

Regional Involvement in the Gaza Strip: Scenarios and Implications

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A pressing question concerns the extent to which the Gulf states are prepared to send forces to stabilize and rebuild the Gaza Strip. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which possess significant economic and diplomatic leverage, are setting strict conditions for their involvement: the disarmament of Hamas and the transfer of its powers to the Palestinian Authority (PA). The UAE also demands a fundamental reform of the PA. These conditions may reflect a lack of real willingness to become involved, an understanding that Hamas cannot be disarmed, and concern about being perceived as collaborating with Israel if there is no political horizon for resolving the Palestinian issue. In contrast, Qatar and Turkey show greater determination to engage in developments in the Strip seemingly without preconditions, which suggests that their influence there is likely to grow at the expense of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The future of the Gaza Strip will be decided not only in Jerusalem or within Gaza itself but also in Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Ankara, and Doha. Since the implementation of the ceasefire agreement, these states have been examining the possibility of participating in shaping postwar Gaza. Although Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) welcomed the ceasefire and expressed hope for stability, they remain skeptical about the feasibility of implementing the framework for ending the war as formulated by the Trump administration and are hesitant to take an active role in realizing the plan to demilitarize the area. Both states have set strict preconditions for participating in reconstruction processes: a stable and lasting ceasefire; a gradual Israeli withdrawal; the disarmament of Hamas, at least of its offensive weapons; and the transfer of authority to the PA or another internationally legitimate body. In their view, Gaza's reconstruction is part of a broader reshaping of the Palestinian arena, within which moderate actors will be strengthened and Islamist movements curbed. By contrast, Qatar and Turkey are reportedly prepared to begin reconstruction efforts immediately while attempting to preserve Hamas as a relevant actor in postwar Gaza.

The key implication for Israel that emerges from this picture is the sharpening of its strategic dilemma over shaping the "day after" in the Gaza Strip and indeed in the entire Palestinian arena. As long as Israel opposes granting the PA actual control over the Strip and refuses to engage in advancing a "sustainable pathway" toward the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state, as demanded by the UAE, and even more so by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey will become the leading players in Gaza's reconstruction and will ensure Hamas's continued survival.

Conditions and Positions

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have considerable leverage that could prove valuable in the Gaza Strip's reconstruction process: vast financial resources, experience in **de-radicalization**, and,

in Saudi Arabia's case, a diplomatic lever in the form of gradual normalization with Israel should their demands on the Palestinian issue be met.

Saudi Arabia conditions its involvement in the Gaza Strip, particularly the transfer of substantial financial aid for reconstruction on Hamas's disarmament; in other words, on the demilitarization of the Strip in a way that would prevent its return to terrorism and instability. The UAE, for its part, is already active in humanitarian efforts in Gaza but emphasizes that it will not provide significant financial aid for reconstruction without demilitarization, the establishment of an agreed-upon governing alternative, and fundamental reform of the PA, including a leadership change. In addition, the UAE is hesitant to participate in a multinational security force to be stationed in the Gaza Strip, partly due to concerns that its forces might come under attack and that it would be perceived as fighting Israel's war. In any case, the Arab states view such a force, once it is established, more as a policing contingent than as a combat force.

The situation looks different in Qatar's case. Qatar is one of the main players shaping the reality in Gaza, especially since the Israeli strike in Doha, which led to a growing closeness between Qatar and the United States. In effect, Qatar operates in a delicate balance between demonstrating loyalty to the United States and projecting itself as a supporter of the Palestinian cause in general, particularly through its backing of Hamas. Over the years, Qatar and Hamas have fed off each other: Doha provided Hamas with legitimacy and funding, while the terrorist organization granted Qatar a foothold and influence in the Strip. Indeed, it is believed that Qatar supported the Trump framework, which included a clause on demilitarizing the Strip, in order to secure its continued political and economic influence in the region by preserving Hamas's power.

From the American perspective, Qatar is now seen as a reliable partner that helped pressure Hamas to agree to a ceasefire; therefore, any Israeli attempt to act against Qatari involvement in the Strip would likely be seen as harming American interests and undermining the chances of implementing the plan formulated by the administration. In contrast, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi find it difficult to accept the central role granted by the United States to Qatar and also to Turkey and view them as direct rivals in shaping Gaza's future. From their standpoint, as long as Qatar continues to provide unconditional assistance to the Strip and maintains its influence over Hamas, it will be difficult to establish stability in Gaza or create a new governing authority there to replace Hamas.

The United States also sees Turkey as a constructive actor in efforts to stabilize the Gaza Strip, since it pressed Hamas to accept the Trump framework. Turkey's public support for Hamas is more explicit than Qatar's, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has repeatedly emphasized that Hamas is not a terrorist organization but a "liberation movement." Following the agreement on the framework for stabilizing and reconstructing Gaza, Turkey appointed a "Humanitarian Aid Coordinator for Palestine," formerly the head of the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Authority. The Turkish news agency *Anadolu* reported that around 20 Turkish governmental and non-governmental organizations have provided aid to Gaza since the outbreak of the war, and some have already resumed operations there. Nonetheless, like Egypt, Turkey seeks to benefit from the expected profits of Gaza's reconstruction (without contributing to its funding); also, its independent charitable donations are an instrument of

influence in the Strip. Turkey views itself as a guarantor of the Palestinians' security, and it can be assumed that it promised Hamas that its status would remain secure (even if its influence were to become more behind the scenes) in order to encourage the organization to accept the Trump framework. For years, Turkey has claimed that its relationship with Hamas serves a moderating purpose and therefore should not be criticized. It now maintains that its influence will bring about positive change.

From Israel's perspective, the critical Turkish approach—along with a series of Turkish measures against Israel, the most severe of which was the May 2024 announcement of a full trade boycott—has led Jerusalem to seek to exclude Turkey from mediation efforts to end the war. Nevertheless, Turkey's role in persuading Hamas to agree to the framework for ending the war makes it difficult to marginalize it from being involved in the Gaza Strip, although Israel has made clear its opposition to including Turkish forces in the planned multinational stabilization force.

Inhibitors and Catalysts for Saudi and Emirati Involvement

Alongside Qatar's and Turkey's readiness to act immediately in the Gaza Strip, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are reluctant to become involved right away for several reasons:

- **Fear of loss of investment** due to the Strip's chronic instability. The Gulf states also have strong economic interests and wish to see returns on their investments.
- **Domestic economic pressures**, mainly in Saudi Arabia, due to declining oil prices and existing commitments in the Syrian and Lebanese arenas.
- **Competition among the Gulf states** for leadership in the Palestinian arena, where Qatar currently takes the lead. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi are less inclined to get deeply involved once Qatar takes the lead.
- **Concern for public image**, fearing that engagement in Gaza might be perceived as cooperation with Israel in undermining Palestinian rights, particularly under conditions in which Israel opposes the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza and the advancement of a "sustainable pathway" toward the establishment of a future Palestinian state.

In contrast, potential **catalysts** for Riyadh's and Abu Dhabi's involvement in Gaza could include **American pressure** (especially from President Trump himself, eager to capitalize on the diplomatic achievement he led), as well as a desire by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to influence Gaza's political structure and prevent Hamas, identified with the Muslim Brotherhood, from rebuilding and reestablishing its power. Another catalyst may be the perception that **normalization with Israel in exchange for Gaza's reconstruction** would strengthen the Gulf states' regional standing and their relations with the United States.

The Question of Normalization

The ceasefire and the beginning of the implementation of the American plan to end the war have opened a possible but narrow window for future **normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia** and potentially with other Muslim countries as well, on the condition that progress is made in implementing the plan and in meeting the kingdom's chief requirement: movement toward the establishment of a Palestinian state. Formally, given the clause in the

framework requiring the **disarmament of Hamas**, the United States is currently closer to the positions of the UAE and Saudi Arabia. However, developments on the ground may push Washington to show greater flexibility and understanding toward Qatari and Turkish demands. American pressure could also lead Saudi Arabia and the UAE to cooperate and contribute financially to reconstruction, albeit cautiously, on a limited scale, and as part of a broader **quid pro quo**; that is, in the context of their broader negotiations with the United States involving other issues as well. The countries are proceeding carefully: Saudi Arabia, particularly in light of the upcoming visit of the crown prince to Washington, may link the extent of its involvement in Gaza to **US commitments to supply advanced weaponry, promote nuclear cooperation, and provide security guarantees**. While such “carrots” might increase Saudi motivation to take a more active role in Gaza, their advance provision could, conversely, **reduce Riyadh’s incentive to pursue normalization with Israel**, unless the US administration explicitly ties the issues together.

Analysis and Scenarios

The differing positions and interests of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Turkey regarding the shaping of Gaza and the Palestinian arena in the postwar period suggest several possible scenarios:

Involvement of all key actors—This is a realistic scenario if Israel agrees to the conditions set by Saudi Arabia and the UAE of restoring the PA’s control over the Strip and committing to a two-state solution. In this case, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi would agree to help rebuild Gaza by providing funding and leveraging their experience in **de-radicalization processes**, while balancing and reducing the negative influence of Qatar and Turkey. Furthermore, if Gaza gradually develops into two separate zones—one under Hamas’s control and another under Israeli security control—Saudi Arabia and the UAE could provide long-term Gulf investment to stabilize the alternative to Hamas’s rule, provided Israel allows PA forces or those aligned with it to operate in the territory under its control.

Qatari–Turkish dominance—This scenario would unfold as long as Israel maintains its opposition to the PA and to progress toward a two-state solution, while the United States pushes for rapid reconstruction even without demilitarization. This dangerous scenario would strengthen the influence of **Turkey, Qatar, and Hamas** alike in Gaza and across the broader Palestinian arena and deepen **intra-Gulf divisions**.

Stalemate—In this scenario, Israel continues to reject the Saudi and Emirati conditions while successfully resisting US pressure to advance reconstruction without demilitarization, thereby limiting the involvement of Qatar and Turkey as well. Gaza would remain without a viable path to recovery, persisting as a **humanitarian and security burden** that would fall entirely on Israel’s shoulders.

Conclusion

At present, there is little enthusiasm in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi for direct involvement in Gaza. Their support for diplomatic frameworks throughout the war has likely aimed more at **pressuring Israel** to end the conflict and reopen a political track than at actual engagement on the ground. Furthermore, internal economic strains, intra-Gulf rivalries, and reluctance to become over-involved in the Palestinian arena are delaying practical steps in Gaza. For Israel,

the central implication is a sharpening of its **strategic dilemma** regarding postwar Gaza and, indeed, in the broader Palestinian context. As long as Israel opposes granting the PA a role in governing Gaza and refuses to engage in promoting a “sustainable pathway” toward the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state (as demanded by Saudi Arabia and to a lesser extent by the UAE), **Qatar and Turkey will remain the leading players in Gaza’s reconstruction**, ensuring Hamas’s survival. This dilemma will persist even in a scenario where Israel and the United States adjust the implementation of the Trump framework and begin reconstruction in the Israeli-controlled part of the Strip before demilitarization. Even in that area, without Saudi and Emirati willingness to participate in reconstruction—particularly through funding and de-radicalization initiatives—financial aid will likely come primarily from Qatar, **creating conditions for Hamas to later reassert control there as well.**

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