missiles caused massive damage to the oil and gas infrastructure across the Gulf and Iran massively disrupted their revenues through the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

The war against Iran might have two consequences for the situation in Gaza. First, the Gulf states so far were designated as the main sponsors for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Gaza that is estimated to cost around 70 billion USD (World Bank et al. 2026). In April when the ceasefire with Iran was announced, the damage caused to energy and other infrastructure across the Gulf region was estimated at up to 58 billion USD (Rystad Energy 2026). It therefore seems unlikely that the Gulf states will finance rehabilitation and reconstruction in Gaza when they themselves must repair their own infrastructure. Added to this are losses from lost exports due to the closure and still ongoing disruption of the Strait of Hormuz, which can likely be offset only in part by higher prices charged to buyers.

Second, the 20PP for Gaza is directly linked to the U.S. President's Board of Peace (BoP), so it is likely that the Gulf states—all of which, except Oman, are represented on the BoP—are now less motivated than before to continue cooperating on a political level within this U.S.-led structure. It is unlikely that they will leave the organization, but they will adopt a rather passive role. The United States' declining political influence in the Middle East, as well as the lessons learned from the war, cast close cooperation with the U.S. in a different light today. It remains to be seen whether the cost-benefit analysis will still add up for the Gulf states under these new conditions.

On the other hand, the U.S. is adopting a very harsh approach towards the Israeli government (The Guardian 2026a), which can also be seen as a means to mitigate the fallout the war caused in the Gulf. This gives the Gulf states the opportunity to assert their position more strongly on the Palestinian issue and to persuade the U.S. to demand concessions from Israel. Whether the U.S. is still capable of exerting sufficient pressure on Israel remains to be seen (see above). The refusal to accept the above-mentioned disarmament agreement signed July 31 is a clear indication of the declining US leverage.

In the worst-case scenario, relations with the Gulf states could prove to be beyond repair during the remainder of the Trump II administration's term, whilst the Netanyahu government (and maybe also his potential successor), for its part, continues to ignore U.S. demands regarding Gaza and Palestine as a whole. The U.S. could thus end up losing its remaining influence in the region, allowing a strategic vacuum to emerge in the absence of a stabilizing force.

Gaza in Summer 2026

Human Costs of the War in Gaza

Although the large-scale fighting has ceased, the situation for the population has hardly improved and the direct and indirect human toll remains unknown. Whilst there are preliminary figures of around 73,000 direct war-related deaths as well as around 174,000 injured (UNRWA 2026b), including many with lifelong disabilities, and damage to civilian infrastructure (World Bank et al. 2026), the costs of the war in the form of indirect war casualties remain unclear.

Indirect casualties are defined as people who are not killed by direct combat operations, but rather, for example, by war-related malnutrition and undernourishment, contaminated drinking water or a lack of medical care, given the absence or devastation of the health sector (UNICEF 2026b). Depending on the nature of the war and the country's level of development before the start of fighting, the ratio of direct to indirect war deaths varies between 1:3 and 1:15, with the latter applying to wars in least developed countries (LDC) like the Democratic Republic of Congo or Sierra Leone. In countries with a higher level of development pre-war, the ratio is at the lower end, considering better health conditions before the war, better infrastructure, and a swift humanitarian response. (Ratnayake 2008).

It is, however, questionable whether this logic applies to Gaza, which had a higher level of development than LDCs and was on par with other countries in the region concerning life expectancy before the war, given that the attacks specifically targeted the very infrastructure, e. g. health and water, that kept the ratio of direct to indirect fatalities low in other contexts.

Furthermore, humanitarian access was restricted throughout the war and remains restricted today, at times Gaza was completely inaccessible for humanitarian organizations, which caused a Level 5-famine according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC 2026). The full impact of this approach will only become apparent over time, as undernutrition and malnutrition are associated with serious long-term consequences, especially for children.

An indicator for a higher ratio of indirect deaths is the significant drop in life expectancy of the population. For females in Gaza this dropped from around 77 years before

to around 46 years in 2024. For males the drop was even sharper, coming from 74 years before the war, dropping more than 50% to around 36 in 2024. These calculations do not yet consider the phase of the 2025 full-scale humanitarian blockade and the effects it has on the population's health. (Gomez-Ugarte et al. 2025)

It is therefore reasonable to assume that the number of indirect deaths will be somewhere in between the two benchmarks and is highly dependent on future developments concerning the humanitarian situation and the access first and foremost to food, WASH-services, shelter and healthcare. If the status quo remains, the ratio will inevitably be higher than in a situation with unrestricted humanitarian access and adequate supply of relief goods beyond the bare minimum and services for the population.

The 20PP

On October 9, 2025, both Israel and Hamas committed to the 20PP. The document itself, which was later endorsed by the UN Security Council (UNSC) with Resolution 2803, was drafted by a small circle of President Trump's aides, first and foremost Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner.

On the one hand, the document contains many parameters known from other successful disarmament and peace processes and is detailed in many parts, while other parts contain hardly any specific statements and some demands must rather be seen as obstacles to a successful conflict transformation. In addition, there are loopholes and ambiguities that make implementation difficult (Israel Policy Forum 2026). Furthermore, the plan does not provide for any sanctions in the event of noncompliance with the obligations, which further complicates the situation. For the implementation, the plan is now divided into three phases.

1. Short-term measures (expansion of humanitarian aid, prisoner exchange, withdrawal of the Israeli army to an agreed-upon line).
2. Mid-term measures (disarmament and demilitarization, establishment of a transitional technocratic governance body, establishment, entry of the ISF and reconstruction).
3. Long-term measures (Palestinian self-determination and statehood).

So far, both sides have only agreed to phase one, which was completed from Hamas' side in an extended timeframe. Hamas released the living hostages as well as the remains of the deceased. The delay occurred because the remains of several Israeli hostages were difficult to locate and recover in the largely destroyed area. On the other side, Israel released a total of 1,950 prisoners, 250 of them serving life sentences, but has not fulfilled its commitments concerning unrestricted humanitarian access and furthermore, increased the share of territory it holds deep into the red zone in violation of the agreement. At the same time, Israel as well as the BoP demand that Hamas start implementing phase 2, which had already officially begun in January 2026.

While phase one was implemented, the NCAG, which is set to govern Gaza in the interim phase, was formed but as mentioned above, lacks staffing as well as funding and has no access to Gaza. It therefore remains a meaningless shell residing in Cairo with neither influence nor impact on the situation on the ground.

The Deadlock and how to break it

For Hamas the current demand to disarm is a non-starter for three main reasons: 1) Disarming in light of the presence of Israeli-sponsored non-state armed groups is an immediate and existential threat for their members. 2) As long as Israel has still not completed its commitments from phase one, Hamas will not start implementing any disarmament that is part of phase 2. 3) As long as Hamas is left with nothing but irrelevance as part of a transformation process, there is no incentive for it to lay down its arms permanently. Consequently, this deadlock has blocked any progress, and the civilian population of Gaza is bearing the brunt of the situation.

The current approach by the BoP centers around creating a model camp in the south of the strip near the Rafah border crossing (The Guardian 2026c). Although this is in line with the contingency plan developed in point 17 of the 20PP in the event of delays in Hamas' disarmament, this must be seen as a reflection of helplessness and frustration on the one hand and the pressure to make at least some small progress on the other.

On July 31 a new operational plan for disarmament was announced by President Trump; the agreement is part of phase 2 of the 20PP and is intended to result in full disarmament of all actors in Gaza and the withdrawal of the IDF from the strip (Haaretz 2026a). Immediately after the agreement was announced both sides, Hamas and Israel, shared their interpretations. For Israel, there will be no withdrawal from the yellow line before Hamas is fully disarmed, while for Hamas there will be no disarmament without withdrawal of the IDF from Gaza (Haaretz 2026b).

Whilst points 1 and 2 that led to the deadlock can be solved by holding the Israeli side accountable to their commitments, the following should focus on point 3.

The 20PP and the future of Hamas

The 20PP says very little about the future of Hamas; point 13 merely states: "Hamas and other factions agree to not have any role in the governance of Gaza, directly, indirectly, or in any form." In the explanatory text of the 20PP, however, the paragraph does not deal with governance but exclusively with the disarmament of Hamas and other groups. Accordingly, within the logic of the plan, governance in Gaza is viewed primarily as a security issue, rather than as a system of norms and rules that regulate everyday life.

On May 21, Nickolai Mladenov repeated this demand when he briefed the UN Security Council and presented 15 principles for the transformation of Gaza (Mladenov 2026). Unlike in the 20PP, however, he added here that Hamas's civilian employees – who essentially make up the entire civil service – would be able to continue their work and "[w]hat ends is rule by the gun – not the livelihoods of public servants in Gaza." This provision can be seen as a concession to Hamas. In the ongoing negotiations, the group has insisted that its civilian employees in the police force, hospitals, the civil service, et cetera should continue to be part of a new administration in Gaza, which would then be under the NCAG (Reuters 2026).

From the US perspective, this must also be seen as a learning from the failed policy of De-Ba'athification in Iraq from 2003 on, where up to 100,000 civil servants serving under the toppled regime of Saddam Hussein were removed from their positions. This policy alienated Sunnis, who lost their livelihoods, from the state, helped fuel the insurgency and eventually the rise of the so-called Islamic State (Zeren 2014). Furthermore, reintegrating an experienced cadre of administrative staff will enable the rapid reconstruction of administrative systems and can thus help bring the chaotic conditions in Gaza under control efficiently.

Although addressing the administrative bureaucracy, the plan provides for no suggestion for the military as well as the armed wing of Hamas. Without addressing these, any process will face severe structural obstacles and, at best, will merely result in a temporary lull in the fighting. This issue is highly contentious, as it is ideologically charged and politicized (see below). However, this politicization obscures the tools and measures that have already been successfully implemented in other contexts, as well as how successful disarmament and peace processes should be structured. In the following, we will develop a model that illustrates how successful disarmament and conflict transformation can be achieved.

What is Disarmament?

UN-IDDRS Module 4.10 is the United Nations standard for disarmament. It defines disarmament as follows: „Disarmament is the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population.“ (UNIDDRS 2020)

According to this definition, disarmament therefore goes beyond the mere collection of weapons and encompasses the other related technical steps. Since this definition refers to “combatants” and not to “soldiers” it applies primarily to non-state actors (Berghof 2012).

Furthermore, disarmament should be understood as a measure within the framework of conflict transformation that aims not to resolve the conflict itself, but to shift it from a violent *modus operandi* to a civil, nonviolent arena. It must therefore be viewed as a technical process for fulfilling a necessary condition on the path toward peaceful conflict resolution within the framework of a political solution. Disarmament alone, without a political framework, does not lead to success, as the root causes of the violent conflict remain unaddressed. Disarmament thus does not define a final status but rather serves merely as an intermediate step on the path toward a peaceful resolution and settlement of the underlying causes.

Of course, this does not preclude addressing the underlying causes of conflict and individual motivations for taking up arms during the process of disarmament. Integrating such considerations into the process is seen as essential to achieving a successful outcome (Mac Ginty/Darby 2002).

Disarming Hamas, a Framework

When considering Hamas’s disarmament, it is essential to first categorize the weapons involved. Different categories serve distinct purposes, hold varying strategic weight, and require tailored methods for decommissioning and incentivizing decommissioning. Thanks to Iranian sponsorship and knowledge and technology transfer, besides imported ones Hamas developed a large-scale local production of heavy weaponry—most notably various types of rockets. Additionally, the group acquired a vast arsenal of different types of mostly light weapons by driving the Palestinian Authority out of Gaza in 2007, while continuously smuggling substantial quantities of small arms into the coastal enclave. We will first look at heavy weapons before looking at light weapons (SALW).

Heavy Weapons

The discussion around Hamas’ heavy weapons is centered around its arsenal of rockets and the dense system of tunnels dug deep throughout the Gaza Strip which allegedly also include workshops for the production of weapons. Before the war, the rocket arsenal was estimated to number between 18,000 and 30,000, the vast majority of which were unguided, simple short-range artillery rockets (INSS 2024). However, it is unknown how many rockets of each type were in the arsenal. Some types of rockets were produced locally, some were smuggled through various channels from Iran and Syria to the strip. The Ayyash-250, the rocket with the longest range, is manufactured locally, while the R-160/M-302, the second most powerful rocket, is an external production from Syria known there as Khaibar-1.

They should therefore be viewed as strategic, political weapons, and the path to their removal must also be a political one.

If we look at successful disarmament and peace processes—for example, in Northern Ireland, Colombia, or Indonesia—it furthermore becomes very clear that the key to success lies in integrating armed groups into processes that steer the conflict away from violent confrontation and onto a peaceful political path. In Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin, the informal political arm of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), became part of the government, in Colombia the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) were given a fixed number of seats in Parliament for two legislative terms, and in Aceh, Indonesia, armed groups were allowed to form local political parties in line with the 2005 Helsinki agreement. These integrative measures

Comparison and specifications of hamas rocket types (pre-2023)

Figure. 1

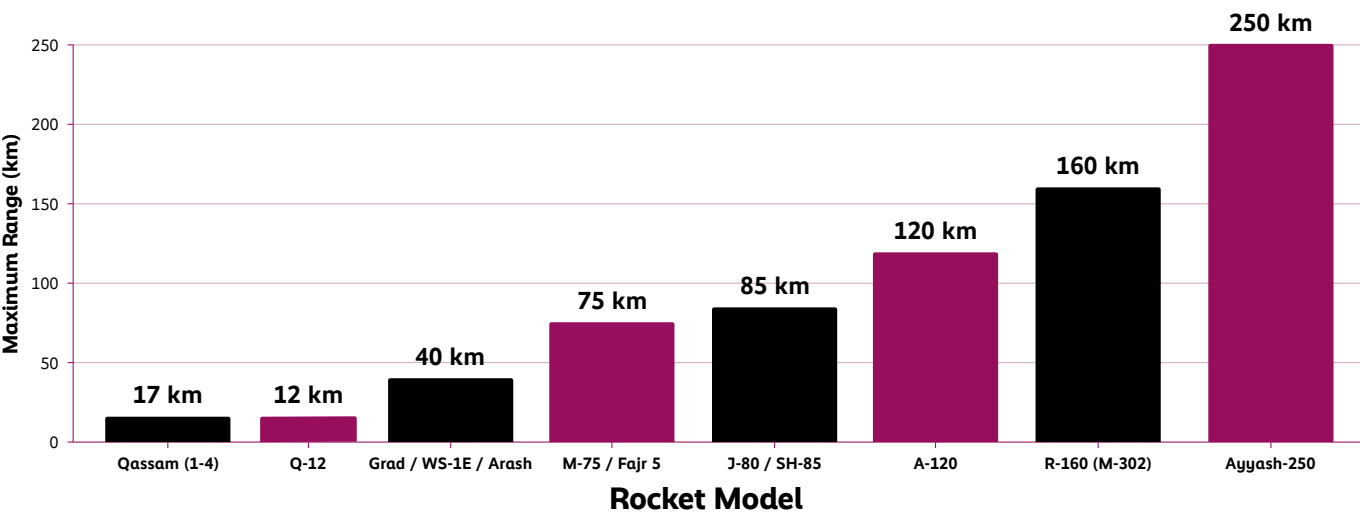


Figure 1 Hamas’ Rocket Arsenal before the Start of the 2023 Gaza War

It is unknown what remains of the arsenal today, after nearly three years of war. Already back in late 2024, the IDF announced that, as part of the operations, hundreds of launch pads, underground production facilities, warehouses, and tunnel connections were destroyed (i24NEWS 2024). Since early 2025, there have also been only a very small, single-digit number of rocket launches from the coastal area toward Israel, all of which caused no damage. It is therefore reasonable to assume that, despite some remaining rocket stockpiles, Hamas appears to no longer pose a strategic threat to the State of Israel.

Those remaining stockpiles should also not be seen as operational weapon systems that could realistically pose a threat to Israel, but rather, as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Israel and the U.S. to bring about an end to the conflict and an Israeli withdrawal from the strip.

ultimately led to the success of the peace processes—which were at times bumpy—and thus ensured long-term stability and the transition from a negative to at least a partial positive peace.

Those cases and the mechanisms used are of course no direct blueprints for the case of Gaza and Palestine; but they show that integrating armed groups and their domestication within a peaceful political system is more promising on the path to sustainable conflict resolution than excluding them, especially when looking at cases like Iraq and Afghanistan.

What distinguishes the case of Palestine from those just mentioned first and foremost is that the integration process must take place within Palestine, of course not Israel, within the PLO, and, by extension, within the PA

political system—none of which are belligerents in Gaza, but part of the intra-Palestinian conflict between Fatah, as the party that forms the backbone of the PLO and the PA, on the one side and Hamas on the other.

With the start of the war, long-lasting negotiations for reconciliation between the factions were revived. The most prominent step in this direction in recent history was the 2024 Beijing Agreement, which was signed by 14 Palestinian factions, including Fatah and Hamas. The agreement states that the parties agree to “a comprehensive Palestinian national unity that includes all Palestinian factions under the PLO framework, and to commit to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital [...]” (Al-Monitor 2024)

Although opinions on the agreement vary, from a political as well as an analyst’s perspective, it shows that the Palestinian side recognizes that Hamas is not going to simply disappear and that it is therefore necessary to seek a way to integrate it politically. While the agreement was outright rejected by the Israeli side (Associated Press 2024), it was welcomed by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell (Al Arabiya 2024).

However, since Israel is the occupying power in Palestine and a direct party to the conflict, it plays a role of equal importance when discussing integrating Hamas into the Palestinian political arena. In the past, Israel has always rejected attempts by the factions to reconcile the conflict that has divided Palestine in two. Israeli governments also worked to maintain the division. Therefore, there has been no viable proposal on this matter from either side. The BoP, represented by Nickolay Mladenov, stated—as already mentioned—that Hamas should no longer play a role in the future of Gaza (see above), which is in line with the policies of the Israeli Government. This statement, however, presents the group with a choice: either to fade into obscurity by disarming without a political horizon or to continue governing the devastated territory, armed and still relevant. It can be assumed that, under these circumstances, the decision does not amount to sustainable disarmament. This significantly reduces the likelihood that the 20PP will succeed.

To break the deadlock, there must be a viable path for the unarmed and peaceful, political integration of Hamas members into the Palestinian political arena. This may be met with political resistance, but from the perspective of sustainable conflict transformation, it is essential. Hamas is a reality and so is the support the movement still enjoys in certain segments of Palestinian society, and it won’t just disappear, not even in light of a new round of high-intensity fighting.

One possible path could be for Hamas to surrender its heavy weapons or at least start an irreversible and verifiable process to decommissioning and disclose the tunnel system and weapons workshops to an independent third party. In return it would be allowed by the PA run in the upcoming elections either on their own, as a new faction or as part of a joint list with other factions. Furthermore, Hamas must commit to the PLO’s framework and obligations, including accepting the two-state-solution and Israel’s existence.

From the Israeli side there should be guarantees that, first, remaining Hamas members—regardless of their rank or status as combatants or political figures—will not be further persecuted and can become part of the non-violent political arena. This would also be consistent with point six in the 20PP, that grants Hamas members who commit to “peaceful co-existence and decommission[ing; KW] their weapons” amnesty. Second, Israel should commit to not interfere in the internal affairs of Palestine during (and after) the reconciliation process between the factions and the upcoming elections.

The offer of integration cannot apply to the circle of the military leadership of Hamas who were responsible for the attack on October 7. However, this should not be of any significance in quantitative terms, as these individuals have already been killed and the leadership has already been replaced several times.

So far, Hamas has never governed without force; in Gaza, Hamas’ governance before the war is best described as hybrid governance with authoritarian and Islamist elements. However, in order to prevent the population from becoming unsettled, the Islamist elements were dealt with in a rather pragmatic manner (Caridi 2010; Brenner 2021; Wagemakers 2025). The legitimacy Hamas has today must be seen as the result of the movement’s armed resistance against the occupation of Palestine and blockade of Gaza, revolutionary legitimacy, and is not so much rooted in the religious ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood Hamas emerged from. Many see armed struggle as the only viable option (PCPRS 2025), since negotiations with Israel—the approach taken by the PA—have so far failed, and the situation has continued to deteriorate as a result. Furthermore, the population’s negative overall view of the PA and Fatah contributed to the popularity of the movement. Therefore, losing the element of muqawama (resistance) and becoming part of the democratic political arena again after 2006 now as a non-violent political party that would have to formulate policy and mobilize support for its ideas through a democratic process will be a tremendous challenge and inevitably needs a transformation of the movement as a whole. Security guarantees and the lifting of sanctions against the political arm of the movement, once its complete disarmament has been verified, could serve as incentives for its transformation.

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)

SALW stands for small arms and light weapons. This category primarily includes weapons that are directly carried by the person, such as assault rifles, pistols, light machine guns, but also anti-tank weapons and other light explosive weapons.

Unlike regular armies, small arms belonging to armed groups are not typically stored in depots and issued as needed; instead, they remain with the individual combatant, making disarmament considerably more complex. Furthermore, weapons belonging to members of armed organizations in zones of insecurity serve a dual purpose: firstly, on the collective level to fight on behalf of the organization, and secondly on the individual level, to ensure the everyday, personal protection and the income of the fighter and their families in a fragile region. This means that even after the fighting has ended, the second function must be considered during disarmament, as the process always takes on an individual dimension; ultimately, it is not only the organization but each individual fighter who decides whether the environment meets their security and economic needs.

Re-establishment of the Monopoly of Violence

In the light of the absence of the rule of law the first step towards sustainable SALW disarmament must therefore be the restoration of the monopoly of violence and public order by legitimate actors in whom the bearers of arms and the broader population enjoy a minimum level of trust. At this point, it is crucial to consider who can meet these criteria, rather than the preferences of the Israeli government. The role of local and national Palestinian actors is central, as they alone are capable of establishing the necessary trust and possess the legitimacy to impose sanctions in the event of violations. This is particularly important in a situation where an ill-designed international presence without any social capital would be perceived as another form of occupation.

The fragmented political and administrative landscape of Palestine, the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and the newly-established but defunct NCAG under the BoP pose a challenge here. A mission jointly led by the Palestinian Authority (PA), that brings policemen from the Westbank to Haza and which integrates the former civilian police and trains and deploys further civilian security forces, and the NCAG, which is to organize civilian administration, faces no insurmountable obstacles. It would also pave the way for reconnecting the West Bank with Gaza, breaking the isolation for the first time since 2007 and opening up new possibilities. A police force consisting of former and new policemen is also part of Mladenov's 15 Principles (Principle 7), but without mentioning who will train them and without any role for

the PA, therefore must be seen as a continuation of the division of Palestine.

In establishing the new civilian police force, it is crucial to ensure that no separate units are formed consisting of, on the one hand, veteran police officers of the Hamas government and, on the other, new recruits. This mixing of different groups has proven successful in multiple arenas like Sierra Leone, Mozambique and the Philippines, because this approach breaks down old chains of command and loyalties. On the other hand, past examples of integration processes involving armed groups have shown that separate units composed of members of different status groups increase the risk of (mass-) desertions and foster the emergence of parallel structures that behave like a state within a state (HRW 2007). This is particularly important in times of crisis, which always serve as a test of the loyalty of executive bodies towards a new governance structure.

However, the crucial prerequisite for creating an integrated police force that has the best chances to be accepted by the local population is the corresponding political will and the willingness to invest political capital to achieve this goal.

Creating Opportunities in the Legitimate Economic Sector

The Israeli blockade before the war, which cut Gaza off from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as from the rest of the world, led to a persistent economic crisis and extremely high unemployment, particularly among young people. This made armed groups attractive to many, as salaries were relatively high and regular compared to the private sector; furthermore, Hamas fighters received exclusive benefits, including wedding subsidies, special access to healthcare, and housing for fighters (Robins 2025). Therefore, to prevent people from rejoining armed groups, reliable pathways to civilian life must be offered.

At the core of the connection between unemployment and participation in armed conflict is the opportunity cost theory; the lower the opportunity cost of joining an armed movement is, the more likely it is that especially young men join them to make a living (Loewenthal et al. 2023). To put it bluntly, if you don't have anything to lose, the threshold to participate in armed struggle is very low. This also applies to better/higher-educated individuals. Empirical evidence from Gaza shows that the economic crisis not only increased the quantity of combatants but also the quality in terms of education, further strengthening Hamas (Benmelech et al. 2010).

It can therefore be said that the Israeli blockade, which primarily choked off Gaza's private sector and left Hamas as the sole provider of reliable livelihoods, contributed significantly to the group's ability to recruit fighters.

Furthermore, beginning in 2018, the Israeli government convinces Qatar to provide financial support to Hamas, thereby cementing this situation. The private sector continued to suffer from a massive crisis, while Hamas was propped up by direct cash payments. When protests against Hamas broke out in Gaza in the summer of 2023—just a few months before the October 7 attack—triggered by the dire economic situation, the Netanyahu government attempted to mobilize additional funds for Hamas in Qatar (The New York Times 2023).

In conclusion, if one wants to break Hamas' power in Gaza, one of the core activities must be the revitalization of the private sector providing legitimate jobs that give the people a perspective.

Reconstruction can serve as a bridge; it can be used to create civilian jobs, thus enabling people to earn a stable and sufficient income. But reconstruction must not only be seen as a purely physical exercise, removing rubble and rebuilding apartments; it must rather be seen as a holistic approach to rebuilding an economy and ultimately a society whose cohesion had been attacked and weakened by years of war. And in this sense, it is crucial that reconstruction primarily reflects the vision of the Palestinians and is designed by them to meet their needs. The plans developed exclusively by outsiders aiming at their own interests must be rejected, as they mostly ignore Gaza's spatial and cultural traditions and would add another layer to the collective trauma of Palestinian society (Witschel 2026).

In this model, reconstruction must not be seen as an exclusive means of preventive security policy but as a crucial element towards Palestinian self-determination. The old Hamas economy with its outside support was a key factor in perpetuating the division of Palestine geographically as well as institutionally, which made a resolution of the conflict seem nearly impossible. The creation of a new, civilian economy—one that is independent of external and extremist influences—in turn can pave the way for the reunification of Palestine under one governance structure and, with it, self-determination.

Why the proposed sequencing will fail and what to do

A crucial factor is the need to avoid treating the various dimensions of physical and economic security and reconstruction as a linear sequence – in the sense of a “disarmament first” approach. Rather, an integrated approach where multiple things happen at the same time is essential.

This necessity stems primarily from the deep-seated mistrust between the parties, which was further exacerbated by Israel's unilateral termination of the ceasefire in early 2025 after the conclusion of the first

phase. In this fragile environment, a phased approach proves highly problematic: there is a lack of the necessary certainty that the agreed-upon steps will actually follow a period of demobilization. Reconstruction should therefore not be seen as a reward for disarmament, but as a means of achieving it. The same applies to political integration; disarmament and integration mark the end point of a process and, as the case of Northern Ireland demonstrates, cannot be separated from one another.

The idea of sequencing is also rooted in the mistaken assumption that this will create pressure from below – from Gaza's society – on Hamas to honour its commitments. However, Gaza's population has endured one of the most intense wars since the end of the Cold War for almost three years; it is severely traumatised and lacks the strength to rise up against an armed group with an estimated 18-20,000 fighters. People are primarily concerned with ensuring their own physical survival under the most difficult circumstances and finding their way in the situation they find themselves in. It is therefore unrealistic to use them as a tool against Hamas.

Comparison of the 20PP with the above Developed Model

The main differences between the 20PP and the proposed model are centered around the inclusion of both the general population and armed groups, as well as the agency of the affected society. While the 20PP follows a strict top-down approach that denies Palestinians—both in Gaza and within the PA—a meaningful say in their future and reduces them to passive actors dependent on external entities, the proposed model prioritizes local ownership across all stages of the process, particularly in political transformation and socio-economic reconstruction. By granting ownership of the reconstruction process to the local population, this model creates an opportunity to honor the cultural and spatial traditions of the Strip, thereby rebuilding social cohesion and local networks.

Furthermore, this inclusive framework significantly mitigates the risk of potential spoilers by integrating relevant political and armed factions into a peaceful political path. This local embedding also enhances the monitoring and sustainability of the peace process: because local stakeholders gain a tangible interest in its success, they are intrinsically motivated to safeguard the transition and directly address internal disruptions.

Differences between the 20PP and the Proposed Model

Dimension	Security- and Disarmament-Centered Model	Conflict Transformation Centered Model
Overall logic	Disarmament as a prerequisite for political and economic progress	Disarmament as the outcome of a broader political, economic, and social transformation
Governance model	Externally driven, top-down implementation through a apolitical technical body	Locally owned and participatory process
Role of Palestinians	Primarily recipients of externally designed policies and assistance	Active stakeholders shaping reconstruction and political transition
Approach to Hamas	Exclusion from governance and prior disarmament	Political transformation through incentives, reintegration, and gradual demobilization
Role of armed groups	Primarily security threat to be neutralized	Political and social actors whose incentives must be transformed
Reconstruction	Conditional reward following disarmament	Instrument for creating incentives for disarmament and reintegration
Political integration	Limited or postponed	Core component of sustainable conflict transformation
Economic strategy	Focus on infrastructure reconstruction	Creation of sustainable livelihoods and legitimate economic opportunities to increase opportunity costs of violence
Ownership	Limited role for local actors	Fundamental principle throughout the entire process
Social reintegration	Limited attention	Reintegration of former combatants and rebuilding of social cohesion are essential objectives
Management of spoilers	Exclusion of armed actors	Reduction of spoiler risks through conditional inclusion and political transformation
Monitoring and implementation	Predominantly external oversight	Combination of international monitoring and locally rooted accountability mechanisms

Obstacles for a more inclusive Framework

Israel

The biggest obstacle to implementing an effective plan for Gaza is the Israeli government. As previously noted, it has blocked even the most minimal steps outlined in the 20PP. Israel in summer 2026 is still governed by the most right-wing government in its history, which came into office in December 2022. It is reasonable to say that the government survived its full legislative term (as only the third government in the country's history) not despite October 7, but because October 7 happened. The attack has united the parties in the coalition into a sort of community of shared destiny; for lack of alternatives, they had no choice but to continue. Any early election would have either cost Prime Minister Netanyahu his power or likely resulted in the far-right parties being ousted from the Knesset or both.

The attack on October 7 and the complete failure of the security structure also shattered the Prime Minister's narrative as "Mr. Security" (The Times of Israel Blogs 2026), which makes any concession to the Palestinians appear to be a further sign of weakness.

Under the current circumstances, this government is not willing to make concessions that would lead, even in the slightest, towards an improvement in the situation in Gaza and a sustainable transformation of the conflict towards Palestinian statehood. Verbally, the government is more or less treating the PA similarly to Hamas, which was best exemplified when Prime Minister Netanyahu spoke about "Hamastan" and "Fatahstan" in the early days after the war in Gaza began (JNS 2023).

The acceptance of the first tranche of 200 ISF soldiers into Gaza (The Times of Israel 2026a), a decision the cabinet took in late July 2026, must also not be seen as a step in the right direction, but as a means to even deepen the division of Gaza. When the ISF arrives, Gaza will be divided not only into two, but into three sectors, one mostly depopulated sector the IDF controls, one mostly depopulated sector the ISF controls, and the sector under Hamas control where more than two million people live under dire circumstances. This further complication on the ground serves the interests of the Israeli government, which regards division as a tool to fend off the now strong international demands for at least a path towards Palestinian statehood. It is essentially a continuation of

the old and failed strategy of division, though today it is combined with repeated calls from government circles for the expulsion of the people from Gaza (The Guardian 2026b). In this light, the refusal to provide unrestricted humanitarian access makes sense, as a persistent shortage of available goods, including non-essential goods, benefits Hamas and revives its economic monopoly, thereby providing Israel with a further narrative to justify its ongoing refusal to negotiate. It is therefore reasonable to assume that as long as the political cost-benefit analysis works in favour of the current Israeli Government, no change in its stance is to be expected.

Hamas

Hamas must not be seen as a unitary actor with a consistent positioning, especially not after about three years of war. The established structures—which, even in the past, were not free from conflicts and factional struggles—have, if not been destroyed, at least been severely weakened. One prominent example of this is the long-lasting conflict between the foreign and domestic leadership structures. There is substantive evidence that the political leadership abroad was not—or at least not fully—informed of the plans for October 7. Those internal conflicts could play a role in a scenario where the above-mentioned agreement would be reached by negotiators and not accepted by more radical parts of the faction.

Achieving political reconciliation might also be obstructed from Hamas' perspective through the various agreements and commitments the PLO has made so far with Israel. As mentioned, the new electoral law requires parties wishing to run in the elections to accept all PLO agreements, including the recognition of the State of Israel. So far, Hamas was not willing to accept this and boycotted the local elections. It remains to be seen how the faction will address this challenge, which touches on the very core of its entire organizational narrative, once there is a serious discussion about the group joining the PLO. For the moment, Hamas tries to find back its way into the political arena without making any concessions.

Currently, the group is having talks with the so-called Democratic-Reform (DR) bloc of Mohammad Dahlan and other factions to create a joint list for the upcoming elections. DR mainly consists of former Fatah members, that were ousted over disagreements with the mainstream

Fatah-bloc around President Abbas. The main goal of the multi-faction meeting was to create a joint list for the upcoming elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, the PA parliament, and to challenge the dominance of mainstream Fatah. So far, there has been no results, but the meeting certainly was a clear wake-up call for Ramallah. Just a few days after the meeting, PA Vice-President Hussein al-Sheikh travelled to Egypt and met with Dahlan and other DR members in an attempt to reconcile the differences and avoid a potential opposition coalition for the upcoming elections. It remains to be seen what results the talks with Dahlan will yield for Hamas. (alJazeera 2026c)

From the PA's perspective, Hamas' attempt for a comeback still armed is dangerous, because this would further undermine the PA's claim to a monopoly on the use of force in Palestine. It would also lead to a situation in which the president, as the commander-in-chief of Palestine's legitimate armed forces, would be confronted by a parliament in which a political group maintains armed forces, and it cannot be ruled out that these might be used to achieve political objectives.

On the other hand, the rapprochement between Dahlan—who was expelled from Gaza by Hamas in 2007—and Hamas can also be seen as a sign of Iran's waning influence. Dahlan has long been regarded as the favorite for a post-war solution for Gaza by the Israelis and the Americans, and he is supported by the UAE, that have taken a confrontative stance against the regime since the last war in early 2026, where he also lives; without the UAE's consent, he likely would not have held these talks. It was also Dahlan who pushed Hamas to accept the July 2026 disarmament agreement against the recommendation of Iran.

In sum, there appears to be a clear shift away from what was once its most important partner. However, it should also be noted that the relationship between Hamas and Iran has never been easy or free of rifts, so it comes as little surprise that Hamas is readjusting its external relations after three years of war. It is also questionable what benefit Hamas would derive from clinging to the Iranian regime in the first place; the regime seems to be no longer in a position to support Hamas militarily or financially. And since the relationship was based on a utilitarian logic anyway, this shift away is only natural, as the potential benefits for the group now lie elsewhere.

However, this is not a one-sided move, the government in Teheran is currently also shifting its strategic priorities, in their case to the Persian Gulf, and it has mostly given up on Hamas. From their perspective, the faction is no longer considered a strategic asset in their struggle against Israel and can no longer be used as a means of deterrence.

Just losing its main patron without any viable alternative might reduce Hamas' ability to restructure and rebuild internal cohesion, which could potentially lead to permanent fragmentation. This makes the shift toward Dahlan all the more significant. Furthermore, a reduced or even absent Iranian influence could be helpful on the path towards inner-Palestinian reconciliation and could increase the chances of compromise. Engagement with Dahlan would therefore be important for the various stakeholders interested in ending the war in Gaza.

The PLO/ PA and Fatah

Within Palestine and its institutions, it is reasonable to assume that Fatah, and with it the Palestinian institutions of the PA, will be keen to play a prominent role in stabilising the Gaza Strip and restoring public order. After 20 years of division, this would mark the beginning of the reunification of the territories, one of the Palestinians' most important objectives. Furthermore, they have clearly demonstrated on several occasions that they, too, wish to play an important role in the reconstruction.

At the same time, it is unlikely that they will be eager to grant Hamas a political role. The already mentioned Beijing Agreement contains few concrete details and remains highly ambiguous, and since the agreement was concluded – one of many since the 2007 civil war – the situation has not changed significantly.

The decision by President Abbas to set an election date in Palestine for November 2026 at such short notice can also be seen as an attempt to prevent Hamas from taking part in the elections, as it is impossible to create the necessary conditions for participation within such a short timeframe under given circumstances. Added to this is the new Palestinian electoral law, which sparked protests not only from Hamas but also from democratic parties, ultimately leading key Palestinian parties to boycott the local elections in April 2026. It remains to be seen, however, what impact the President's decision will have.

The International Community

Whilst the international community would very likely be able to come to terms with a plan for the economic integration of former combatants and a stronger role for the PA in stabilization and reconstruction, the integration of Hamas members into the Palestinian political arena is highly likely to be met with resistance.

Looking back at the Quartet's boycott of the Hamas-led government in 2007, the situation today is even more difficult. The attack on 7 October and the massive brutality especially against civilians requires an enormous degree of flexibility to accept an inclusive approach. Furthermore, there are significant legal challenges which make reconstruction and development cooperation and its funding even more complex, particularly considering Hamas' designation as a terrorist organization by, amongst others, the European Union.

One option here would be to revert to the original listing approach of 2001, which only included Hamas's armed wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades. The EU's decision to extend its terrorist designation from Hamas's military wing to the organization as a whole in September 2003 took place in the context of the Second Intifada and Hamas's campaign of attacks against Israel. However, the relevant EU decision did not provide a detailed public explanation of why the distinction between Hamas's armed wing and the organization as a whole was no longer considered appropriate.

Returning to an approach that distinguishes, for the purposes of terrorist designation, between Hamas's armed wing and its political structures could open up new opportunities for political engagement while reducing legal uncertainties regarding state aid and private investment. The parties involved would face less uncertainty about whether their activities might breach the relevant sanctions regimes, potentially resulting in legal consequences or sanctions against them. In the past, the EU has demonstrated that terrorist designations and related sanctions are not necessarily irreversible when the political and conflict context changes, as illustrated—albeit under different circumstances—by the cases of the FARC in Colombia and Jabhat al-Nusra/Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham in Syria.

Conclusions

In conclusion, experience from past disarmament processes shows that technical measures alone are insufficient; they must be embedded in a broader political process and offer belligerent parties an alternative that gives them the opportunity to address their grievances peacefully while tackling the underlying causes of the conflict. While restoring public safety and creating economic opportunities are necessary pillars, they fall short without a credible political vision. Sustainable peace requires offering those affected the prospect of a life of dignity and self-determination, as well as a lasting resolution to the conflict. In this context, it must be acknowledged that stabilization measures are likely to remain ineffective as long as the core problem—the continued Israeli occupation of Palestine—persists.

The events of 7 October should not be understood as an isolated episode, but as part of the broader historical trajectory of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The 20PP ignores this history and, in doing so, also fails to address the structural political conditions that have enabled

Hamas to emerge, sustain itself, and retain support among parts of the Palestinian population. Without addressing these structural drivers, particularly the occupation, no sustainable resolution to the conflict will be achievable.

Furthermore, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and in Palestine more broadly, cannot be treated merely as a technical problem. It is also a symptom of deeper structural conditions and fundamentally political issues that cannot be resolved through technical measures alone. It is simply not enough to provide services and rebuild hospitals and homes. Attempts at de-politicization by institutions such as the NCAG risk paving the way for the next round of confrontation, as the underlying issue—the denial of the Palestinians’ right to national self-determination—remains unresolved. Consequently, any intervention in Gaza should be embedded within an explicit Theory of Change. Every proposed activity should therefore be assessed against a single guiding question: How does it contribute to the realization of the Palestinians’ right to self-determination while simultaneously enhancing Israel’s long-term security?

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AI Transparency

AI tools were used in the preparation of this study. DeepL was used for translation, while Gemini was used to improve the readability of the text and the abstract, as well as to assist in creating the graph [\(p. 13\)](#), the chart [\(p. 17\)](#), and the bibliography

About the author

Dr. Konstantin Witschel assumed his position as Director of the FES Palestine Office in 2026. Previously, he served as Policy Advisor for Israel and Palestine at FES headquarters in Berlin. Before joining the foundation, he worked for the German Federal Foreign Office and an international humanitarian NGO in Germany and the Middle East. He holds an MA and a PhD in political science, with a strong focus on peace and conflict studies.

Breaking the Deadlock

This paper develops a transformative framework for Hamas's disarmament and Gaza's transition. It argues that the 20-Point Plan's security-focused, top-down approach is unlikely to achieve sustainable disarmament because it neglects political integration, local ownership and economic incentives. Drawing on DDR and conflict-transformation research, the paper proposes parallel progress on security, reconstruction, economic recovery and political inclusion. Palestinian self-determination, alongside Israel's long-term security, should guide the process.

Further information on this topic can be found here:

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