

The Gaza Strip: Strategic Alternatives for Israel

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This article analyzes Israel's strategic maneuvering space in the Gaza Strip in 2026. In the background are the Trump administration's determination to implement the Gaza framework and Hamas's recovery as long as the momentum for change is delayed. Israel faces a dilemma between two main alternatives: The first seeks to fully realize the demilitarization option in accordance with the Trump framework, which would require Israel to show flexibility regarding the conditions for the return of the Palestinian Authority to the Strip; a second alternative proposes implementing the framework in a differential model, applied only in areas cleared of Hamas and terrorist infrastructure, but risks entrenching Hamas rule in the "red zone"—its current area of control. Two other, less recommended alternatives are freezing the current situation and creating a new status quo, or returning to fighting to disarm Hamas and destroy its capabilities and infrastructure.

At the present stage, Israel should demonstrate a positive approach toward the Trump framework, while conditioning the pace of reconstruction on governance performance by a technocratic committee free of Hamas members and on effective demilitarization steps; preserving independent security freedom of action while avoiding civilian responsibility for the Strip and its population; and building operational readiness for occupying the Strip as part of a time-limited "Demilitarization Operation," intended to enable a return to the Trump framework under improved conditions.

Background

The framework of US President Donald Trump (the 20 points, October 2025) and the UN Security Council Resolution 2803 include three practical stages:

1. **Ceasefire:** The return of all Israeli hostages from Hamas captivity and the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli prisons; expansion of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip.
2. **Establishment of implementation mechanisms:** The Board of Peace (BoP) at the leadership level, a Palestinian technocratic committee for civilian administration of the Strip, an International Stabilization Force (ISF), and Palestinian police forces. In parallel, an increase in the volume of humanitarian aid entering the Strip and the phased withdrawal of IDF forces to the security perimeter, if conditions allow.
3. **Return of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to Gaza:** Following the implementation of required reforms and the possibility of renewing Israeli–Palestinian political dialogue.

Implementation is to proceed in four parallel efforts:

1. **Security:** At its core is demilitarization—the destruction and prevention of the rebuilding of terrorist infrastructure, including tunnels and weapons production

facilities. Conditions for a gradual Israeli withdrawal include: (1) the establishment and operation of Palestinian police forces (devoid of Hamas) and the ISF; (2) security stability; (3) standards, benchmarks, and timelines related to the demilitarization process, to be agreed upon between the IDF, the ISF, involved Arab states, and the United States; (4) Israel will maintain a (limited) military presence in a security perimeter until the Gaza Strip is properly secured against renewed threats.

2. **Governance:** At the top of the architecture will be the Board of Peace, responsible for: (1) supervising humanitarian aid; (2) establishing and supervising a non-political Palestinian technocratic committee responsible for operating civilian services in Gaza; (3) formulating an economic recovery and reconstruction plan for the Strip; (4) approving the participation of states in the ISF and overseeing it.
3. **Economic and physical reconstruction:** The World Bank and additional financial institutions will support Gaza's reconstruction and development, including through a dedicated trust fund managed by donor states. Establishment of a special economic zone with preferential tariffs and access gateways.
4. **Social rehabilitation and deradicalization:** Hamas operatives who commit to peaceful coexistence and surrender their weapons will receive amnesty; those wishing to leave Gaza will be granted safe passage to receiving countries. Deradicalization is an integral part of social rehabilitation in the Strip.

Assumptions

The reality in the Gaza Strip will take shape during 2026 based on a number of domestic Israeli, regional, and international considerations and constraints that will affect Israel's strategic maneuvering space in the Strip. Several assumptions can be identified as the basis for analyzing the strategic alternatives Israel will face during the year:

- **The determination of the Trump administration:** The administration will continue to view the implementation of the "Trump framework" in Gaza as a central strategic and political objective, aimed at presenting a foreign policy achievement and creating momentum for broader regional arrangements. This motivation may generate pressure on Israel to advance implementation of the plan, even at the cost of compromises on security issues and demilitarization.
- **Internationalization of the conflict:** Direct decision-making regarding the future of the Strip is no longer exclusively in Israel's hands. UNSC Resolution 2803 and the Trump framework have created a reality in which the United States and other actors have become directly involved in decisions on security and civilian aspects of the Gaza issue.
- **Qatari-Turkish activism versus regional hesitancy:** While Doha and Ankara demonstrate determination and deep involvement, most Arab states (including the UAE and Saudi Arabia) are pursuing a risk-management strategy and avoiding deep engagement in the Strip. Their willingness to assume responsibility is conditioned on three guarantees: an Israeli-Palestinian political horizon, effective demilitarization of Hamas, and structural reform of the Palestinian Authority.

- **Hamas's recovery should the process stall:** The organization remains committed to armed struggle against Israel and is not prepared for genuine and complete demilitarization, if at all. As long as the current reality persists—no practical progress in implementing the political framework on the one hand, and no return to intensive Israeli military action on the other—Hamas will exploit the situation to rehabilitate its military capabilities and reassert control over territory and population.
- **Limitations of the PA:** Under its current leadership, the PA is unable to carry out the significant reforms required as a condition for its full return to governing the Strip.
- **Spoilers:** Negative developments in other arenas (Iran, Lebanon, Judea and Samaria) may spill over into Gaza and disrupt the planned settlement framework.

Israel's current policy seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Prevent Hamas's military and civilian rehabilitation, weaken it, and render it irrelevant;
- Reduce the security threat from the Gaza Strip over time;
- Maintain close strategic coordination with the Trump administration and narrow political gaps;
- Establish long-term control over an "expanded security perimeter," including the northern buffer, Rafah, and the Philadelphi Corridor;
- Avoid Israeli civilian responsibility for the Strip and its residents;
- Place responsibility for delays on the Palestinian side and avoid losing the "blame game";
- Continue the separation between the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria and actively prevent the return of the PA, in its current format, to rule the Strip, while attempting to cultivate local power brokers;
- Adhere to the idea of a path toward normalization and expansion of the Abraham Accords.

The emerging reality is that the Gaza Strip is divided into a "green zone" under Israeli control (east/north/south) versus a "red zone" under Hamas's control (west), with no effective alternative governing authority.

Strategic Alternatives

Alternative A: Advancing the Trump Framework

- **Strategy:** Expressing principled willingness to implement the Trump framework and UNSC Resolution 2803, while positioning security demilitarization as the non-negotiable core of the process, alongside some willingness to compromise regarding demands on the PA.
- **Logic and benefits:** Shifting political pressure onto the Palestinian side. Israel will strive for maximum dismantling of Hamas's capabilities and demonstrate flexibility on

demands for PA civilian reforms in order to ensure uncompromising adherence to security requirements, halting incitement, and preventing terror financing.

- **Implementation catalysts:** Creation of coordinated “triple coercion” on Israel, Hamas, and the PA (by the United States, Qatar–Turkey, and Arab states respectively); conditioning the political horizon on security performance on the ground; and willingness of Gulf states (excluding Qatar) to assume responsibility and financing.
- **Risks and costs:** Concern over a “slippery slope” dynamic leading to pressure for premature security concessions; granting governing legitimacy to the PA while forgoing reforms—a deeply politically contested issue in Israel; US pressure for Turkish–Qatari involvement.
- **Risk mitigation:** Establishing clear security metrics (dismantling underground infrastructure and workshops for the production/assembly of weapons, collection of heavy weapons) as hard conditions for transitions between stages and for initiating reconstruction; insisting on threshold conditions from the PA (one authority, one law, one weapon; cessation of incitement and payments to prisoners and families of “martyrs”); securing US recognition of Israel’s right to act militarily to thwart threats and renewed buildup regardless of progress in the civilian process; setting a red line against Turkish and Qatari involvement in the ISF and Palestinian police force.

Alternative B: Focusing on the Green Zone

- **Strategy:** Gradual and differential implementation of the Trump framework in green zones under Israeli control and cleared of Hamas and terrorist infrastructure (such as Rafah and the northern buffer); increasing Israeli security control.
- **Logic and benefits:** Testing the feasibility and effectiveness of the technocratic committee and the ISF; creating a local success model including a local authority. The gap in quality of life between rehabilitated areas and Hamas-controlled areas may generate internal pressure on Hamas to hand over weapons to the Palestinian police and encourage population movement from its territory to rehabilitated areas.
- **Implementation catalysts:** Prolonged Hamas refusal to demilitarize; limitations of the ISF mandate to forcibly disarm; US–Egyptian agreement on a delimited “success model” in green zones with international financing.
- **Risks and costs:** Entrenchment of Hamas in the red zones as a fait accompli; humanitarian deterioration in Hamas-controlled areas leading to international pressure to initiate reconstruction there as well; lack of cooperation from the international community and Arab states; Hamas terrorist activity against the green zone to sabotage the project.
- **Risk mitigation:** Conditioning any reconstruction in a given area on effective and verifiable demilitarization in that area; creating a rigid physical separation between green and red zones and a high-quality defensive perimeter for green zones; accelerated reconstruction in cleared areas leveraged to attract population from Hamas-controlled zones; establishing permit mechanisms and security screening for movement of people and goods; maintaining Israeli control over an expanded security

perimeter and freedom of action to thwart threats until proven enforcement and disarmament capabilities are demonstrated on the ground.

Alternative C: Preserving the Status Quo (Continuation of Existing Policy)

- **Strategy:** Entrenching the current situation in which Israel controls 54% of the Strip (the green zone) and Hamas remains sovereign in the red zone; preventing PA entry and maintaining separation between areas, including between Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip.
- **Logic and benefits:** Fortifying the defense of the western Negev; deferring discussion of a political settlement as long as Hamas is in control; wearing down the organization under the burden of responsibility for the population without reconstruction resources (humanitarian aid only).
- **Implementation catalysts:** Erosion of the Trump administration's determination to implement the framework; fatigue in the international system; and a desire by the parties to avoid difficult strategic decisions (for Israel, also against the backdrop of an election year).
- **Risks and costs:** A governance vacuum enabling Hamas to rebuild under humanitarian cover; hostile involvement by Qatar and Turkey in filling the civilian void; erosion of Israel's international legitimacy and blaming it for the humanitarian crisis; lack of motivation for PA reforms; risk of broad escalation at an inopportune time for Israel.
- **Risk mitigation:** Adopting a "mowing the grass" doctrine (raids and targeted killings in the red zone); a firm veto on Qatari and Turkish involvement in civilian governance; enabling continued international humanitarian efforts; using the Trump framework as a diplomatic shield to shift the "blame game" toward Hamas and prevent erosion of legitimacy.

Alternative D: Returning to War

- **Strategy:** The only effective path to widespread physical dismantling of Hamas's capabilities and destruction of tunnel infrastructure and weapons production and storage across the Strip.
- **Logic and benefits:** Preventing a situation in which Hamas remains standing after October 7; restoring full operational freedom of action to the IDF; dismantling tunnels and destroying production capabilities without constraints—serving as a basis for achieving Israel's security interests and creating conditions for the successful advancement of the Trump framework.
- **Implementation catalysts:** Proven failure of demilitarization implementation and other components of the Trump framework; identification of a fundamental breach of understandings and rapid, unacceptable force buildup; ineffectiveness of the ISF and Palestinian police.
- **Risks and costs:** Full occupation of the Strip and assumption of comprehensive civilian responsibility for the Gazan population; heavy economic burden; lack of a Palestinian

or international address for transferring responsibility thereafter; deepening internal rifts in Israel; risk of international isolation and high friction with the Trump administration.

- **Risk mitigation:** Framing the campaign as a “temporary demilitarization operation” rather than permanent occupation; close strategic coordination with the Trump administration; preparing an exit strategy to transfer authorities to the technocratic committee, the ISF, and the Palestinian police force immediately after the military clearing phase.

Alternatives	Alternative A: Advancing the Trump Plan	Alternative B: Focusing on the “Green Zone”	Alternative C: Preserving the Status Quo	Alternative D: Returning to War
Strategy	Progress in line with the Trump framework and UN Security Council Resolution 2803. Willingness to show flexibility regarding demands on the Palestinian Authority under US pressure, but insistence on demilitarization requirements.	“Differential implementation”: phased reconstruction in areas cleared of Hamas and terrorist infrastructure, and testing the effectiveness of the technocratic model and the ISF. Increasing Israeli security responsibility/control.	Entrenchment of the existing situation of a divided Gaza—on both sides of the line—without reconstruction. Continued separation between Gaza and Judea and Samaria and no advancement of a political process.	Military dismantling of Hamas’s capabilities and destruction of the tunnels, production, and storage infrastructure. Understanding that there is no non-military way to dismantle the organization.
Main Risk	Security erosion; granting legitimacy to the PA without reforms; Turkish–Qatari involvement.	Lack of international cooperation; de facto entrenchment of Hamas rule in the “red” zone; terrorism directed at the green zone.	Hamas rehabilitation and consolidation of its rule; no motivation for PA reforms; Accusing Israel of responsibility for a humanitarian crisis.	Assuming civilian responsibility (military administration) with no address to which responsibility can later be transferred; diplomatic isolation; and an economic burden.
Risk Mitigation	Insistence on demilitarization (no reconstruction without demilitarization); maintaining freedom of action to thwart threats.	Accelerated reconstruction in the green zone to create an alternative; no infringement on security freedom of action; strict permit and screening mechanisms.	Disrupting terrorist infrastructure also in the red zone; distancing/keeping out Qatar and Turkey; a broad humanitarian effort.	Close coordination with the United States; framing the campaign as temporary, to lay the groundwork for future implementation of the original Trump framework.
Expected Outcome	Return of the PA in line with the UNSC framework; an ISF without disarmament authorities; Hamas remains a relevant actor.	Emergence of a local alternative to Hamas; creation of a positive trend; demilitarization and destruction of Hamas infrastructure in parts of the Strip, and difficulty integrating the PA later on.	Security margins for the western Negev at the price of installing Hamas as sovereign; damage to Israel’s international standing; missed opportunity regarding radicalization in the red zone.	Dismantling of the military wing and infrastructure; prolongation of the conflict; full Israeli responsibility; and diplomatic isolation.

Dilemmas and Tensions

A. Lack of alignment between Israel’s strategy and the Trump framework

There is an inherent misalignment between Israel’s current strategy—focused on strict security threshold conditions for stage transitions—and the American drive for a rapid political achievement. Adherence to a gradual model may thwart realization of the Trump plan, while Hamas continues to recover militarily and civically and turns its renewed control into a fait accompli. Conversely, relinquishing threshold conditions—such as agreeing to reconstruction without effective demilitarization or easing demands on the PA—also harms Israeli interests.

B. The demilitarization process—necessity of gradualism and prioritization

Even under the unlikely assumption that Hamas would agree to genuine disarmament, case studies from other conflict zones show that agreement-based demilitarization processes (rather than military ones) take many years. Given the need for gradual demilitarization, it is recommended to initially focus on destroying tunnel infrastructure and “heavy weapons,” including the rocket arsenal, UAVs, and anti-tank missiles (it is suggested to avoid the terminology of offensive/defensive weapons, which is subject to interpretation). Immediate handling of small arms can be pursued through incentives for voluntary surrender. It is also important to maintain the condition that “the depth of reconstruction corresponds to the depth of demilitarization.”

C. The Palestinian Authority—tension between structural failures and indispensability

Integrating the PA presents a structural dilemma between two opposing vectors. On the one hand, the PA’s weakness and failures in corruption and incitement cast doubt on its ability to reassert security and governance leadership in the Strip. On the other hand, the PA is the only default institutional option capable of preventing a governance vacuum, securing broad international and moderate Arab support, and reducing Hamas’s relevance.

D. Regional involvement—functional division of labor

A functional division of labor among regional actors is required: Egypt and the UAE should focus on establishing moderate alternative governance and de-radicalization processes; Gulf states and international actors should lead reconstruction investment; Qatar and Turkey should serve solely as political pressure levers for Hamas demilitarization. To neutralize Doha’s and Ankara’s potential for backing and delay, the demilitarization mechanism should not be subject to political arbitration but instead be based on a predefined list of “material breaches” vis-à-vis the United States. Identification of a breach—technical or operational—would automatically trigger legitimacy for Israeli military freedom of action, regardless of mediator consent.

E. The bottom line—the strategic trade-off

Assuming the Trump administration will not allow Israel to return to a full-scale war in the Strip in the foreseeable future, Israel faces a choice between two opposing paths:

1. Striving to fully realize the Trump framework, initially focusing on the green zone under increasing Israeli security control, and subsequently being willing to pay the price of returning the PA to the Strip, even without full implementation of structural reforms.
2. Undermining the framework and entrenching the status quo: accepting Hamas’s presence and control as a *fait accompli* alongside Israeli entrenchment in the security perimeter, which provides operational security margins and buys time for Israel but perpetuates the absence of a governing alternative.

Recommendations

- **Adopt a rhetoric of “conditional positivity.”** Present Israel as adhering to the Trump framework to preserve legitimacy and place the burden of proof on the Palestinians.

This implies returning the PA to the Strip before completion of reforms; an ISF without disarmament authorities; and Hamas remaining a relevant actor to be reckoned with. Therefore, each stage of progress should be conditioned on proven performance on the ground, with emphasis on demilitarization requirements.

- **Separate civilian and security responsibility.** Accept involvement of a civilian mechanism for managing daily life (a technocratic committee or an improved PA), while preserving full IDF security freedom of action in the event of emerging real threats, similar to the operational model in Area A of Judea and Samaria.
- **Reconstruction as a strategic lever.** Condition the pace of reconstruction in green zones on proven performance by alternative governing actors (technocratic committee, local authorities, Palestinian police, and the ISF), as a “test model” prior to initiating infrastructure reconstruction. This principle is relevant when focusing on the green area (Alternative B). Although this alternative focuses on creating a positive trend only in demilitarized areas, it has weaknesses, including the risk of Hamas entrenchment in western Gaza and difficulty integrating the PA later. In any case, the core message is that there will be no reconstruction in areas held by Hamas that are not free of weapons and terrorist infrastructure.
- **Prepare a “return to campaign” alternative.** Maintain operational readiness for full military decision as a backup in case political alternatives collapse, while ensuring a framework of American legitimacy and an “exit mechanism” based on a return to the original Trump framework.

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