

The Language of the Arab Initiative for Gaza's Reconstruction

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An analysis of the official statement on the Arab initiative for Gaza's reconstruction reveals a highly problematic declaration. Published in Arabic, the statement glorifies the resilience of the Palestinian people against Israeli aggression and includes harsh rhetoric condemning Israel's alleged "crimes." This language implicitly elevates and legitimizes Hamas, despite the statement's token denunciation of terrorism—without explicitly condemning Hamas, Hezbollah, or Palestinian militants in the West Bank. For Israel, the lessons of October 7—and previous experiences—underscore the need for careful consideration of words and phrasing, avoiding any attempt to rationalize the adversary's logic. The cumulative effect of the terminology used is deeply concerning, reflecting neither a shift in approach nor an acknowledgment of the post-October 7 reality.

On March 4, 2025, the Arab League convened an emergency summit in Cairo to discuss Gaza's reconstruction, its governance, and the "day after" the war. This urgent and exceptional meeting followed a preparatory gathering in Riyadh attended by the Egyptian president, the Jordanian king, the Saudi crown prince, and the president of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The preparatory meeting concluded without a joint statement, highlighting fundamental disagreements among the Arab leaders. Indeed, absent from the emergency summit were the leaders of Saudi Arabia and the UAE—whose participation would have been as significant as that of Egypt and Jordan due to their regional influence, close ties with the United States, and the expectation that they would bear the primary financial burden of Gaza's reconstruction.

The objectives of the emergency summit were to present Egypt's reconstruction plan, forge an Arab consensus around it, and reject the vision of the Trump administration for depopulating and rebuilding Gaza—a proposal perceived by Palestinians and the Arab world as a forced transfer from their homeland. This prospect raised grave concerns in Egypt and Jordan, which feared that they would be pressured into absorbing a significant number of displaced Gazans.

Egypt had already publicized the principles and framework of its reconstruction plan before the summit. Official Egyptian representatives made it clear that Hamas would not be permitted to play a role in Gaza's reconstruction or its governance as a sovereign military-political entity. However, a review of the final statement published in Arabic and an unofficial English translation reveals that Egypt's stipulation regarding Hamas is entirely absent. In fact, the declaration is highly problematic in establishing a foundation for any constructive process, particularly concerning Israel's interests.

The official statement, as released by the Egyptian presidential office (which has not yet been published by the Arab League itself, leaving room for potential changes to the wording), makes no mention of Hamas's brutal and barbaric attack on October 7, 2023, nor the fact that Hamas initiated the war in Gaza. The statement does not reference Hamas at all or the need for its disarmament. Hezbollah, which joined Hamas's offensive on October 8 by launching rocket barrages at Israel and thereby compelling Israel to engage on the northern front simultaneously with the war in Gaza, is also conspicuously omitted from the statement. Additionally, the Houthis, Shiite militias, and Iran—integral actors in the regional war—are similarly ignored. Furthermore, the declaration does not reference the causes of the war between Israel and Hamas, Hamas terrorism, Palestinian terrorism in the West Bank, Hezbollah's repeated violations of the Lebanon ceasefire agreement, or its continued efforts to rearm.

In the unofficial English translation of the statement, Israel is referred to merely as the "Israeli entity," whereas Palestine is consistently designated as the "State of Palestine." Moreover, the declaration calls for the internationalization of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict through an international conference, essentially reinstating the United Nations' central role. This would involve revitalizing UNRWA—an institution that perpetuates the Palestinian refugee status—and pursuing ongoing legal actions against Israel in international tribunals, accusing it of war crimes, including genocide and starvation. At the same time, the declaration implicitly glorifies Hamas by exalting the resilience of the Palestinian people in Gaza against what is described as Israeli criminal aggression.

Furthermore, the idea of establishing a technocratic committee in Gaza to manage civilian affairs—part of the Egyptian plan—along with statements in the summit's final declaration referring to the PLO as the representative of all Palestinians and calls for its reorganization, can be understood as laying the groundwork for integrating Hamas into Gaza's governance in the "day after" the war scenario and incorporating it into the PLO and the Palestinian Authority. While Hamas and Hezbollah are conspicuously absent from the statement, Arab leaders were meticulous in reinforcing the Palestinian refugee ethos—particularly by emphasizing the preservation of UNRWA—while avoiding discussion of its contradiction with the notion of a two-state solution.

Despite Saudi Arabia's endorsement of the final declaration, the fact that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed were absent from the summit is due to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi's more hawkish stance toward Hamas compared to Cairo and Doha. This discrepancy is far more consequential than the question of Arab unity. Saudi and Emirati positions are not only significant diplomatically but also crucial from both a strategic and financial standpoint, given that these states are expected to bear the bulk of the financial burden if any reconstruction plan materializes. Disagreements among these states had already surfaced in February during the preparatory summit in Riyadh, which Saudi Arabia described as an informal and non-binding "friendly meeting." Moreover, Hamas is unlikely to cooperate with the initiative, disarm, or relinquish its control over Gaza.

At the same time, the continued coordination between Cairo and Doha vis-à-vis Hamas and Gaza and the participation of Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad in the summit suggests that Doha may have some influence over Egypt's stance. Qatar has a vested interest in ensuring Hamas's continued rule over Gaza and its influence in the broader Palestinian arena, thereby securing its own regional leverage. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia holds a unique position among Arab nations—not only because it is expected to finance Gaza's reconstruction but also due to its close relations with the Trump administration, which appears to be coordinating with Riyadh on this matter.

It seems that neither the Egyptian initiative nor the Arab League summit will lead to any meaningful progress—let alone a positive outcome—unless a mechanism is established to dismantle Hamas as a governing and military entity in Gaza. The terminology used in the final statement will make it difficult for Arab leaders to apply genuine pressure on Hamas to disarm and relinquish control. Ultimately, the language of the statement underscores the Arab world's failure to internalize the fundamental shifts that have taken place since October 7 and since President Trump returned to the White House. The grandiose display of solidarity at this summit is unlikely to advance the Palestinian cause, as it adheres to the lowest common denominator among Arab League members—vilifying Israel, branding it a war criminal, and portraying it as an oppressor of innocent Palestinians. This approach disregards Israel's interests, its proven strength, the American efforts to integrate it into the Middle East through agreements, and its regional and international standing, despite ongoing criticism.

The lessons of October 7 underscore the need for a serious approach to terminology and an end to rationalizing the adversary's logic. The deliberate choice to refer to Israel as the “Israeli entity” (in the English text) while omitting references to Hamas's disarmament—emphasizing instead Palestinian refugee status and UNRWA's revival—are troubling indicators.

Against the backdrop of President Trump's vision for Gaza's reconstruction, it is not surprising that the US administration distanced itself from the final declaration of the Arab initiative, citing the impracticality of Egypt's plan. It is imperative that Israel coordinates closely with the Trump administration to counter efforts to implement this untenable and problematic Gaza reconstruction framework promoted by Egypt. The more Israel engages in this effort while presenting its own plan for the “day after,” the better.

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