

ANALYSIS

## What might Gaza look like after the war? ‘Day-after’ talks under way with no easy solutions

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Palestinian children look out over a camp for displaced people along the border with Egypt in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip, on April 28.

AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

After Hamas gunmen attacked Israel on [Oct. 7](#), the deputy speaker of the Israeli parliament, Nissim Vaturi, tweeted: “Now we have one common goal – erasing the Gaza Strip from the face of the earth.”

Today, nearly seven months after the attacks that killed about 1,200 people in Israel, Mr. Vaturi and other cabinet ministers who called for Gaza’s elimination could almost claim mission accomplished. Gaza lies in ruins, with half to two-thirds of its buildings destroyed. Israeli air strikes and ground operations have killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza Health Ministry estimates, along with about 100 journalists and 200 humanitarian workers employed by the United Nations and other aid agencies, among them [World Central Kitchen](#).

The fighting continues. Still, there are already “day-after” talks: Who will govern postwar Gaza? Who will rebuild the 41-kilometre strip, if anyone? Where will the money come from? And – crucially – will the horrific war finally trigger momentum to create a sovereign Palestinian state?

At this stage, when the headlines are dominated by the fighting in Gaza, reports of hunger and starvation among Palestinians, and fears of an all-out war between Israel and Iran, there are no easy answers to the questions, just theories and speculation.

“Right now, it seems completely impossible to talk about reconstruction,” Matthias Schmale, who was until 2021 director of operations of UNRWA, the UN’s Palestinian refugee agency, told The Globe and Mail. “It is futile until you determine who will govern Gaza and a just solution is agreed with the Palestinians.”



Palestinian children inspect the remains of a house after it was destroyed by an Israeli strike, in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip, on April 27. HATEM KHALED/REUTERS

The broad options for Gaza’s future include leaving the territory as an uninhabitable wasteland, a scenario that would demand that Arab countries absorb most or all of the 2.3 million Gazans while Israel contemplates resettling parts of the strip; handing governance to the Palestinian Authority (PA), which controls the dwindling amount of Palestinian land in the West Bank; establishing a multinational security force that would keep the peace while a Palestinian governance structure is implemented; leaving the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) with total security control of Gaza; or a fast-track two-state solution that would unite Gaza and the West Bank into a Palestinian state.

Each of these scenarios is fraught with difficulties, all the more so since Gazans themselves can hardly contemplate a future beyond finding enough food to keep them alive and would want to decide their own future when the fighting stops. “We are talking a Mad Max scenario in Gaza,” said H.A. Hellyer, a scholar with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s Middle East Program and the security studies department at the Royal United Services Institute in London.

Politicians, academics, UN officials, geopolitical analysts and diplomats contacted by The Globe – all of them living, or who have lived, in the Middle East – have diverse views on what the future of Gaza might look like and how Palestinians and Israelis might live in harmony. But they mostly agree that any sustained peace is highly unlikely as long as Benjamin Netanyahu remains Israel’s Prime Minister and leader of an extreme-right coalition government, and Hamas retains any control of Gaza.

“Netanyahu will never accept a Palestinian state and his possible successor, Gantz, probably would not either,” said Mustapha Kamel Al-Sayyid, professor emeritus of political science at Cairo University, referring to Benny Gantz, a former Israeli defence minister who is a member of Mr. Netanyahu’s war cabinet.

They also agree that a sustained peace that leads to a Palestinian state is unlikely unless U.S. President [Joe Biden](#), or his successor, wants one.



Palestinian students attend a makeshift tent school amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, in Deir Al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, on April 28. RAMADAN ABED/REUTERS



The Biden administration officially supports a two-state solution. At the same time, Mr. Biden is an “ironclad” – his term – defender of Israel, to the point of supplying the IDF with highly destructive weapons even as he calls for the Netanyahu government to exercise restraint. “Biden is a very, very pro-Israeli Democrat,” Mr. Hellyer said. “He has chosen not to force the Israelis to do what they don’t want to do, to the point of leaving every bit of leverage that Washington has on the Israelis untouched.”

Of all the countries in the Middle East watching the tragedy unfold, it is Egypt that has the most to lose as the war continues – and the most to gain if Gaza is rebuilt, allowing the Palestinians to return to their homes. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has played host to several Gaza peace talks in Cairo, none of which has led to a ceasefire.

Cairo’s overwhelming fear is that the war will drive all the Gazans into Egypt, forcing it to create a new Gaza in the sands of the Sinai. Apparently, as a contingency plan, Egypt has built a walled-in area near the border with Gaza that could hold 100,000 displaced Palestinians, The Wall Street Journal reported in February.

Mr. el-Sisi and his Foreign Minister, Sameh Shoukry, have rejected what they call “the forced displacement of Palestinians from their land.” Accepting the Gazans would hand an outright victory to Israel and pose potentially grave problems for Egypt. Who would pay for a new city that would house more than two million Gazans?

“El-Sisi will not accept the Gazans,” Mr. Al-Sayyid said. “It’s also a security question for him. The Palestinians in Sinai will not forget that they were driven out by Israel. Hamas’s resistance from the Sinai would continue.”



Displaced Palestinian children drag water containers at a tent camp along the Egyptian border in Rafah, on April 26.

MOHAMMED ABED/CETTY IMAGES

Some Egyptians are not sure their President would keep the gates to the Sinai shut if Israel were to launch a relentless bombing campaign on Rafah, the city next to the Egyptian border, where about 1.2 million Gazans are living in temporary structures. There is a theory in Cairo that says Mr. el-Sisi might allow Gazans into the Sinai if

Gulf states, such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, and Western countries were to provide Egypt with billions of dollars to resettle them, putting them out of harm's way.

One European Union official who is monitoring the Hamas-Israel war said he was well aware of the theory but was certain that the EU would not subsidize a resettlement program for Gazans in Egypt (he declined to be quoted by name because he was not authorized to speak to the press). The EU states' 27 foreign ministers have been pressing Israel to accept a two-state solution and a Gaza devoid of Palestinians would make a mockery of that goal, he said.

The two-state solution remains the objective of much of the West, including Canada.

How to get there? The idea of rebuilding Gaza is a non-starter without at least the broad political and security outline for a two-state solution, various diplomats and academics said. Absent that, it is highly unlikely that any reconstruction money would be deployed. "Why would anyone rebuild schools and hospitals if Israel will destroy them again in the next two to five years in the next war?" said Mr. Schmale, the former UNRWA chief.

The minimum requirement to even start that process would be a ceasefire that would bring about the release of the hostages abducted by Hamas on Oct. 7. About 240 civilians and IDF soldiers were taken into Gaza. Some were later released. Israel believes that about 130 hostages remain in Gaza, most of them Israeli, and that 34 of them are dead.



Rows of Israeli tanks park near the southern Israel-Gaza border, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, on April 28.

AMIR COHEN/REUTERS

After that, a sustained ceasefire would have to be negotiated. Hamas probably would demand the withdrawal of IDF forces from Gaza before agreeing to release the hostages. But Israel might insist on occupying Gaza for some time – perhaps forever – to ensure that Hamas or any successor group is neutralized.

Amr El-Shokabi, a former member of the Egyptian parliament who is the author of several books on Islam and democracy, said a prolonged Israeli occupation could backfire on Israel. “You cannot occupy a country forever,” he said. “If Israel occupies Gaza for a long time, there inevitably would be another terrorist war.”

The outline of a path toward Palestinian sovereignty would be the next step. It would have to include plans for the interim oversight of Gaza. Options might include UN or multinational security forces, neither of which seems likely unless a framework for sovereignty were in place.

Hamas might balk at the terms of any path to sovereignty, of course. Yuval Noah Harari, an Israeli historian, philosopher and author, told Spain’s El Pais newspaper in January: “I hope that after disarming Hamas so it cannot foil future peace deals, Israel will go back to the Saudi deal, commit itself to the path of peace, and realize that peace can only be achieved if it includes the Palestinians with dignified lives in their homeland.”

The “Saudi deal” to which he was referring centres on plans discussed by Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, the United States and Israel to rebuild Gaza, establish a moderate Palestinian leadership in Gaza, forge a pathway to a Palestinian state and create a defence treaty between the Americans and the Saudis against Iran.

Mr. Al-Sayyid agrees that a Palestinian state could work wonders for all sides, including Israel. “The friends of Israel should convince Israel to allow a Palestinian state,” he said. “If that were to happen, Israel immediately would have a full relationship with the Arab states. A Palestinian state would not be a threat to Israel.”

The regional peace dividend could be enormous. But the gap between today’s reality – a war that has yet to end – and a permanent ceasefire that could emerge as the first step to Palestinian statehood seems equally enormous.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-gaza-israel-after-war/>

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You will never convince the leaders of Israel—no Reformed Jew among them—that a sovereign Palestinian state would be another Jordan. After this war, Palestinian hatred of Israel will never abate. The West Bank is another tinderbox kept from exploding only by brutal Israeli domination, with those damned settlers being incorrigible. It was one of them who assassinated Rabin, wasn’t it, becoming a settler hero? The PA is an unfunny joke especially with Palestinians. Hamas’s appeal has been that it was not; it will re-emerge in any future aggrieved Palestinian society.

No one factors in that, however much Iran and its kind want Israel wiped out "from the river to the sea," the Israeli's are nuclear and not going anywhere without wiping out the Middle East itself in the process. Do you think the Americans have a secret over-ride switch on the Israeli nuclear button? Do you think Netanyahu—let alone his rabid coalition partners—would listen to Joe Biden? Trump might wake up at Mar Lago muddled in a foul mood and tell friend Bibi to go ahead, "solving the Middle East problem once and for all." American zealot Christians, epitomized by the Christian Zionists, would like nothing better because their End Times require, first, the construction of the Israeli state, then its destruction. Who needs "friends" like this?

Hamas has Muslim Brotherhood roots, does it not? That's why Mr. Erdrokan met with Hamas leaders? Mr. el-Sisi will never allow Palestinians in Egypt. A synopsis of Arab "support" for Palestinians would be "menial labor jobs in the Gulf with foreign aid in Palestine from Gulf State countries with more money than they know what to do with, glad to finance a thorn in the Israeli side and look devout Muslim and anti-Jewish."

People pump up this "two state solution" as a hobby horse because in theory it is a good idea—it should have been put in place decades ago after a more "international" shared multi-faith arrangement proved unviable—and professes "fairness" and concern for both sides with especial favour for the mistreated Palestinians. But crooning on about it is not going to make it happen, and will only weaken the terms of the actual outcome "the day after." Which will be horrible enough already.

If we are ever to get the Israeli house put in order, its enemies have to back off to give Jewish "moderates" a chance to take back some control of the country.

This is not to fail to show sufficient compassion and support for, and solidarity with, the beleaguered Palestinians who have been battered from pillar to post from the first Nakba. Anything that settles the Israeli's down, forces Iran to face its own internal fissures without an external enemy scapegoat, and stops Palestinians from being pawns pushed forward to lure Israeli rooks, knights, bishops and queens into geopolitical traps, all to get at the king, will ultimately prove good for Palestinians.

I once spent a year as the Guidance Counsellor at the Calgary Jewish Academy (CJA), two clocks in the staff room, one for Tel Aviv, with the VP having once been a Jerusalem cop. I never before or since have seen staff meetings like that. Argue! Vehemently! Anywhere else, no one would have shown up for work the next day. But at the CJA life carried on as though nothing had happened. (As the year wound down, I told the Director, Dr. Claude Oppenheim, a gracious South African Jew, Conservative with a dim view of those Reformed, "I am not born to this Claude." He smiled and replied "I'm not sure I am either, but here I am.") It made me think Israeli democracy and the Knesset were a modern miracle. But I came to realize how fractious people need a wicked external enemy to keep them united and away from each other's throats.

TJB